PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

SIXTH SERIES—VOLUME 93

HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

THIRD SESSION OF THE FORTY-NINTH PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
THIRTY-FIFTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 1985-86

COMPRISING PERIOD
3 MARCH—14 MARCH 1986

HER MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT

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IN THE THIRD SESSION OF THE FORTY-NINTH PARLIAMENT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND

THIRTY-FIFTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES VOLUME 93

EIGHTH VOLUME OF SESSION 1985-86

House of Commons

Monday 3 March 1986

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

WALES

Rating Reform

1. **Mr. D. E. Thomas** asked the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of the gross earnings of those earning less than £100 per week is, on average, taken up on local authority rates in Wales; and what the figures will be if the Government's proposals in their Green Paper, "Paying for Local Government" are implemented.

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Nicholas Edwards): Only householders are directly liable for domestic rates, and there is no way of knowing the extent to which non-householders, earning or not, contribute to the cost of rates. Comparative information on the basis requested is not therefore available.

Mr. Thomas: Does the Secretary of State accept that that is an inadequate and innumerate answer from his Department yet again, because the whole direction of Government policy in this area is to shift the burden to all householders? That is the basis of the poll tax. Does he accept that it is completely illogical to propose to introduce a poll tax without making such comparative information available so that we know that each adult householder in Wales will be substantially worse off as a result?

Mr. Edwards: If anything is innumerate, it is the question. We know what the effect on households will be, and we know that the community charge will reduce bills for low-income households. We know that the domestic rate is 7·5 per cent. of the income of households with a net income of £100 or less, and we know that the new community charge will lessen the burden. What we do not know is all the information that the hon. Gentleman wants about single persons, young adults, and so on, who at present do not contribute directly to the rating system.

Mr. Raffan: Referring to my right hon. Friend's recent rate support grant announcement, will he confirm that Clwyd, which is making a real and genuine effort to find savings in its budget, will receive a substantial part of the remaining unclaimed grant, as five other county councils in Wales have categorically said that they will not be making savings? Can he give me any idea of how much Clwyd will receive?

Mr. Edwards: I am not sure that that arises from the question, but it is certainly true that the pressure on councils to reduce their expenditure remains and that those which have succeeded in cutting their expenditure will get a higher proportion of remaining grant than those which continue to spend at a high level.

Mr. Barry Jones: Will the right hon. Gentleman accept my warning that the collection of the community charge—the poll tax—will be difficult? Why did the right hon. Gentleman hand over £13 million to the Welsh counties on 20 February after saying on 17 February that he would not do so? Why did he give in? I remind him of the heading, "Edwards gives in" in the *Daily Post* of 21 February.

Mr. Edwards: I propose to say something on the subject in the debate on Welsh affairs, but the fact of the matter is that at the meeting on Monday I did not say that I would not. I said that if I did the county council should offer some reduction in expenditure. The county council said that it was impossible to reduce expenditure by a single penny. I am glad to say that subsequent to that the Clwyd council, by reducing its expenditure by £1·5 million, showed that it was possible, and it has passed on the benefit to its ratepayers.

Mr. Speaker: I have a suspicion that that was somewhat wide of the question.

Sixth Form Colleges

2. **Mr. Grist** asked the Secretary of State for Wales what advice his Department has given to local authorities considering the establishment of sixth form colleges.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Wyn Roberts): The Macfarlane report, which was commissioned by the Government and the local authority associations, identified the advantages and disadvantanges of establishing sixth form colleges and considered various patterns of provision.

Mr. Grist: Does my hon. Friend agree that whereas some schools have adequate and large sixth forms, many with falling school rolls no longer have and are unable to offer a sufficiently wide choice of subjects to those pupils who are academically able? In such circumstances, is it not wise for local authorities to consider setting up sixth form colleges?

Mr. Roberts: My hon. Friend is right. We are faced with falling secondary school rolls, and between 1981 and 1991 there will be a decrease of 22·9 per cent. in secondary school pupils in Wales. That is why many local authorities are trying to rationalise by making alternative provision for them.

Mr. Wigley: In any discussions that the Minister has with local authorities, will he ensure that if they are considering moving towards sixth-form colleges they take into account the Welsh language, especially those councils that have bi-lingual secondary schools, and the consequences that will flow unless there are Welsh language sixth-form colleges? Will he also consider the effect on rural areas and the need for local authorities to have more resources to cover transport costs or the cost of children staying at one centre?

Mr. Roberts: The Welsh Office does not seek to prescribe the pattern of provision to local authorities. That provision is basically a matter for them. There are various options. For example, there are the traditional sixth-form colleges, tertiary colleges and further education colleges. The Macfarlane report states that special steps are needed to ensure continuity between sixth-form colleges and their feeder schools in both education and pastoral matters. I should have thought that the Welsh language was covered by that statement.

Mr. Best: My hon. Friend may be aware that one of my constituents, Mr. John Rowlands, the headmaster of Holyhead school, is on a year's sabbatical to consider the problem raised by the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley). Is it not imperative that we recognise that there is only one choice available to us if we are to provide the great variety of disciplines that are necessary in a sixth form, which is to establish sixth-form colleges, especially when we bear in mind falling school rolls?

Mr. Roberts: I have already said that that is only one alternative. There is only one sixth-form college in Wales, and that is Yale at Wrexham. There are other options, including those that I mentioned, but it is important that there should be rationalisation of provision for secondary school pupils to reflect falling rolls.

Dr. Roger Thomas: What advice would the Minister give to anxious parents of sixth formers at our small comprehensive schools? I am thinking of the one in Llandovery, which is quite a distance from any other school and has only 400 pupils. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the choice of A-level subjects at such schools is disgustingly small? The choice is extremely limited and the pupils at such schools are suffering a disadvantage when compared with those who attend schools in more populated areas.

Mr. Roberts: One of the advantages of sixth-form colleges, as outlined by the Macfarlane report, is that they are able to offer a wider range of subjects than sixth-form schools. I am glad the hon. Gentleman is apparently prepared to support a proposal for the rationalisation of secondary education in his constituency and county.

Colliery Closures

3. **Mr. Ron Davies** asked the Secretary of State for Wales whether he intends to take steps to provide further employment opportunities in the light of continuing colliery closures.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: Following the closure of several consistently uneconomic collieries, the NCB has no current plans for further closures in south Wales, and the industry can look forward to much greater stability and renewed development. Efforts to provide other employment opportunities are continuing, using the instruments of regional industrial policy, the urban programme, and the Welsh Development Agency and drawing on the support of NCB (Enterprise) Ltd.

Mr. Davies: It is not surprising that we have heard nothing new yet again from the Secretary of State. When will he show some sign of understanding, let alone compassion or concern, of the effect of the Government's policies on the south Wales valleys? Is he aware that in the lower Rhymney valley 500 jobs will be lost as a result of the closure of the Bedwas colliery? The Government, the Welsh Office and NCB (Enterprise) Ltd. have nothing to offer.

May I draw the right hon. Gentleman's attention to the report which was published today by the Department of Trade and Industry which suggests that regional policy is effective and has created over 600,000 jobs in Britain over the past 20 years? If he accepts the findings in the report, which was sponsored by the Government, why does he not ensure that the logical conclusion of the report is accepted and that Wales has a proper regional investment policy to provide the jobs and infrastructure that it needs to replace the jobs that it is losing?

Mr. Edwards: I agree that regional policy has an important role to play. The hon. Gentleman knows that his constituency has the maximum level of assistance that is available under regional policy. The fact that assistance differs in various areas gives the policy its impact. NCB (Enterprise) Ltd. has made a good start by supporting projects in Wales. The cost of the investment has been over £11 million and about 1,400 jobs have been provided. I am taking other initiatives for the valleys, of which I have sent the hon. Gentleman details and to which I shall refer in the debate that is to follow.

Mr. Harvey: Can my right hon. Friend estimate the number of jobs lost in Wales as a result of the miners' strike last year?

Mr. Edwards: I cannot. We know that more than 6,000 jobs have been lost in the pits that have been closed. We cannot tell what the total effect of that strike has been. It affected many other industries and many small firms.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: Does the right hon. Gentleman have any plans to increase the proportion of the working population living in parts of Wales eligible for regional development grant?

Mr. Edwards: We carried out a major review of regional policy comparatively recently. I do not believe that it would be sensible, so soon after the last review, to recast the present distribution of coverage. There is no doubt that if we extended coverage in Wales there would have to be a major extension of coverage in other parts of the United Kingdom. It is therefore by no means clear that Wales would benefit from such a change.

Sir Raymond Gower: Although it is true that in recent years there have been pit closures in south Wales, did not the most marked decline in employment in the coal industry in Wales occur during the period of the Labour Government?

Mr. Edwards: That is true. That decline continued for many decades. We can be thankful that we have probably reached the end of that long historic process.

Mr. Ray Powell: Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that since the end of the miners' strike, which the Prime Minister, MacGregor and others conspired to ensure took place, every colliery in Ogmore has been closed? Is the right hon. Gentleman further aware that 1,5[illegible] of the 6,000 people whose jobs were lost were living and working in Ogmore before the strike? What does the right hon. Gentleman intend to do to replace the jobs which he and his Government have ended during the past 18 months?

Mr. Edwards: There is no truth whatsoever in the allegation about a conspiracy. It has been denied by the Prime Minister's Office and by Mr. MacGregor. The hon. Gentleman knows that the allegation is nonsense.

Mr. Raffan: Will my right hon. Friend take this opportunity to congratulate the NCB on progress with the coal to oil liquefaction plant at Point of Ayr, on which construction has now started and which is expected to be completed by December 1987, providing 80 new jobs?

Mr. Edwards: That is part of the major investment programme which the NCB is undertaking in the Welsh coalfields. There has been substantial investment in the south Wales coalfield as well, much of it in new equipment at the faces. That holds out a much better prospect for the future.

Mr. Anderson: Does the review of regional development grant, to which the right hon. Gentleman referred, take account of the sudden avalanche of job losses in the colliery areas?

Mr. Edwards: Most of the colliery areas are substantially covered under the existing provisions, giving maximum levels of assistance. I do not believe that there would be any sense in having a major extension of coverage. That would be bound to cover a large part of the English and the Scottish regions as well. Instead of increased incentives to encourage people to come to Wales, there would probably be greater competition. An extension of coverage would not benefit Wales.

Agricultural Technology (Joint Degree)

5. **Mr. Livsey** asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will indicate when the Welsh Office and the Welsh Advisory Body will sanction the joint degree in agricultural technology, which has been initiated by University College, Aberystwyth, and the Welsh Agricultural College.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: A working group set up by the University Grants Committee and the public sector higher education advisory bodies has concluded that sufficient course capacity already exists to meet the industry's demands for graduates and diploma holders. However, the two colleges are now considering a suggestion that a new degree course could be established at Aberystwyth by transferring student places from the existing higher national diploma and degree courses.

Mr. Livsey: Will the Minister explain why this strictly Welsh matter was referred to the National Advisory Body? Is the hon. Gentleman aware that colleges such as Harper Adams and Seale Hayne in England have 100 HND students and 40 graduate students per course? Why is Wales losing out in that way? Can the hon. Gentleman assure us that sufficient resources will be made available to run the course as a viable one?

Mr. Roberts: The hon. Gentleman will appreciate that the working group's report related to the position in Great Britain as a whole. The demand for graduates in production agriculture and the capacity of existing degree courses in Wales to meet it are in line with the position in Great Britain. What is needed now is a change in the type of course available, and that possibility is now being examined.

Sir Peter Emery: Will my hon. Friend make certain that he does not begin poaching from Seal Hayne in the way that the Welsh Development Agency might be doing for jobs in the west country in other instances?

Mr. Roberts: I am sure that there will be no poaching or any hint of illegality. The hope is that student places can be transferred from existing higher national diploma and degree courses to provide this new course.

Welsh Water Authority

6. **Mr. Ray Powell** asked the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he had with the chairman of the Welsh water authority prior to his statement to the House on privatisation; and on what date they took place.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: I met the chairman of the Welsh water authority on 25 June 1985 to discuss the authority's response to the Government's consultation paper on privatisation. I also spoke to the chairman on the morning of 5 February to inform him that I would be making a statement on privatisation that afternoon.

Mr. Powell: On Friday 5 February, how far did the right hon. Gentleman screw the chairman's arm around his back to get him to agree to the idea that we should have privatisation of the water industry, because for months before—indeed, in all probability during the whole of

1985—John Elfed Jones had publicly declared, together with the board, that he was against any sort of privatisation? I should like an inquiry into what happened with the Secretary of State and what pressure was put on the chairman of the Welsh water authority to obtain his agreement.

Mr. Edwards: The thought of trying to twist someone's arm over the telephone is interesting. if anyone imagines that John Elfed Jones is the sort of man to have his arm twisted, he clearly does not know the man. He is well able to stick up for himself and to express his own views. He and the board will be considering the proposals put forward in detail and will be presenting their fully considered views to the Government in due course.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Has my right hon. Friend been asked to convey any apology to the chief executive of the Welsh water authority for what must have been, at best, a sincere misunderstanding by the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd)?

Mr. Edwards: I have no desire to act as a postbox between the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) and the chief executive of the Welsh water authority. I am sure that they are able to conduct their exchanges directly and on their own.

Dr. Marek: Is the Secretary of State aware of the quality of water that is being drunk by residents in the Wrexham area? Is he further aware——

Mr. Speaker: Order. There is another question on the Order Paper about that.

Dr. Marek: I was thinking that it might not be reached. It fits in with the present question.

Is the Secretary of State aware that there was a fire this morning, that some very toxic chemicals leaked into the soil, and that the Welsh water authority was able to say only that it probably will not reach the River Dee? What will the Secretary of State do, consequent upon privatisation, to ensure, if it happens, that any subsequent company will have sufficient capital to undertake a new water supply to the people of Wrexham?

Mr. Edwards: It is quite clear that none of the evils described by the hon. Gentleman could arise from privatisation. If the water authority is privatised, it will operate under a licence from the new Director General of Water Services, who will lay down strict conditions under which the service will operate. Undoubtedly one of the advantages of privatisation is that it will be easier for the authority to carry out its capital programme without the day-to-day and year-to-year interference from the Treasury and Ministers which is inherent in the present system.

Mr. Best: Is it not apparent to anybody who takes the trouble to read the White Paper that two things flow from the privatisation proposals: first, that the money would be raised from the private sector so that capital investment could be undertaken without the present great charges to many subscribers; secondly, that there would be much greater pricing protection and protection of the water consumer in the proposals than is presently enjoyed?

Mr. Edwards: I am sure that sewage will continue to flow as well. However, my hon. Friend is right.

Mr. Rowlands: Is it not a fact that the only way that privatisation of the Welsh water authority can be carried out is if the Government and the Secretary of State wipe off the vast majority of its debt? Instead of doing that for the benefit of future shareholders, why does the right hon. Gentleman not do it now for the benefit of the overwhelming majority of Welsh water consumers?

Mr. Edwards: We have made it clear that we shall be looking at the financial structure of the authority before privatisation. Surely the hon. Gentleman cannot object to any reconstruction of the debt position, because it is something for which Welsh Members have long pressed. In particular, it helps the authority to raise its capital more easily and carry out its programmes more satisfactorily, which is directly to the benefit of consumers.

Mr. Wigley: May I press the Secretary of State further on this point? If, in order to make privatisation viable, it is necessary to write off £450 million of historic debt, why does the right hon. Gentleman not do it now and give even more benefit to consumers?

Mr. Edwards: We shall look at the capital structure when we privatise and consider what is necessary for a sensible structure, but it is not the capital structure that controls the external financing limits—the borrowing—of the water authority. They are laid down by the Treasury, because of the need to control the totality of Government expenditure. That is the principal constraint on the capital programme at present — not the debt position of the water authority.

Sir Raymond Gower: Is it not a fact that prior to the big nationalisation programme of 20 or 30 years ago, many utilities in the private sector—gas, water, electricity and so on — had a splendid record of service to the community, and is it not likely that that will be reproduced in future?

Mr. Edwards: I think I am right in saying that one quarter of the water in England and Wales is presently supplied by private companies. Therefore, the idea that it is not possible to supply it efficiently and economically is disproved by existing facts.

Mr. Barry Jones: Does the right hon. Gentleman know that the director of the School of Water Sciences at Cranfield has predicted that when the details of privatisation are considered they will look impractical? Even at this late stage, will he strive to exempt Wales from the water privatisation proposals? Does he understand that the proposals have offended public opinion in Wales because they put profit before public service?

Mr. Edwards: No doubt we shall have many predictions. I predict that privatisation can go ahead and will result in an improvement in the service and the charging structure for the users of the Welsh water authority's services.

Singleton Hospital, Swansea

7. **Mr. Gareth Wardell** asked the Secretary of State for Wales when the planned new paediatric and obstetric unit at Singleton hospital, Swansea will be completed.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Mark Robinson): Construction is expected to start in December 1987 and the unit is expected to be in service in 1991.

Mr. Wardell: Is the Minister aware that on 12 December 1983, in an oral reply, I was told that the West

Glamorgan health authority was planning to open that unit in 1988-89? For how long must the Welsh Office endure health authorities pulling the wool over its eyes and over the eyes of the public at large? In view of the answer that I received earlier, it appears that the unit will be delayed by at least another two years. I hope that the shambles with the casualty unit at Singleton is not repeated in connection with the paediatric and obstetric units there.

Mr. Robinson: The date previously given was the best estimate for completion at that time and was based on preliminary planning only. More detailed planning for the development, which involves considerable reorganisation and expansion of existing support services and departments, has identified a need to reprogramme a sequence of building operations to enable replacement accommodation to be built to free the site location for the new paediatric and obstetric block.

Mr. Williams: Will the Minister recognise that there will be genuine regret in that part of Wales about the two-year slippage that he has just announced? Will he bear in mind that we are grateful for the fact that the announcement that the casualty unit is about to be opened has been made? The Opposition would like to put on record our thanks to the general practitioners and the consultants who made that possible. Will the Minister say whether he has made it clear to the West Glamorgan health authority that, while the unit can start on a part-time basis, he hopes that it will soon be on a 24-hour basis?

Mr. Robinson: I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman will concede that it is important to get the building of the new unit right. With regard to the casualty service, on Friday we received the formal proposal from the health authority and we are considering that. I assure the right hon. Gentleman that our reply will be issued in the very near future.

Sheltered Housing

8. **Mr. Raffan** asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the effect on sheltered housing in Wales of the Housing Act 1980 as amended by the Housing and Building Control Act 1984.

Mr. Mark Robinson: The effect of the Housing Act 1980, as amended by the Housing and Building Control Act 1984, is to exclude sheltered housing from the right-to-buy provisions. These provisions are consolidated in the Housing Act 1985, which comes into effect on 1 April.

Mr. Raffan: Is my hon. Friend aware that Delyn borough council has a particular concern in this matter, which is highlighted by the case of 3 St. Mary's Drive, Northop Hall? What assurance can he give the council that its sheltered housing stock will not be eroded under the amended right-to-buy provisions should it replace resident wardens by visiting wardens on schemes where there is no common room nearby?

Mr. Robinson: My hon. Friend wrote to me on 10 February and I replied to him on 28 February. We do not consider that there will be any erosion of sheltered accommodation under these provisions, as the purpose of the provisions was to remove the accommodation that had been adapted for the elderly or disabled several years ago and which is no longer suitable using today's criteria.

Labour Statistics

9. **Mr. Rowlands** asked the Secretary of State for Wales what was the level of unemployment in both numerical and percentage terms in Merthyr Tydfil in 1979; what is the current percentage; and what are the similar figures for Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: On 6 February 1986 there were 11,279 unemployed claimants in the Merthyr and Rhymney travel-to-work area, a rate of 21·4 per cent. A comparable claimant-based figure for February 1979 is not available. For Wales as a whole, for the same dates, the seasonally adjusted claimant-based figures were 176,000 and 76,400, or 16·6 per cent. and 6·9 per cent. respectively.

Mr. Rowlands: In the face of those terrifying figures, should not the Secretary of State's complacency have been shattered by the past two month's unemployment records, and the trends that are accompanying them? Does he agree that we are not seeing the light at the end of any tunnel and that unemployment is rising? In addition to the genuine problems of the young unemployed, is the Secretary of State aware of the growing anxiety that hon. Members have witnessed over the 50-year-old unemployed, who now believe that they will never work again unless the Government change their direction and policy?

Mr. Edwards: Of course, I share the hon. Gentleman's concern that the recent, more encouraging, trend in unemployment figures has come to an end and that we have had two or three poor months. That is one reason why we are continuing to extend, enlarge and improve the wide range of employment and training measures generally, and those for the category of people to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

Mr. Foot: As the right hon. Gentleman has mentioned improvements in training measures, can he tell us whether he has sorted out the problem of the heavy extra burden which he and the Government are imposing on local authorities in carrying out the second part of the two-year programme? All of us want to assist the young through the YTS programme, but it is unfair that such a heavy, increased burden should be put on local authorities.

Mr. Edwards: The Government are providing substantial resources for this important new major extension of training provision. Local authorities are also playing their part, and I am glad that all Welsh local authorities, including Mid Glamorgan, which has had difficulties in the past, will participate fully in the next phase of the programme.

Mr. Barry Jones: The right hon. Gentleman has not told us how he proposes to make major inroads into the terrifying unemployment in Wales. Can he throw some light upon the firm Biomass International in my constituency? Does he know that £1·1 million of county council, Development Agency and Government money was on offer to create only 76 jobs on Deeside? Before Biomass International ceased activities, only nine jobs had been created. Has the Welsh Development Agency's £416,000 investment been lost? What moneys can be rescued? I remind the right hon. Gentleman that Biomass follows the problems with the Parrot Corporation. Does he plan to review investment policy in his Department?

Mr. Edwards: The hon. Gentleman identifies the great difficulty that all venture capital organisations, in the public and private sectors, have in always backing successful projects. If he wishes to encourage the support of the new high technology industries, especially in areas such as biotechnology, there will always be risks and failures. I hope that in developing the Labour party's general policies for investing vast sums of public money into such ventures and directing them centrally, he will realise that they are hazardous and risky choices. It is unlikely that public funds will be recovered in this case, except on a very small scale.

Job Creation

11. **Mr. Best** asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will state the number of new jobs created in Wales since 1979.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: In a period of rapid change, in which large investment has taken place in industrial and service sector projects in a more diversified economy, no comprehensive statistics on new jobs are available. Many new jobs are created without Government financial assistance, and between 1981 and 1984 the number of self-employed increased by 30,000.

Mr. Best: Bearing in mind the worthwhile meeting that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister had exactly a week ago with academics from the universities, does my right hon. Friend agree that we need a much closer empathy between education and industry, so that each understands the other?

Mr. Edwards: I was present at that meeting. In addition to representatives of the universities we met several leading representatives of British industry, who drew attention to many of the shortcomings of our education system, which is failing to provide the mathematicians and scientists who are needed. I agree that one conclusion that emerged from the meeting was that we must have closer links between industry and local schools, to persuade pupils that industry offers attractive careers, and to point them towards the skills that they will need to acquire.

Mrs. Clwyd: The Secretary of State cannot tell us how many new jobs have been created in Wales, but he must agree that not many of them were created in the Cynon Valley, which has the highest male unemployment in Wales, and among the worst male unemployment of any industrial area in Britain. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that substantial sums of Government money are necessary to create the infrastructure and employment opportunities that are needed in the valleys of south Wales?

Mr. Edwards: I do not doubt the problems of the Cynon Valley. However, the hon. Lady will agree that the recent completion of the Cardiff to Merthyr road provides greatly improved access to the Cynon Valley, which will improve its inhabitants' chances, and which is part of the substantial infrastructure expenditure in the area, which we shall continue to make. The hon. Lady should remember that, although there are serious problems, between April 1985 and January of this year—the latest period for which figures are available—at least 200,000 people have taken up employment in Wales. Although many people—too many—are on the unemployment register, many more are going into new employment all the time.

Mr. Geraint Howells: The Secretary of State will be aware that the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Best) is keen to find out how many new jobs have been created since 1979. The majority of Opposition Members would be glad to know how many jobs have been lost in Wales since 1979.

Mr. Edwards: The hon. Member has frequently tabled questions on that subject and we have answered them. In a changing industrial world, even he must understand that there will be many job losses and job gains. I am sure he will be glad to know that we have a higher proportion of the working population in employment than almost any other country in Europe, with the exception of Denmark.

Mr. D. E. Thomas: Will the Secretary of State accept that the Government of which he is a member have tinkered with the base on which the officially registered unemployment figures are calculated at least 15 times since the Government took office in 1979? One day, will the Secretary of State come to the House and give us the number of jobs lost in Wales since that date?

Mr. Edwards: If the hon. Member tables a question I shall do so, but it does not arise from this question.

Mr. Barry Jones: I can help the right hon. Gentleman. Since 1979,, under his regime, Wales has lost 105,000 manufacturing jobs. We have heard nothing from him in six years as to how we shall regain those lost manufacturing jobs. It is about time he came to the House and told us that he has a plan to bring Wales back to work. May I remind him that in Anglesey one in four men are jobless. What will he do to help north-west Wales?

Mr. Edwards: There are few developed countries in the world where there has not been a loss of jobs in manufacturing. We are witnessing a major change in the pattern of employment. There are far more jobs in the service sector, and far more self-employed, than before. A large number of new small firms are being created continuously.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Museums and Galleries, Merseyside

25. **Mr. Alton** asked the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster with whom he consulted before appointing the trustees of the national musuems and galleries on Merseyside under paragraph 3(2) of the schedule to the Merseyside Museums and Galleries Order 1986 (S.I., 1986, No. 226).

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Mr. Norman Tebbit): The appointments were made upon the recommendation of my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Arts, who will assume full responsibility for the Merseyside museums and galleries after the forthcoming transfer of functions order is made.

Mr. Alton: I can understand the Chancellor's reticence about assuming responsibility for the arts on Merseyside. Will the right hon. Gentleman say why, under section 46 of the Local Government Act 1985, the order was laid before Parliament setting up the trust before consultation

with other political parties and indeed with Parliament itself? What was the particular hurry in proceeding with the appointment of the Duke of Westminster, whose previous affinities with the arts on Merseyside are not especially well known?

Mr. Tebbit: The hon. Gentleman chooses one appointment — that of the Duke of Westminster. If I recollect rightly, 13 appointments were made. The appointments make up a group of good, well-balanced people who have had a long interest in Merseyside and in the arts. I think that the hon. Gentleman should be very pleased about that and should stop trying to introduce political factors.

Mr. Frank Field: Will the Chancellor accept that not all those living on Merseyside share the views that have just been expressed? Many of us are extremely pleased that the Government have established most of the museums on Merseyside as national museums.

Mr. Tebbit: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for what he has said. I must confess to the House that those actions were taken primarily on the recommendations of my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Arts, and I am sure that he heard the hon. Gentleman's words.

The Arts

27. **Mr. Freud** asked the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what functions he exercises in relation to the arts.

Mr. Tebbit: When the then Minister for the Arts was appointed to the office of Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster in 1984, his arts functions were formally vested in that office by virtue of the Transfer of Functions (Arts, Libraries and National Heritage) Order 1984 (No. 1814). They will be the subject of a further transfer of functions order shortly, since my right hon. Friend the present Minister for the Arts does not hold the office of Chancellor. Meanwhile, my right hon. Friend exercises all day-to-day arts functions on my behalf.

Mr. Freud: Will the Chancellor tell the House why it has taken from September of last year until now to effect a transfer of functions order? As the right hon. Gentleman is travelling and down the country talking about the incompetence of the arts, will he accept the Government's appalling incompetence in allowing this to go on for so long? Is there not an overwhelming reason for having a Minister for the Arts instead of this nonsense of incompetence in which different people have different responsibilities?

Mr. Tebbit: I do not accept a word of what the hon. Gentleman has said. The arts function will formally be passed back to the Lord President of the Council, to whose Department the present Minister for the Arts is technically attached. That was the case between the summer of 1983 and late 1984, before my noble Friend Lord Gowrie was appointed Chancellor of the Duchy. *[Interruption.]* If the hon. Gentleman would just listen for a moment, he would get the answer. The transfer of functions order will be made shortly. It has taken longer than usual because of a study of possible alternative ways of legally vesting the arts functions without requiring an order every time the ministerial portfolio changes hands. Meanwhile, my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Arts has full authority to conduct the day-to-day arts business, while the ultimate legal power rests with the Chancellor of the Duchy. There are no legal or administrative problems whatsoever about this.

Mr. Buchan: But there may be many artistic problems, and it does not give the Opposition much comfort to know that the right hon. Gentleman is in charge of the arts. Does he not think it is time that he gave some consideration to the all-party Select Committee report, which simply said that there should be a Ministry for the Arts, Communication and Tourism, which would bring in films, broadcasting and the arts, and above all strip the responsibility from the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and make a proper Ministry for the arts?

Mr. Tebbit: I notice that the hon. Gentleman's party did not take that view when it was in office, and this Government do not take that view now. I do not think that these problems are best dealt with by permanent restructuring of the Departments in Whitehall. The arrangement is working very well and effectively today, and that is the best way to leave it.

Ministerial Duties

28. **Mr. Winnick** asked the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what proportion of his time in the week beginning 24 February he has spent on matters relating to the Duchy of Lancaster.

Mr. Tebbit: It is my practice to devote such time as is necessary to carry out my responsibilities as Chancellor fully and effectively. In the week beginning 24 February, I estimate that some three hours were required for this.

Mr. Winnick: Would not some of the right hon. Gentleman's Cabinet colleagues, such as the Home Secretary and the Leader of the House, prefer him to spend much more time looking after the affairs of the Duchy of Lancaster? Is it altogether a coincidence that since the right hon. Gentleman became chairman the Conservative party has gone even further down the polls? Does he connect that in any way with his taking over the job?

Mr. Tebbit: I do not answer in this House for my responsibilities as chairman of the Conservative party, and most certainly I would not abuse my post as Chancellor of the Duchy by doing so. I was very glad to note that on Saturday my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary was in vigorous and raucous form, busily scragging the Opposition.

Mr. Ryman: With his intimate knowledge of the Prime Minister and what, if anything, she is thinking, will the Minister say whether it is true that Mr. MacGregor is going to Downing street tomorrow——

Mr. Speaker: Order. That was a good try, but I doubt whether it has very much to do with the Duchy of Lancaster.

Mr. Ryman: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The Minister has answered the question about how much time he spends on these duties, the inference being that he has other time for other duties. I wish to ask him whether he can confirm or deny that Mr. MacGregor is seeking to shorten his term of office——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The point is that that has nothing to do with the Duchy of Lancaster.

Mr. Skinner: Does the Minister recall that his predecessor could not manage on £33,000 a year in that job and went to other fields to feather his nest? The right hon. Gentleman has just said that he does about three hours work for this £33,000. It is not a bad number, is it? He gets £33,000 for three hours' work, yet last week one of his playmates on the Government Front Bench came here and said that they would give single pensioners an extra 40p in the coldest February for 40 years—just enough to buy a mustard plaster.

Mr. Tebbit: If the hon. Gentleman was right about my salary, he might conceivably have some sort of point. I am not paid as the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster from public funds. I do not receive a salary as a Cabinet Minister from public funds. I do receive a nominal salary as Chancellor of the Duchy from the Duchy itself.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Sunday Trading

29. **Mr. Peter Bruinvels** asked the hon. Member for Wokingham, as representing the Church Commissioners, what response the Church Commissioners have received from those retail companies of which they are shareholders regarding the proposed deregulation of Sunday trading.

Sir William van Straubenzee (Second Church Estates Commissioner, Representing Church Commissioners: Of the responses received so far, the majority have indicated in varying degree that they are not in favour of Sunday trading, although many say they may well feel compelled to open if their competitors do.

Mr. Bruinvels: In view of the General Synod voting 427 to six against Sunday trading, I warmly welcome my hon. Friend's answer. Is he aware that the cathedral bookshops at Canterbury and Guildford have now closed and are awaiting the debate on Sunday trading? Will my hon. Friend impress on shop chains in which the Commissioners hold shares that they should close on Sunday, to ensure that Sunday is a day for recreation, religion and leisure?

Sir William van Straubenzee: The Church Commissioners would expect any institutions in which they hold shares to obey the law. Perhaps I might add that the nearest biblical analogy that I can find for the Government's present stance on this issue, if they insist on persevering, is that of the Gadarene swine.

Mr. Frank Field: When we next ask questions on this subject, may we ask the Second Estates Commissioner to draw attention to the Prime Minister's post? She has received only 100 letters in support of her proposal, and 37,000 against.

Sir William van Straubenzee: I shall bear that suggestion in mind. The interesting experience of many hon. Members on both sides of the House, and with differing views of the legislation, concerns the number of people who express their anxiety when they have no religious observance whatever.

THE ARTS

Arts Council (Funding)

32. **Mr. Murphy** asked the Minister for the Arts if he will make a statement on the implications for the arts of the increase of Government funding for the Arts Council since 1979.

The Minister for the Arts (Mr. Richard Luce): Arts Council funding from 1979-80 to 1986-87 has been increased by 32 per cent. in real terms, including the extra abolition money, and by 7 per cent. in real terms excluding it.

Mr. Murphy: Does my right hon. Friend agree that a 7 per cent. increase in real terms, with a 10 per cent. increase in real terms in overall arts funding and £20 million-plus from business sponsorship, means that there are excellent implications for the arts?

Mr. Luce: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. The picture that is painted by some of gloom, doom and despondency in the arts world, is the very contrary of the fact. The Government have increased the amount of resources for the arts in real terms.

Mr. Tony Banks: It is not a matter of gloom and doom. Is the Minister aware that since 1982-83, excluding abolition money—which we must, as it is an inadequate substitute for the money previously put into the arts by metropolitan county councils and the GLC—the real increase in the arts funding by the Government is less than 1 per cent.? That figure was produced by the House of Commons Library. Does the Minister not feel that it is an obscenity in terms of values for the Government to spend £18 billion on defence and only £136 million on the arts?

Mr. Luce: The hon. Gentleman abuses the English language by suggesting that it is an obscenity when we have increased overall resources available for the arts. He should bear in mind that local authorities give a great deal of support to the arts. The diversity and plurality of funding is the very strength of arts in the long term.

Mr. Jessel: How far does my right hon. Friend think the arts should rely on the Government rather than on local government? As for abolition of the GLC and the metropolitan county councils, does my right hon. Friend agree that the 32 London boroughs and other successor authorities could do rather more than they have so far shown signs of doing?

Mr. Luce: My hon. Friend is right. We have to remember that the Government have switched £43 million from local government funding to Government funding. As a result, we are relieving local authorities of the overall burden. On Merseyside, for example, we are merely asking successor authorities to fund 10 per cent. of what is being precepted from them under present policies.

Mr. Buchan: We are in the classic situation of asking why, if things are so good, they are so bloody awful? Theatres, music halls, concert halls and arts centres throughout Britain are desperately anxious about the fall in the amount of money that they receive. Does the Minister agree that since the Government came to office arts funding has collapsed in real terms? Does he agree also that local authorities are being cut and capped, if not abolished, and that it is a cruel and obscene joke to suggest that they can match the proper funding given earlier?

Mr. Luce: The hon. Gentleman is painting a wholly false picture. The West End commercial theatres are doing exceedingly well and their attendances are increasing. The hon. Gentleman should not assume that everything should be done by the state. He should welcome the fact that one of the major ways of finding a solution to the problems of the Empire theatre in Liverpool, for example, has been through the private sector, not the ratepayers. Both the private and public sectors should work in partnership in the arts world, and that is what we are seeking.

Local Government Reform (Theatres and Concert Halls)

33. **Mr. Alton** asked the Minister for the Arts what recent representations he has received from those theatres and concert halls threatened with closure as a result of the abolition of the metropolitan authorities.

Mr. Luce: I have received a number of representations about some of those theatres and concert halls, and I have discussed their concerns with the Arts Council. As the House will know, good progress is being made on a number of issues, including Sadler's Wells, the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic and the Liverpool Empire.

Mr. Alton: Notwithstanding that reply, may I ask whether the Minister is aware that the director of the Merseyside Arts Association, Mr. Peter Booth, is reported as having said last Friday that he is fed up with hearing that everything is safe, that the crisis is still a deep one, and that some £600,000 will be required to save the philharmonic, the Everyman, the Playhouse and 30 other smaller art groups on Merseyside? What hope is there of that £600,000 being found? What co-operation is the Minister receiving from the five district councils on Merseyside?

Mr. Luce: The Arts Council, under the chairmanship of Sir William Rees-Mogg, is doing an excellent job in trying to solve all these problems in turn. On Merseyside, the local authorities are being asked to take a small burden. I emphasise that it is small, because I know that the hon. Gentleman is deeply worried about the continuity of the arts on Merseyside. The local authorities are being asked to pay only 10 per cent. of what they are being precepted until 1 April. The whole burden of supporting museums and galleries is being assumed by central Government on behalf of taxpayers. That is a genuine demonstration of the Government's anxiety to ensure that we play our part. We now look to the local authorities to pay their share of the matter.

Mr. Hanley: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, following the abolition of the Greater London council and metropolitan county councils, such halls and theatres will have to survive because of the plural funding, which he mentioned earlier, from local authorities, the Arts Council, business sponsorship and one group that has so far not been mentioned—the public, who attend such shows? Does my right hon. Friend further believe that some sensible taxation reforms may help to encourage more people to donate money to their local theatres and concert halls?

Mr. Luce: My hon. Friend is right about the paying public being important. Indeed, at present they are the largest supporters and funders of the arts—way beyond any other source of funding. The Government have already made some tax concessions to encourage people to give to the arts, and we are concerned to ensure that everything possible is being done to improve on that.

Mr. Wareing: Does the Minister realise that, despite being within one month of the abolition of Merseyside county council, many arts facilities on Merseyside still do not know whether they will be open or closed after 1 April? Is he aware that Liverpool city council, which is short of resources and is being rate-capped, cannot finance all those services? He has had correspondence over the Croxteth hall and community park, for example. Is he about to respond to my request that he visits the area and sees the people concerned with that hall and park?

Mr. Luce: The hon. Gentleman is not quite with it. As I said in Friday's debate, I have already visited Merseyside and seen a large cross-section of the arts. On the question of funding, which is important for the continuity of the arts, Arts Council clients which are not affected by the abolition of the metropolitan county councils have been informed of their allocation for 1986-87, and those affected by abolition are being given interim assurances that their Arts Council funding will be no less than at present. Their final figures will depend on the outcome of negotiations with local authorities. It is now up to local authorities to show that they wish to play their part in the partnership.

Mr. Michael Marshall: Will there not be a genuine problem if the various local authorities taking over responsibilities for such things as health, safety, fire precautions, and so on, make differing interpretations of their duties, which could affect, for example, the activities of touring companies? Will my right hon. Friend keep an eye on this and help to bring a balanced and reasonable approach across the board wherever he can?

Mr. Luce: Although I have been somewhat critical of some local authorities, principally Merseyside and Islington, in the large bulk of the cases, including Tyne and Wear, Manchester and South Yorkshire, local authorities have been co-operating extremely well with the Arts Council in negotiations to deal with abolition problems. They have set a good lead and we look to other local authorities to follow their good example.

Disabled People (Attenborough Report)

34. **Mr. Wigley** asked the Minister for the Arts what progress has been made by the Government in implementing recommendations of the Attenborough report on arts for disabled people.

Mr. Luce: Good progress has been made. The Arts Council published a "Code of Practice on Arts and Disability" on 6 December 1985. The public libraries, museums and galleries have for many years made special efforts, within the resources available, to facilitate visits by disabled people. I shall continue to take a close interest.

Mr. Wigley: Is the Minister aware that that is a very disappointing answer, in that there were a series of specific proposals in the report, most of which have not yet been taken up? Has he had any discussions with the Chancellor of the Exchequer with a view to implementing some of those suggestions in this year's Budget? Will funding for the proposals in the report come from the expenditure of his Department, or from that of other Departments?

Mr. Luce: If the hon. Gentleman is referring to the recommendations in the report about Government activity, I can tell him that I have already had a preliminary meeting with representatives of the Carnegie trust, which produced the report and the recommendations, and I have had meetings with my hon. Friend in the Department of Health and Social Security to discuss these matters. My problem is that I am clearly limited by available resources in doing much more, but I am giving every support to the work of the Arts Council in trying to ensure that the code of practice is implemented by arts organisations.

Mr. Buchan: We all welcome the report and that partial response to it, but the crucial question is to what extent there will be resources so that it can be implemented? Is the Minister aware that we shall give him full support in any argument that he has with the Treasury to achieve that purpose?

Mr. Luce: I note what the hon. Gentleman has said. In libraries, museums and galleries a good deal of progress has been made in providing access to the disabled. There is more of a problem with the performing arts, but a great deal of attention is being given to this sector.

Leyland Vehicles

3.33 pm

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 10, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the refusal of Her Majesty's Government to extend the deadline of 4 March and to provide proper information, so as to enable Lancashire Enterprises Ltd. and others to prepare properly costed bids for Leyland Vehicles as an alternative to a takeover by General Motors."

This matter is obviously specific. As to its importance, four days ago the Prime Minister told the House, in answer to my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition:

"Those who are interested in making genuine bids—the trade unions could have done the self-same thing—could have obtained the information from the Department of Trade and Industry or British Leyland."—[*Official Report*, 27 February 1986; Vol. 92, c. 1066.]:

On the Jimmy Young show last week, the Prime Minister said of those talking of alternative bids to General Motors that they should

"put up or shut up".

Lancashire Enterprises Ltd., with the West Midlands enterprise board, has sought to do that—put up a bid. It is hoping to sponsor a federated management buy-out in which the major investment will be made by the finance institutions, with a stake from the enterprise boards and from the management and work force. Contrary to the pledge given by the Prime Minister four days ago, the request for information met with a point-blank refusal. Messrs Hill Samuel, on behalf of British Leyland and the Government, have refused to provide any information unless a series of onerous conditions are met. However, they have caught Lancashire Enterprises Ltd. in a catch 22 trap, for these conditions can be met only with the information which Hill Samuel is refusing to provide. In other words, the Government are creating conditions which make it impossible for any others but General Motors to get to the starting line. No prospectus has been provided.

As to the urgency, the deadline set by the Government expires tomorrow. It has taken General Motors at least nine months of work, and I understand that it has not yet formally submitted a bid. The National Carriers buy-out —greatly applauded by Conservative Members—of a size similar to that proposed for Land Rover took nine months to reach fruition. The Government's proposed time scale for counter-bids to that of General Motors for Leyland Vehicles is laughable. It makes a mockery of the Government's claim to be serious about alternative bids.

Yesterday, the former Conservative Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath), suggested that Leyland Vehicles was to be sacrificed and sold off to General Motors as part of a private deal between the White House and Downing street. This Government's tactics in blocking other bids suggest that the right hon. Member is right. The deadline in this case can be extended only if there is an emergency debate today or tomorrow.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) asks leave to move the Adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 10, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that he thinks should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the refusal of Her Majesty's Government to extend the deadline of 4 March and to provide proper information, so as to enable Lancashire Enterprises Ltd. and others to prepare properly costed bids for Leyland Vehicles as an alternative to a takeover by General Motors."

I have listened with care to what the hon. Member has said and I fully understand the case that he has made, but the only question that I have to decide is whether this matter should take precedence over the business set down for today or tomorrow. I regret that I do not find that the matter meets all the criteria laid down in the standing order. I therefore cannot submit his application to the House.

Mr. Stan Thorne (Preston): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: No, I will take the other Standing Order No. 10 application first.

Nuclear Waste (Disposal)

3.37 pm

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Grantham): I also beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 10, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the anxieties, potential financial loss and planning blight caused by the announcement that Fulbeck airfield is a possible site for disposing of nuclear waste."

Last week, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment announced that Fulbeck airfield is to be one of four possible sites for disposing of nuclear waste. My constituents have greeted this announcement with a justifiable mixture of shock, disbelief, grave concern and total opposition.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): I bet they have.

Mr. Hogg: They are sentiments that I wholly share.

As part of this application, I need to make it clear that my constituents and I will resolutely oppose this application unless and until four conditions are satisfied.

The first is that the Nuclear Industry Radioactive Waste Executive must prove that this method of disposing of waste is the only proper way of disposing of that material. Secondly, it must be proved that Fulbeck is the only proper site. Thirdly, it must be established that the scheme is absolutely safe. Lastly, all financial damage must be fully compensated. My constituents and I do not believe that any, far less all, of these conditions will be satisfied. Unless and until they are, we are wholly opposed to what NIREX has in mind.

As to recent developments which justified this application, there is clear and pressing evidence that contracts for the sale of property will fall through as a consequence of this application and that severe financial loss will be suffered by my constituents.

It is against this background that I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg) asks leave to move the Adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 10, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that he thinks should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the anxieties, potential financial loss and planning blight caused by the announcement that Fulbeck airfield is a possible site for disposing of nuclear waste."

I regret that I have to give the same answer to the hon. Member as I gave to the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw). I do not consider that the matter that he has raised is appropriate for discussion—*[Interruption.]* Order. I do not consider that the matter that he has raised is appropriate for discussion under Standing Order No. 10. I therefore cannot submit his application to the House.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I will take the hon. Member for Preston (Mr. Thorne) first.

Mr. Stan Thorne (Preston): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. In reply to the application of my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) under Standing Order No. 10 you referred to the importance of tomorrow's business as one of the reasons why you felt obliged to reject the application. One item of tomorrow's business is the Salmon Bill——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think that the hon. Gentleman misheard. I said that the application did not meet all the criteria laid down in the Standing Order. That is a different matter.

Mr. Thorne *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. If the hon. Gentleman is challenging my decision, I am not interested.

Mr. Thorne: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. The urgency of this matter in Lancashire——

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is a continuation of the application. I will take the point of order from the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours).

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Have your received notice, Mr. Speaker, from the Government Chief Whip that he intends to apply for a debate on nuclear waste tomorrow under Standing Order No. 10?

Mr. Speaker: If he had made an application, I would have heard it.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS &c.

Ordered,

That the draft Mental Health (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments &c.

That the draft Mental Health (Northern Ireland Consequential Amendments) Order 1986 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments &c.—*[Mr. Durant.]*

Wales

Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn. *—[Mr. Durant.]*

3.43 pm

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Nicholas Edwards): I intend to concentrate on a few subjects of special importance. Before turning to the central economic and industrial theme, I shall say something about agriculture, rates and the Health Service. At this delicate moment in the negotiations, I do not intend to speak about education, save to say that I hope that all the unions will now join in bringing this damaging disruption to an end by sitting down to talk about pay and conditions of service in the knowledge that the Government are prepared to make very substantial additional resources available to get a better paid teaching profession with extra pay for those with skill, responsibility and experience.

In agriculture, this has been another difficult year for Welsh farmers and the supporting industries. Fortunately, many in Wales were able to recover some of the harvest during the few fine weeks in September. Farming incomes have declined but not so severely as in other parts of the country. The Government made available £1 million weather aid to help the worst hit. Hill livestock compensatory allowances have been increased and part of the sheep premium for farmers in less favoured areas has been paid early.

Most milk producers have adjusted to the quota regime better than was expected a year ago. As a result of the outgoers' scheme, all small milk producers of up to 200,000 litres — that is, more than half the milk producers in Wales—were restored to their 1983 levels of production. We can now issue more quota producers whose development awards represented a high proportion of their total quota. These will now have at least 90 per cent. of the total quota that they would have had if there had been no cut. We shall end completely the 35 per cent. cut in development awards for all producers with quotas of up to 200,000 litres.

At recent meetings, the farmers' unions have emphasised the importance that they attach to maintaining support for beef in the price-fixing negotiations and opposing proposals by the European Commission that discriminate against British farmers. The Government share those objectives.

Over the years ahead we face fundamental changes in the pattern for agriculture. We shall need to make full use of a range of measures to achieve those changes and to give farmers the time that they need to adjust. Among the instruments are price restraint, quotas, quality control, income support, assistance with countryside and conservation measures and the encouragement of new crops.

I am surprised that, at a time when the National Farmers Union in Wales is pressing for much wider use of quotas, Liberal spokesmen have announced their total opposition to quota systems. I look forward to hearing their alternative policies.

Mr. Geraint Howells (Ceredigion and Pembroke, North) *rose——*

Mr. Edwards: Are they coming?

Mr. Howells: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman, but first of all he said that the Government had plans to introduce quotas; I am just wondering for what commodities.

Mr. Edwards: As I thought, we are not to hear the alternative policies. All I am saying is that quotas are one of the instruments that will continue to be needed. We shall clearly continue to need them for milk. The National Farmers Union in Wales, as the hon. Gentleman knows, is suggesting that they should be used for a wide range of commodities. I do not entirely share the views of the NFU on that issue, but the Liberal party has said that quotas should not be used as an instrument at all, and I find that surprising.

The rate support grant settlement for local government that I announced before Christmas was a good one for Wales. It provided for a 5 per cent. increase in current spending, which is more than the likely rate of inflation. Local authorities have complained of a reduction in grant, but this year we were proposing an increase to 67 per cent. Local authorities understood very well that the system was designed to discourage high spending and that authorities spending above the settlement figure would lose grant. I had undertaken that any grant unclaimed would come back to local authorities, but that the method of recycling would be decided only when we had a clearer indication of spending plans.

While the system undoubtedly had the effect of discouraging authorities from proposing even larger increases in spending—I am glad to say that on average they have been substantially less than in England—some have chosen to impose very high precept demands on ratepayers.

I make no apology for seeking to discourage high spending, or for trying to protect ratepayers from what the chairman of the Welsh Counties Committee at the meeting with me described as "horrendous rate increases". I agree with Mr. Arthur Harris of Dyfed that:

"vast endeavours must be made to reduce the burden on ratepayers".

Local councillors talk about the pressures on their services caused by high unemployment and the need to fund high pay settlements in the local authority sector, but private sector firms cannot pass on high wage settlements, or their rate bills, without losing business, and high rate burdens add to unemployment.

When representatives of the Welsh counties came to see me, asking for immediate recycling of grant, I believe that I was right to suggest that if I did so they should trim their expenditure as well. What shocked me was not that they refused to reduce by 2 per cent., or by 1 per cent. but that they said that it was impossible to make any economies or to reduce by a single penny. I was even more shocked when Dyfed's "vast endeavours" to help ratepayers led to a further increase in spending and precept, despite its receiving extra police grant.

Following that meeting with the Welsh Counties Committee I decided that I would give the maximum possible immediate relief to ratepayers through a recycling of RSG, on the clear understanding that it would be passed on, while maintaining pressure on the remaining counties to reconsider their expenditure plans. The decision of the Clwyd county council, both to reduce its precept by 10 per cent. and to make a £1·5 million reduction in expenditure,

[Mr. Edwards]

proved that this was the right approach, and it made nonsense of the argument that expenditure reductions were impossible.

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): How much extra unemployment will result if the £1·5 million cut takes place, as opposed to appearing on paper?

Mr. Edwards: I have just said that, because industrial firms and businesses cannot pass on the demands to customers, with high-spending decisions fewer people will be employed in commerce and industry. So far from increasing unemployment, the cut will protect jobs which would otherwise have been lost.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way on that point?

Mr. Edwards: No, I have just given way and I want to get on. I know what will happen. The last time that I spoke from the Dispatch Box I was criticised for giving way too often and for making too long a speech. On this occasion, the proper thing is for me to allow everyone to speak, and I shall try not to take too many interventions.

I am glad that other counties have reduced their precept as well, and there are good reasons for thinking that the pressure of the system will lead to further reductions in expenditure during the year. Last year, Welsh local authorities undertook to exercise restraint if we removed the system of targets and penalties. Regrettably some of them have failed to do so; but I am quite clear about three things: first, that our system has and will continue to put pressure on local authorities to restrain expenditure, secondly, that I have been able to obtain direct reductions in the rate burden for the benefit of the ratepayers of Wales, and thirdly, that the case for our package of reform of the local government finance system has been further reinforced by these events.

Sir Raymond Gower (Vale of Glamorgan): South Glamorgan's proposed rate increase is the highest in Wales, and I should like to know whether my right hon. Friend has made a special appeal to it. There seems to be little difference between the circumstances of the Welsh counties, and certainly not one which would merit such an enormous increase.

Mr. Edwards: I agree with my hon. Friend. The leaders of the councils made it clear at our meeting that they were proposing increases in their spending programmes. As my hon. Friend the Member for Delyn (Mr. Raffan) observed at Question Time, the system is such that, if the authorities continue to spend in this way, they will lost grant and low-spending authorities will benefit when we come to the further redistribution of grant withheld.

I have now given way three times, twice to Opposition Members and once to my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Sir R. Gower). I should like now to get on with my speech.

We are at the time of the year when health authorities are having to face the difficult decisions that they have to take about priorities. That will always be the situation because funds cannot be infinite, while demand is virtually unlimited. What the House and the public must understand is that health authorities are dealing with the problems and the priorities of an expanding service and changing needs, and that the allegations of widespread cuts are false.

The Government are providing record levels of financial resources for the National Health Service in Wales. We are carrying out one of the largest programmes of hospital building ever. Taking account of inflation, recurring revenue allocations to district health authorities have been increased by over 23 per cent. between 1978-79 and the financial year which is just ending. We have recently announced that, in total, a further £44 million in revenue provision will be made available to health authorities in Wales for the coming financial year, which represents a cash increase of more than 7 per cent. over the provision in 1985-86. Between 1979 and 1985, the number of staff concerned directly with patient care has increased by more than 12 per cent. allowing for the reduction in the standard working hours of nurses.

Among new services announced in 1985 was an eight-bed bone marrow transplant unit in Cardiff. In August I announced that high-resolution CT scanners would be provided at Morriston and Ysbyty Glan Clwyd, supported by five or six small to medium scanners at other locations. The third Welsh renal dialysis unit became fully operational at Morriston in 1985, while the two new subsidiary renal units at Bangor and Carmarthen both opened in the summer and are working well.

There is, of course, considerable concern about waiting lists, which have risen under this Government just as they did under the previous one. There is one difference between the situation then and now, and that is that already by 1984 we were treating 63,000, or 18 per cent., more in-patients than in 1979 and 51,000, or 12 per cent. more out-patients. These figures have continued to rise since. The acceleration in the number of patients treated and in the range of services has been far greater than under our predecessors: it is a remarkable achievement. Health authorities have been checking on their waiting lists and report that in many cases the numbers include double counting; but that is no consolation to the patients who are having to wait and we are undertaking a major exercise with health authorities to try to get on top of this long-standing problem.

Mr. Anderson: The right hon. Gentleman has boasted about an increase in the number of in-patients. How much of that increase is accounted for simply by demographic factors—the aging population—and how much is a real increase?

Mr. Edwards: Of course there is an aging population, but we have provided not only additional resources to deal with it but a wider range of new and improved services. It is a considerable achievement to have been able to extend the service in the way we have and to treat this large number of additional patients.

Dr. Roger Thomas (Carmarthen): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Edwards: I think that this must be the last time I shall give way, or I shall be accused of speaking for too long.

Dr. Thomas: How much has the fact that people are leaving Wales and seeking specialist treatment elsewhere contributed to reduced waiting lists in Wales?

Mr. Edwards: I fear that it has not contributed as much as perhaps it should have. Although we have greatly improved and extended the service, there will always be opportunities for some patients to go elsewhere. Indeed, in some specialist cases, it is right that they should do so. We must use all the available resources for health care in a particular district both within Wales and within the United Kingdom as a whole. I hope that authorities will look at that as one way of reducing health pressures in the short term.

I turn now to the economy. In the last year, the coal industry in south Wales has undergone a major change, hastened and made more severe by the miners' strike. Eleven of the heaviest loss-making pits have closed or merged. The number on colliery books is down to about 13,500 and the total work force to just under 16,000. The coal board has fulfilled its commitment of finding alternative jobs for all those who wanted to remain in the industry, while those who chose to leave have received generous redundancy terms.

While these closures have been taking place, the work force has responded very positively to good management and the result has been a dramatic increase in performance. Productivity has increased by 46 per cent. in eight months; and the coalfield, which had been losing £100 million or more a year, expects to break even in the March quarter. It is a remarkable achievement. It has enabled the board to announce since the beginning of the financial year investment of £80 million — the largest capital development programme in so short a time in the history of the coalfield. Much of this new investment has been directed into new coalface equipment. I am particularly pleased that the board has approved the investment of £30 million in a new anthracite project at Carway Fawr, thereby safeguarding 800 jobs. There are good grounds for thinking that we have now reached the end of a period of decline that has lasted for many decades in south Wales, and caused much hardship.

The 6,000 job losses in the coal industry, along with losses in a number of other industries including the closure of Courtaulds in north Wales and the loss of jobs at BP Llandarcy, have contributed to the distressingly high unemployment in Wales, now at a record level. I very much regret these closures and loss of jobs, and the impact that they have on local communities, but the process of industrial change is continuous. Whatever general economic policies are adopted, particular companies will cut back or go out of business.

Fortunately, there have been many positive developments. Two major steel projects have been completed on schedule—the £171 million hot strip mill project at Port Talbot and the £30 million Galvalume project at Shotton. Work is well advanced to provide Llanwern with the concast facility which will further improve its performance.

We continue to see a high level of industrial investment in Wales. During 1985, offers of regional selective assistance and new-style regional development grants totalled nearly £60 million, with the aim of creating 12,500 new jobs and safeguarding over 4,800 existing jobs.

During 1985, Wales continued its record of attracting around one fifth of all the inward investment to the United Kingdom with 25 new overseas projects and 23 expansion projects by existing overseas companies involving a combined capital investment of £143 million. In addition, United Kingdom firms from outside Wales decided to locate 20 new projects and one expansion project in Wales with a promise of nearly 2,750 jobs and over £14·5 million in capital investment. I am glad to say that only today it was announced that Nimbus records, the sole manufacturer of compact discs in the United Kingdom, has decided on a major expansion in Cwmbran which will lead to the creation of 275 jobs.

In 1985 the small firms centre dealt with over 17,000 applications, over 9,000 from individuals seeking to start up in business. The business improvement services scheme received over 900 applications in steel closure areas and made offers to over 550 small firms with a value of £2·8 million. The number of self-employed in Wales is rising fast. An example of what projects of this kind can lead to is the firm in the Rhondda, Valdons Ltd., which just three or four years ago was launched by two redundant workers and which now employs over 70 people, about 60 of whom are making plastic mouldings to the very high standards demanded by National Panasonic.

I am encouraged by the very wide range of projects started during the year. The list covers almost every industrial sector, including electronics, biotechnology, pharmaceuticals and aircraft, as well as high-volume consumer products such as video recorders and microwave ovens. I was particularly pleased by the decision of an outstandingly successful British high technology company, Renishaw, to establish a manufacturing plant in Cwmbran backed by high quality research and development, providing over 500 jobs; and by Warner Lambert's decision to consolidate its United Kingdom manufacturing operation at Pontypool which will provide 250. Similarly, Pirelli has announced a major new investment at its Aberdare factory, which will provide over 150 jobs. The further expansion of Amersham International at Cardiff will provide over 200, and a notable success was the safeguarding of over 500 jobs at Borg Warner after a long period of uncertainty.

Our success in attracting Japanese companies continues with the announcement during the year of projects by Brother Industries, the 10th Japanese company to come to Wales, and Sharp, which will lead to the creation of over 350 jobs at Wrexham. I was also particularly struck on a recent tour by the scale of the modernisation and expansion of the major factories of Hitachi, Sony and National Panasonic in south Wales, involving the creation of nearly 450 jobs. United Paper Mills, a Finnish company, began production two months ahead of schedule at its mill at Shotton in which it has invested well over £100 million to create over 250 jobs on the site as well as providing a major boost to the forestry industry.

The Welsh Development Agency, with its offshoots WINvest and WINtech, continues to play an important role in encouraging investment and preparing industrial sites. During 1985 the agency contributed 1·5 million sq ft to the total of more than 2 million sq ft of Government factory space that was allocated. The agency expects to spend about £11 million on land reclamation and environmental improvement in the current year and is, at this time, drawing up a further programme.

The Welsh Office, the agency and Mid Wales Development are working up further programmes to help job-creating business activity in the rural areas, and I hope to announce details within the next few weeks. I believe all Welsh Members will welcome the Government's

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decision to maintain the present system of tourist boards, and in particular to retain the Wales tourist board, which is doing much good work.

Despite all those encouraging developments — with continued growth in the economy and high investment — we have not been able to make any impact yet on total unemployment levels at a time when large numbers are joining the labour force and job losses continue to arise from changes in the industrial structure. Against that depressing background, the Government have reinforced their employment and training programmes.

The growth of the number of long-term unemployed is a particularly disturbing aspect of the situation. During the year, we have more than doubled the number of available places on the community programme, and I am pleased to say that the Manpower Services Commission is well on its way to meeting the June target of 20,500 filled places. Pilot schemes in Neath and Port Talbot aimed at getting the long-term unemployed into jobs or training are already showing encouraging signs. Fourteen thousand places are planned for the adult training programme in Wales in the coming year, representing a threefold increase since 1984-85. The revised training arrangements announced last year are developing well.

I have been particularly encouraged by the success over the last year of the enterprise allowance scheme, which provides a weekly allowance of £40 to unemployed people wishing to set up their own business. We shall have 5,192 places available in Wales this year, an increase of more than 1,000.

The two-year youth training scheme is being introduced from 1 April, and that major training programme will provide school leavers with high quality training and work experience. I am pleased that the problems in Mid Glamorgan have been overcome and the area manpower board has unanimously approved the plans.

Mr. Michael Foot (Blaenau Gwent): On the subject of the second year of the youth training scheme, the right hon. Gentleman talks of problems being overcome, but the Government are imposing a considerable increase in the amount that the local authorities have to pay. Will he not look at that afresh, particularly in the light of the meeting we had at the weekend, representing all the heads of the valley areas, which are all facing the same problems? The Government boast about what they are doing about training, when a considerable part of the burden is being put on the local authorities. Will the right hon. Gentleman look at the financing of that matter again?

Mr. Edwards: I take note of what the right hon. Gentleman says. As I said, we have allocated massive additional funds to start this training programme, which, regrettably, was not started when the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) had responsibility for such matters. We had to catch up with other countries and I am pleased with the progress that is being made to introduce better training for young people. *[Interruption.]* The Opposition do not like being reminded of their neglect of these matters in the past.

Mr. Foot *rose*——

Mr. Edwards: I will not give way again. I have just given way to the right hon. Gentleman.

I turn now to another package of measures which we have developed in our drive to tackle the problems of unemployment, urban dereliction and social hardship which are the consequences of industrial change. In addition to a major road programme — last week we went out to tender for the Conwy crossing, one of the largest road and bridge contracts ever undertaken in this country—during my time in the Welsh Office we have set in motion a dramatic and far-reaching transformation and reclamation of the urban areas of Wales that have been symbols of industrial decay for so large a part of this century. One instrument has been the urban programme. We have increased resources from £7·1 million in 1979-80 to £29 million in 1986-87. I am pleased that it has proved possible to approve 200 new schemes at a total cost of £14·4 million for 1986-87, which represents a 53 per cent. increase in the value of new schemes approved over 1985-86.

In addition to the urban programme allocations, nearly £10 million has been earmarked for urban development grant projects throughout Wales. Since we introduced the urban development grant scheme in 1982, it has proved to be a highly effective tool in bringing forward private sector projects which together have a total investment value of about £115 million. As well as many other benefits, those projects are expected to create nearly 4,000 permanent jobs as well as some 1,800 temporary jobs during the construction stages. By far the most significant project so far approved is the £42 million redevelopment of the Bute east dock area in Cardiff by Tarmac, which is now well under way.

We are now looking at what development opportunities might be created in the wider south Cardiff area if we were to construct a barrage across the harbour mouth, and we are awaiting the results of the feasibility studies. Already the proposal has stimulated widespread professional and business interest in the considerable development potential of south Cardiff.

What is being achieved in south Cardiff also points the way to what can be done elsewhere. It is with that in view that I am today launching a new initiative to improve the environment of the south Wales valleys.

The special problems of the valleys cannot be tackled in isolation. Just as business in the communities of the coastal plain and the valleys grew and prospered together, so the future of the valleys must be related clearly to the tremendous progress which is being made in modernising and diversifying the economy of the rest of south Wales. A key to achieving that lies in the improvement of communications. The new road between Cardiff and Merthyr and into the Cynon valley is complete. We are continuing to support major improvements to the A467 beyond the Rogerstone to Risca section and have supported the construction of the important new access roads into the Rhondda valley.

We have approved capital expenditure allocations to the major development programme that British Rail is undertaking, in partnership with the county councils, for the Cardiff valleys network. It involves the replacement of the existing rolling stock, together with new stations, and other major improvements to services and facilities. With other important road schemes planned to improve access to the valleys still further, this is the moment to launch a fresh initiative to help ensure that the valleys share in the regeneration of the rest of south Wales.

A great deal can be done to improve the valley environment. That is especially true of the town centres and the areas lending to them, where poorly maintained buildings and a damaged environment sell short the enormous attractions which the valleys have to offer. What we shall seek to do is to trigger a series of co-ordinated initiatives by the local authorities and private and voluntary organisations to improve those areas. I am not proposing Welsh Office solutions. Where communities have sound ideas and the willingness to back them, the Welsh Office will focus the many existing mechanisms of assistance and will also make available additional resources to reinforce them, and to promote the contribution that is necessary from the private sector.

I am making available initially in 1986-87, for that specific valley initiative, on top of the other Government funding, £2 million of special capital allocations for housing-related initiatives and £1 million from urban programme resources, quite apart from special capital allocation of £3 million for housing priority estates projects, much of which will go to the valleys, and which I shall refer to later. Inevitably the bulk of developments under that initiative will fall in later years and those planning those projects can work on the assumption that we shall want to reinforce successful schemes in the years ahead.

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): I am not sure whether I heard the Secretary of State correctly. Did he say that £3 million is available for each of the 12 or so districts in south Wales, or is there £3 million for the whole of the south Wales valleys?

Mr. Edwards: I am saying that there is a substantial allocation of resources to local authorities under the housing schemes, to urban programme schemes, and to the work of the Welsh Development Agency and other agencies, all of which will be directed and concentrated. In addition, we are making available £3 million in the coming financial year for the initiative, and a large part of the £3 million of special capital allocation for housing priority estates projects will support the initiative.

I have set out my proposals in a statement, which I have already circulated to hon. Members and to organisations that we expect to be involved. We have shown in south Cardiff and in Swansea what can be achieved. The opportunity is there for the valleys as well. It will not surprise the House if I say that I do not always agree with the Bishop of Durham, but I felt that for once perhaps we shared a common approach when he spoke recently about the need for financial pump priming for community self-help. That is exactly what I am seeking to achieve.

Our drive to tackle housing dereliction has the same objectives. I have been able to increase local authority housing capital allocations for 1986-87. Within the total of over £141 million, special allocations of some £40 million have been made to encourage local authorities to concentrate on the renovation of both public and private housing stock. Taking into account the available spending from housing receipts, local authorities will be able to spend well over £140 million on the renovation of unsatisfactory housing in the coming year. In addition, I have increased net provision for the Housing Corporation by almost 15 per cent., to £44·7 million. A good deal of those resources will go into the valleys, and particularly into the programme of priority estates projects.

What can be done is already being demonstrated at Penrhys in the Rhondda and by the Afon project in Wrexham. The number of long-term unoccupied properties has already been greatly reduced, rent arrears have started to come down and vandalism is being brought under control. There is now a sense of commitment to make the estates places where people can live decent lives.

A new project in Bute Town, Cardiff got under way last October and is already making encouraging progress. We are now launching a further phase with new projects in Merthyr Tydfil, Pontypool and the Rhymney valley as well as in Barry. In total, special capital allocations of £3 million will be made for projects in 1986-87 and we are providing extra revenue support. Most important of all, we are making possible a much more sensitive style of management, which recognises the essential contribution which the people who live in the estates can make to improving them.

No doubt there will be a great deal to divide us in the debate this afternoon, but I hope that at least we can unite to make possible a real success of those important initiatives, and I seek the support of the House for them.

4.15 pm

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside): My hon. Friend the Member for Carmarthen (Dr. Thomas) hopes to wind up for the Opposition, and to be able to pick up some of the many points raised by the Secretary of State, particularly about agriculture and health.

I should like to remind the Secretary of State that last month, in his own county, 1,000 people demonstrated in the county hall against cuts in the education service in the county of Dyfed and for higher rates.

The right hon. Gentleman referred to training in reply to an intervention by my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot). When the right hon. Gentleman was in opposition he used to say that training places were not proper jobs. Many of us remember the attacks that he used to make in that sphere. However, I want to give a positive welcome to his announcement about Nimbus Records—275 jobs in Cwmbran will be much welcomed.

The Secretary of State mentioned an opening at Shotton in my constituency. I can help the House by telling hon. Members that one of our evening papers has written:

"Welsh Secretary Nicholas Edwards certainly has a talent for bad publicity. He can drive into a bed of roses and come up smelling of—fertiliser.

BSC has invited him to open the new £30 million . . . line at Shotton in June but Alyn and Deeside councillors are to write to the Steel Corporation saying Mr. Edwards is not welcome on Deeside."

Rightly, the Secretary of State made the economy the central part of his speech. I agree with him on that. He also made important remarks about our valley communities. Before I take up the points that he made, I should like to make a plea to him to raise in Cabinet the need for extra help for old people in the present freezing weather in Wales. I remind him—the House should know—that our housing problems in Wales are arguably the worst in Britain. Elderly people in leaking, draughty homes, particularly in the south Wales coalfields, are at risk. I have in mind pensioners who are partly disabled through arthritic hips, and live in homes that can be reached only by climbing many steps.

Many pensioners are trapped in the coldest of homes. The chief housing officers in Wales say that the elderly

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live in some of the worst housing. What prospect is there of a special payment? The Secretary of State must fear, as I do, the manifestation of hypothermia in Wales. Despite our record of neighbourliness, there is no doubt that many of our fellow countrymen and women in Wales are at risk.

I should like to refer to tourism. For once, I can fully agree with the Secretary of State. His stand is right. He was right to stand up for the Wales tourist board. He would have been greatly criticised had he not. I very much appreciate the alacrity with which he moved to make sure that nobody got any idea that we were to lose our tourist board.

I advise the Government to exclude Wales from the unpopular Sunday trading legislation—the Shops Bill. The Secretary of State and the Cabinet to which he belongs have under-estimated the disquiet and opposition to it in Wales. For the archbishops of the Church in Wales and the Roman Catholic Church to agree, for the Free Churches, the Mothers' Union and the Salvation Army to agree, when all-party unease is expressed and when the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers agrees with these bodies, there is clearly considerable evidence of the unease about the Bill in Wales. At a recent press conference in Cardiff, the hon. Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Sir R. Gower) made a fine plea for second thoughts by the Cabinet about this important matter.

Mr. Anderson: Conservative hon. Members may be laughing now but, come the election, they may have a very different expression.

Hon. Members may like to know that I addressed a meeting in Cardiff four weeks ago where there was only one person in favour of the Government—and he was a Conservative councillor. I addressed another meeting in Swansea on Friday and again only one person at a large meeting was in favour of Government policy. Again, he was a Conservative councillor doing his inadequate best.

Mr. Jones: Even the South Wales chamber of trade came out against the Cabinet's proposals on the Shops Bill.

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): I wonder whether my hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) can recall the figures published by the Minister of State, Home Office relating to the number of letters he received for and against the Bill. I believe that the Minister received 310 letters in support of the Shops Bill and 37,000 against it.

Mr. Jones: All Opposition Members have found that their mail bags feature this issue strongly and emphatically. I urge the right hon. Gentleman to take the views of the House to Cabinet and at least exclude Wales from the Sunday trading legislation, even if he cannot have the Bill killed in its tracks.

The right hon. Gentleman wriggled somewhat over the issue of rates in his speech. I want to put it on record that since 1980-81 it has been estimated that almost £451 million in cash has been lost by local authorities in Wales in terms of rate support grant and penalties. I advise the right hon. Gentleman—and he knows virtually all the authorities and is on first name terms with them after seven years—to work with the local authorities. He should not take them on or attack them. By not taking that approach, the right hon. Gentleman was forced to make one of the most incredible U-turns in the history of Welsh Office Ministers. I quote from the Swansea *Evening Post:*

"Tory joy at £13 million U-turn."

The article continues:

"The Labour Leader of West Glamorgan County Council has been congratulated by his Tory counterpart for spearheading the successful campaign to secure an extra £13 million of Government money for Welsh county councils."

The *Daily Post* ran a large headline on 21 February. It read "Edwards gives in." There is no doubt that the *Daily Post* correspondent, Mr. David Rose, was correct when he reported:

"In an astonishing climbdown, the Government is to hand over an extra £13 million . . . But Mr. Edwards' announcement amounts to an embarrassing about-turn for the Government. Only four days ago he told the Welsh counties that they could only have the extra cash on condition that they reduce their overspending first."

What has happened is that, late in the day, the right hon. Gentleman has realised that the Government's policies, which have pushed up unemployment in a huge fashion since 1979, have left the local authorities desperately short of the financial resources to cope with the demands made on their services by the unemployed. I am glad that the right hon. Gentleman has become a kind of St. Paul on the way to Damascus.

The right hon. Gentleman raised an important matter regarding community investment in the valleys. Nothing is more important to us in the House than the future of the valley communities through to the end of the century. The concept of assisting the valleys is a good one and I welcome it. Any help for these beleaguered communities is most welcome. If the right hon. Gentleman can enhance the scheme with greater cash backing I would welcome it even more. However, can the right hon. Gentleman tell us how many jobs will be provided by the six schemes? Despite references to the high level of unemployment in the valley areas, there is no suggestion that the schemes will provide any new jobs. Indeed, the first four pages of the document are a eulogy to the policies that have helped to bring about industrial dereliction, mass unemployment and critical housing conditions in the valleys. Has investment in the coal industry really been substantial? Why does the south Wales coalfield have only one high-tech coalface compared with almost 50 in the rest of Great Britain?

When explaining the method of cash allocation, the right hon. Gentleman made it clear that initially there will be only six places and that the valley communities will be in competition with each other. What is the sense in that? Is it not true that the communities least able to mount an effective challenge for cash will be those with the least resources and most desperately in need of assistance? Is the Secretary of State initiating a programme which will merely lead to the survival of the fittest? What will happen to the communities which fail at the first hurdle? Will they receive no help?

The cash allocation for housing must be described as derisory. The £2 million cannot provide hope to undo the damage caused by the 25 per cent. cuts in housing budget made by the Government the year after the general election. The Chief Housing Officers Association suggested that billions of pounds in cash over 15 years is required in south Wales to avert a major housing crisis.

If the right hon. Gentleman would allow Welsh local authorities to use the many millions of pounds from housing sales, if he would free the receipts from these

sales, the communities would have a better chance of correcting the amazing dereliction with which they have to cope.

To put the right hon. Gentleman's statement into context, I remind him that when steelmaking at Ebbw Vale was ended, the Labour Government pumped £25 million into the area and when steelmaking at Shotton was finished, the Department of Industry in 1980-81 put £12 million into that area. On that basis the right hon. Gentleman's initial offer in relation to the coalfield communities and valley communities is not enough.

Can the right hon. Gentleman say whether the housing associations will be able to take advantage of the scheme?

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: Yes, indeed.

Mr. Jones: The right hon. Gentleman has said yes and I thank him for that information.

The Welsh Office has identified the problem but in some respects, given the amount of funding that it has announced, it has passed on the responsibility for dealing with the problem to the local authorities which have been starved of cash since 1979. The two pilot schemes outlined in the appendices are worthy enough. However, as an assault on unemployment, an attempt to attract new industry and as a means of reducing poverty and improving the quality of housing, the schemes are inadequate. I urge the right hon. Gentleman to consider the weakness of the schemes in terms of funding.

I would like the right hon. Gentleman to meet representatives from the Coalfields Community Campaign. He should explain his intentions to them and attend a meeting of the Heads of the Valleys standing conference and discuss the document. The right hon. Gentleman should call the coalfields county councils together and tell them how he views the way forward. He should discuss these plans at length with those whom he hopes will promote them in the years ahead.

If the right hon. Gentleman doubts what I am saying, I will give him an uncomfortable minute by reading the latest unemployment figures for the valley communities. Aberdare has male unemployment of 29·5 per cent.; Blaenau Gwent and Abergavenny have male unemployment of 25·7 per cent.; Cardiff has 21,966 people seeking work; Bridgend has male unemployment of 22 per cent.; Merthyr and Rhymney have male unemployment of 25·4 per cent.; Newport has male unemployment of 19·9 per cent.; Pontypool and Cwmbran have male unemployment of 19·5 per cent.; Pontypridd and Rhondda have male unemployment of 22·4 per cent.; and Swansea has male unemployment of 21·5 per cent. Those are horrendous figures.

The statistics can never adequately explain the humiliation, sadness, deprivation and poverty in the homes of unemployed men and women. The right hon. Gentleman's valley initiative is minuscule compared with the task that we shall have when we take office. As the general election nears, the right hon. Gentleman's language becomes softer. It is dawning upon him slowly that his proposals are insufficient for our people.

On the economy generally,

"we have blown North Sea Oil. We have sold the assets. We are a society too anxious to consume and an economy too reluctant to invest. There is a world of ownership and a world of managers and they don't meet. The whole psychology of the City is profoundly anti-industrial."

That was said by the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine). The Government have been successful——

Mr. Keith Best (Ynys Môn): Why is capital investment in Britain at an all-time high of £55 billion?

Mr. Jones: Why has Wales lost 105,000 manufacturing jobs since the right hon. Gentleman took office? Why is one in four men in Anglesey out of work? Why are 11,000 people in Gwynedd out of work? The hon. Gentleman cannot answer that. He should have remained in his seat. He knows that the Secretary of State is not delivering enough new jobs to Anglesey and the county of Gwynedd. I thank the hon. Gentleman for his timely intervention.

What will be the plight of the Welsh economy when the oil revenues cease? Wales has suffered more than the rest of the United Kingdom in the depression. I look to the Secretary of State to fight in Cabinet for a major change in policy and for a policy that will ensure an attack on the unacceptable unemployment in Wales. If he believes that he can delay that, I must tell him that Carmarthen town has lost 400 creamery jobs; Metal Box has decided that 800 jobs at Neath must go; we have lost 1,200 Courtaulds jobs at Flint and Wrexham, and in that area 14,000 people are jobless; 130 plastics jobs will be lost in Ruabon; and in the Swansea valley, Lucas is destroying 260 jobs. What plans does he have for pumping replacement jobs into the Severn tunnel, Margam and Llanelli following the British Rail job losses?

Why did the Secretary of State fail to halt the closure of the Islwyn and south Gwent skillcentre? Why did he not fight for it? He talks proudly of training investment. Why did he let the Llanellii and Islwyn skillcentres go to the wall?

I repeat that Gwynedd suffers from 23 per cent. male unemployment and 4,000 people in Holyhead are looking for work. For as long as the county of Clwyd is desperate for new jobs, Gwynedd has few prospects, because it is far to the north and to the west. I heard nothing today from the right hon. Gentleman about how he would help that county.

The Secretary of State glossed over our unemployment problems. Officially, in January, 190,000 people were on the register. This month, we hear that the figure is 188,000. It is fair to say that the true unemployment figure, making the generous allowance that half of those on special training will find employment, is probably 210,000. The trend is becoming worrying. The loss of more than 5,000 pit jobs in the south Wales coalfield in less than a year has caused much anxiety to the president of the south Wales NUM, Mr. Emlyn Williams, and to Mrs. Moira Sharkland, the chairperson of the Coalfield Community Campaign in south Wales. Both of them ask for more money for the activities of NCB (Enterprise) Ltd. The Opposition say that the money earmarked is insufficient for the post-closure tasks.

In response to the Secretary of State's initiative announced today, I ask him to make another. He should initiate an investigation of the state of disrepair in Wales' crumbling infrastructure. I remind him that the National Economic Development Council has called for an in-depth examination of infrastructure investment needs in the United Kingdom. The English regions are analysing and quantifying what needs to be done. The Confederation of British Industry has asked the right hon. Gentleman to invest heavily in infrastructure improvements. I have in mind the current state of housing, schools, colleges and hospitals in Wales. There is a major backlog of

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improvements in the operations of the Welsh water authority and there are many outstanding road improvement schemes. Such a national audit of the Welsh infrastructure would give us a gobal picture of the task that we face. If the right hon. Gentleman had had the benefit of such an audit and perhaps more funding, his announcement about the valleys might have meant that we could have worked constructively until the end of the century to right much that is wrong in the valleys and in the rest of Wales.

It is not widely known, but the conservative estimate is that the 190,000 unemployed people in Wales cost the taxpayer, at 1984-85 prices, more than £1 billion a year. According to the latest quarterly report of the Manpower Services Commission, about 77,000 men and women of all ages have been jobless in the Principality for more than a year. The right hon. Gentleman must tell us how to return them to work. How can we lessen the humiliation of the families of the long-term unemployed?

I hope that the Secretary of State will go to the Cabinet and insist at least on the proposals made by the Select Committee on Employment, which have received widespread commendation. The *Financial Times* said that they were "not outlandish" proposals, and they could become the basis of a fight back for jobs in Wales. I have tried to adopt those proposals to the Principality, and I hope that the Secretary of State will consider urgently what I propose: 17,500 jobs subsidised at £40 per week per job; 15,000 jobs, at a cost of £5,000 per job per year, centred on a long-term programme for urban rehabilitation, housebuilding, house renovation and local building projects; and 5,000 jobs at a cost of £4,000 per job per year on improvements to social services. The latter could provide helpers and carers for the elderly, especially in Arctic conditions such as we have now, and people to care for the disabled and those recently discharged from hospital. This would be centred largely in the Health Service and the local health authorities.

It is estimated that the entire programme would cost about £165 million, or £55 million a year for three years, and that it might remove 37,500 people from the dole queues. That is the least that the right hon. Gentleman should do. It is the bottom line. The Opposition are not aiming an ideological arrow at the right hon. Gentleman. The proposals come from an all-party Select Committee and are endorsed by the *Financial Times*. I hope that one of the Ministers will respond sincerely to that tonight.

Because there is a pressure on time I shall, like the Minister, keep my remarks to a reasonable length. We are critical of the Secretary of State not only for his past record but for the huge increase — 137 per cent. — in unemployment in the Principality. We are also critical of him and the Government because they have no strategy to help the unemployed.

4.40 pm

Sir Raymond Gower (Vale of Glamorgan): There is a temptation on these occasions to be parochial and to sound constituency themes. There is also a temptation to be partisan. However, seldom has there been a greater need to be as objective as possible rather than subjective. We should seek to speak about the economic realities rather than political panaceas. It is quite natural for Members to adopt constituency matters which are so important to us all, but it would be inconsistent with our main objectives if we dwelt upon them.

It should be possible to view the problems of the Welsh economy in the context of the United Kingdom. We are witnessing general economic problems arising out of a deep-seated malaise of our industries, which have been declining for many decades. Coupled with this malaise is the somewhat different problem of unemployment—the two things are not always the same. Indeed, if we take steps which are designed to deal with the long-term economic malaise, the immediate effect may be some increase in unemployment, either short-term or long-term. Similarly, steps to counter unemployment — though helpful in the general economic context — can be damaging to long-term trends.

An increase in the activities of the building and construction industries would have an obvious advantage in dealing with unemployment levels. Whatever disadvantages there may be in increasing the activity of the industries, they are on the whole fairly labour-intensive and do not use a great number of imported products. Such an increase in activity would also benefit other industries. There would be an increased demand on the manufacturers of paints and materials, and furniture. Housebuilding and other forms of building would increase the activities of these industries and would, by definition, be likely to lead to an increase in their exports. In this case there would be a contribution to solving the long-term problem of inflation and to the prosperity of our economy.

To adequately reconcile attempts to deal with the deep-seated problems of our economy and at the same time with unemployment are matters of nice judgment on the part of the Chancellor and the Government. In the context of the type of unemployment referred to by the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones), there is a strong case for increasing the production of the construction industries above the levels which have been contemplated previously. This should be done not least in Wales. I hope that serious consideration will be given to this shortly by Ministers in general and by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in particular.

There are, of course, particular problems in Wales. I understand the views of those who continuously express the wish to restore the old basic industries of coal, iron and steel. It is possible to increase the efficiency of those industries and a good deal has been achieved, but it does not seem likely that we shall see a return to the former levels of production. What can any Government do to deal with these problems? What should be their main efforts?

I would suggest, somewhat differently from others, that the first consideration should be communications. There is a good deal of evidence that, more important than regional grants and any other help which the Government can give directly, industrial growth benefits more from good communications than any other single factor. Successive Governments have a reasonably good record in this connection.

One project which has been cited already is the completion of the M4 and the completion of the dual carriageway beyond the M4 to Dyfed. My hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Best) mentioned the north Wales coastal road. The Secretary of State also referred to the dual carriageway from Cardiff to Merthyr Tydfil. One might mention the dual carriageway from Newport to Ross-on-Wye and its connection by motorway to the

industrial midlands. Some bypass schemes—which have not been mentioned in this debate — have been invaluable. I feel that more could and should be done.

While there is evidence that the motorway and dual carriageway schemes have progressed satisfactorily, other main roads are in need of attention and repair. I ask my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State what is the degree of his Department's inspection of the condition of those roads for which the county councils are largely responsible. Is there any system by which these roads are regularly inspected and the defects brought to the attention of the county councils?

There is also the problem of the Severn crossing. I have been encouraged by the steps which have been taken recently to effect certain considerable repairs, but I still believe that there is a need for a second crossing. I do not believe we shall be forgiven in Wales if, within the next year or two, we do not give a strong assurance on this issue. I have heard the view expressed frequently in Wales —it is wrong but quite understandable—that it would be ironic if we had a tunnel to France but an inadequate connection between England and Wales. This is a poor comparison, but I must tell my right hon. Friend that it is a view which is unfortunately held by many Welsh people. Much attention should be given to roads which are maintained by the county councils, and the permanent question of the Severn bridge.

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): The hon. Gentleman cannot shift responsibility solely onto the counties. The current expenditure, the non-capital expenditure, comes out of the rate support grant. What constructive suggestions does he have to ensure that the county councils can repair the roads?

Sir Raymond Gower: We must first identify the need, and in some cases I believe that there is a need. That is why I have asked my right hon. Friend about the extent to which there is an adequate system of inspection to enable us to know what is needed, because we can then make suggestions along the lines that the hon. Gentleman mentioned.

The Cardiff Wales airport is another factor in communications. The steps that have already been taken are most invaluable and helpful, and should ensure the continued growth of the airport. The improvement of the runway enables that airport to handle much larger aircraft than most of its rivals, and that is laudable.

The second priority has already been mentioned. Wales wants a fair share of the newer, highly technical and modern industries to compensate for the real loss of jobs caused by the decline of the older industries. Here I disagree with the Labour party. It is not easy to attract into Wales the sort of industries that will provide the required number of jobs, because by definition these newer industries employ fewer people. They are much more highly technical and capitalised. In that sense, it is a formidable task to arrange for a sufficient number of such industries to come into Wales so that they provide the number of jobs that have declined in the labour-intensive industries. Labour Members are wrong to minimise the difficulties associated with that task.

Whatever Labour Members may think, I believe that my right hon. Friend and his Department have done an amazing job in their efforts to obtain new industry from abroad. The success of that has been evidenced by the number of new companies that have come to north and south Wales from Japan and other countries. In that regard, Wales has been more successful than any other part of the United Kingdom, and my right hon. Friend, his fellow Ministers and all who work in the Welsh Office deserve much praise.

Mr. Rogers: Only from the hon. Gentleman.

Sir Raymond Gower: Such a tribute is deserved. I do not believe that I am the only hon. Member who thinks that. I extend such praise to the Welsh Development Agency and its efforts to attract new factories and new jobs. I am not so convinced that it has yet been as successful in relation to the financial part of its remit—its role as merchant banker. That is much more difficult, and I hope that in future that part of its business will be as successful as the construction of new factories.

I too shall curtail my remarks, but I should like to mention the work of other authorities as well as that of the Welsh Development Agency and the industrial department of the Welsh Office. Work is also done by some local authorities and by organisations such as Cardiff and Vale Enterprises — which operates in south Glamorgan — as well as the Thomson International Organisation, which has done invaluable work at Neath and is now starting to do the same in my own constituency. Such efforts are to be admired.

But part of the remedy lies in the hands of our own people. We must not ask that all these things be done for us. There must be a determination throughout the Principality to assist in this major undertaking. I hope that there will be wholehearted party co-operation, irrespective of whether we are in government or opposition. This is a long-term job which will not be achieved in the lifetime of one or even two Parliaments. We shall need the co-operation of all.

4.55 pm

Mr. Geraint Howells (Ceredigion and Pembroke, North): I have taken part in a number of Welsh day debates since my election to Parliament, and I have had the privilege of representing my constituency for 12 years. I am delighted that in the Chamber today there are three other hon. Members who were elected on the same day as I was. There is the hon. Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Grist), the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley), and the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Thomas). I believe that we are the only four hon. Members from Wales elected in February 1974 who are still here. All of us have in our own ways tried to play our part for the Principality that we all love so much.

On each occasion, I have wished to have the opportunity to celebrate progress in the life and economy of Wales. Many of us celebrated St. David's day last weekend, but alas there was no joy. With each passing year it seems that the cause for celebration gets less and less. Indeed, when we look at the state of Wales today —with its ailing economy and mounting unemployment — any feeling of optimism fades away at the dismal prospect before us.

I believe that the Government's faith in market forces is entirely misplaced, and to adopt an attitude of laissez-faire, as they do, towards Welsh problems is thoroughly reprehensible and unforgivable. We need only look at the statistics published in the latest Department of Employment bulletin.

[Mr. Geraint Howells]

Three of the travel-to-work areas in my constituency have unemployment figures of 24·5 per cent., 26 per cent., and 27·6 per cent. respectively. I again make a plea that the top end of Pembrokeshire, Fishguard and part of Carmarthenshire should come under the jurisdiction of the Development Board for Rural Wales. That would be a step in the right direction. I hope that the Secretary of State and his colleagues will again look at the plight of that area.

The travel-to-work area of Aberystwyth, which is also in my constituency, has only 12·4 per cent. unemployment —a respectable figure by today's standards. But there the economy is underpinned by a thriving university college, several other educational institutions and research establishments — a sector that is increasingly coming under threat from the Tory Government's policies. It seems that this Government are entirely anti-education and anti-research—a fact that bodes ill for my constituency and for the whole of Wales.

It is extremely short-sighted of any Government to starve these centres of excellence of much-needed funds. That is the kind of investment that is absolutely necessary if we are to compete in any way with other nations in Europe and throughout the world. Will the Secretary of State scotch the rumour that one of the Welsh university colleges is to be closed?

How safe are the Trawscoed establishment, the Pwllpeiron experimental farm and the plant breeding station at Gogerddan?

I believe that unemployment in Wales, which is already well above tolerable levels, will, before the end of 1986, be at or near 200,000. That is ample proof, if any were needed, that, whatever the Government's claims, their theories and policies are just not working for Wales. Instead of investing money in improving the housing stock, renewing the infrastructure, giving us better roads and easier communications—which would in the long term provide a better environment for job creation——

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: Nonsense. We all acknowledge that we have great difficulties and problems in Wales, but it does not help to throw out three wholly spurious scares, as the hon. Member has done. I have not heard the vaguest suggestion from anyone about the closure of the university college. He knows perfectly well, because he came with a delegation recently to see me, that very firm assurances have been given about the future of the Welsh plant breeding station. The hon. Gentleman should not invent things.

Mr. Howells: They are not spurious at all. These rumours have been floating in Wales and the Secretary of State knows it. There is no need for him to get excited. We know what has happened in Wales during the past few years, and more may happen. We are well aware that the Welsh plant breeding station has lost its status, but I hope that it will remain and be successful. After all is said and done, it has lost its status, and the Secretary of State knows it.

Dr. Marek: I completely agree with what the hon. Gentleman said about education in Wales. Everybody in Wales is aware of the enforced cuts in the Welsh plant breeding station and indeed the cut at the Agricultural Development and Advisory Service at Trawscoed. The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food will charge farmers for its services. It is a dismal story. The Secretary of State jumped up to deny that the university college of Wales was to be closed. I wonder if he would jump up to deny that Cartrefle teacher training college is to be closed. I understand that it is to be closed. [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] Conservative Members are denying that. In that case, I would welcome the Secretary of State jumping up now to deny it.

Mr. Howells: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his intervention, but I am afraid that the Secretary of State has by now regretted jumping up and intervening so rapidly.

I doubt very much whether privatising the Welsh water authority will create any employment. Still less will it benefit the consumer or the Welsh economy, and conservation, safety and the general management of our rivers and lakes cannot but suffer. Why on earth give away part of our most valuable natural assets in the pursuit of irrelevant dogma?

While we are scaremongering, in the view of the Secretary of State for Wales, what about the Forestry Commission? Who started that scare last week? I have tabled a question to the Secretary of State for Wales. He dare not give me a reply. He referred me to the reply given by the Secretary of State for Scotland. I wonder what his private views are regarding the Forestry Commission in Wales. We may know later. He may jump to his feet now: who knows?

The Secretary of State is nominally responsible for agriculture. I trust that he will forgive me for emphasising, yet again, how important it is that he should represent Welsh farming interests in Brussels and endeavour to make out a special case for Welsh farmers. Many of us have pressed him to go to Brussels during the past seven years. If my memory serves me right, he went once—in 1979-80—to defend the sheepmeat regime. He has full responsibility for agriculture in Wales. The Welsh nation depends on agriculture. If only to show good will, the Secretary of State should go to Brussels to represent Welsh farmers and to give them more moral support.

Farm incomes throughout Britain have been eroded during the past few years—production costs have risen faster than farm prices. Agriculture in Wales has been especially hard hit. In some areas, farmers have still not recovered from the milk quotas, which affected whole communities with devastating suddenness a couple of years ago, ruining many lives. The Secretary of State said that the Liberals do not favour quotas. I have said that there was no need to introduce quotas when they were introduced. I am sure that the Secretary of State would like to turn the clock back and that he does not favour quotas. Nor do the dairy farmers of Pembrokeshire, Carmarthen or Cardiganshire.

We should examine our marketing system in the EC with a view to getting rid of the surpluses. No Welsh Office Minister has mentioned our doing away with the intervention system and improving marketing. A child could buy a bullock for £500, sell it into intervention, leave it there six months and then sell it to the Russians for £50. That is happening. I do not know whether it is the system that the Government advocate, but it is time for the Secretary of State to go to Brussels and tell them that we want to change the system.

Leaders in Brussels should also be told that we want to keep the variable beef premium. Welsh farmers,

especially those who combine dairy and beef production, are worried about the EC threat to replace the premium with a new direct support scheme of headage payments for specialist beef producers. The premium, though not perfect, has been an important and stable influence in Welsh beef production. It has worked much more efficiently than any intervention system on the continent. The Farmers Union of Wales and the National Farmers Union have said that it is vital to retain the premium which store and fat cattle producers consider essential for survival now. We must not have a repeat of 1973-74 when the change in the system made the bottom drop out of the beef market, thus creating instability in the industry.

I remind the House once again that it was the Tory Government of 1973 who abolished the deficiency payments and a guaranteed price for beef in Wales. It was the Labour Government of 1974 who, with the backing of the Liberals and other minority parties, introduced the variable beef premium. I hope that the Secretary of State will do everything possible to ensure that the system continues during the next few years. Welsh agriculture has suffered enough traumas in the past couple of years to last a lifetime. I ask the Secretary of State to fight vigorously for Welsh farmers. Their welfare is vital to the rural economy in Wales.

I should like to quote a press release of the Farmers Union of Wales dated 28 February 1986:

"FUW President, Huw Hughes, told Pembroke farmers at Martletwy on Saturday (March 1) that despite the drop of 43 per cent. in farm incomes last year, Welsh farmers could expect no tangible help from this year's European price talks. He added that the UK Minister of Agriculture, Mr. Jopling, instead of safeguarding the interests of UK farmers, was taking the lead in cutting farm incomes still further."

I wonder whether the Secretary of State for Wales, who has full responsibility for farming in the Principality, shares his right hon. Friend's view that further cuts are needed in farm incomes in Wales during 1986-87. I am afraid that the inevitable will happen and the industry will suffer once again. Let us look forward to the day when a new party will be in government within the next two years, and let us hope that the people of Wales will have a Welsh Assembly within the next five years to look after their interests better than they have been looked after during the last seven years.

5.10 pm

Mr. Ian Grist (Cardiff, Central): The hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Howell) gave me a nice opening. I remember St. David's day in 1979 which heralded the Tory Government. It turned the key for us. That is a happy memory and I thank him for reminding me of it. If he continues to prescribe his policies for Wales, the Conservative party will remain in government, sure as eggs is eggs. He, the hon. Members for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Thomas) and for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) and I—it is fortunate that the names have not changed too much—represented the first major break in the Labour stranglehold on Wales. Indeed, we continue to represent both urban and rural areas.

Those who came to Cardiff on Saturday, whether or not to go to the match, may have seen a steam railway engine proceeding down the street, accompanied by a band, to the Holiday Inn hotel. That is part of the spirit of Cardiff and part of the history of the area. The old and new together show a pride and confidence in the future. I have frequently pointed out the advantages of Cardiff, which is a shining example of how a city can be transformed with the invaluable help of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. Cardiff has never had such a good friend in Gwydyr house.

Cardiff is on the verge of being one of the most exciting cities in Europe. We have magnificent shopping facilities, the south Cardiff development, the old docks area, which is being modernised into the 21st century, fine universities, art galleries, museums, live theatre in quantities of which no other city of the same size can boast, new and modernising hotels, first grade national and local sports facilities, the finest conference and concert hall in Europe, an airport now capable of receiving jumbo jets, and communications by sea, air, rail and road to all parts of the United Kingdom and beyond which serve as a platform from which to go forward to the future.

Mrs. Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is a great pity that Cardiff, for all its tourist attractions, should be about to lose a major attraction when an important collection of impressionist paintings will go to Japan for almost a year? Does he think that that is good for the tourist industry?

Mr. Grist: The hon. Lady shows the sort of insularity that damages Welsh interests. Those great paintings, which were left in the main by two sisters whose family money came from coal, will go to Japan. We have learnt that the tenth Japanese company is to invest in Wales. Those paintings will spread the name and fame of Wales, and will act as a hook to bring more work to our people. Just as the hon. Lady must have seen great exhibitions from abroad in the United Kingdom, we should be proud to have pictures to send around the world so that others may see them.

This should be one of the hon. Lady's days. Cardiff has served as a focal point for the valleys and hinterland of south Wales and, indeed, to a large extent was built on them. She should welcome the Secretary of State's venture of community investment and initiative in the valleys. I echo the comment of my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Sir R. Gower) that it is a chance for people to put forward their ideas, raise interest in their area, and bring pride back to their area, instead of having to rely on the politicians whom they elect and who rarely speak of the glories of the area but always of its dereliction, troubles and difficulties. It is a chance offered to them by the Government to help themselves.

It is absolutely certain that inefficiency, which the Labour party sometimes seems to espouse, and indiscriminate subsidy, which it certainly espouses, have never created or preserved jobs. They merely serve to lose jobs and make the position worse. Inflation, whether of promises or expenditure, wrecks confidence, undermines investment, is socially ruinous, and ultimately spells less work and employment. That is why we are looking forward to the Budget on 18 March and to a continuation of the fight against inflation. *[Interruption.]* Opposition Members should take note that this year the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development predicts that our unit labour costs will be the highest in Europe, and higher than in Japan and the United States. That is the sort of damaging inflation that we are imposing on ourselves, and that is supported by the attitudes of Opposition Members, which undermines jobs. High unit labour costs are one of the most damaging aspects of our national life.

[Mr. Grist]

Just as our productivity is improving and we are attracting the investment we need, we are managing to lose jobs because we are increasing labour costs rapidly compared with our competitors.

Mr. Best: Did not the OECD report show that we had been paying ourselves a 9 per cent. increase every year, which is a real increase of about 5 per cent.? The effect of that is that those in work become richer and improve their standard of living at the expense of those out of work. Is it not material that Labour Members always advocate higher wages and side with those who seek to push through higher wages when those policies directly damage those who are unemployed?

Mr. Grist: Indeed, and the figures show that in 1985 hourly earnings in the United Kingdom rose by 9 per cent. compared with a 5 per cent. average in OECD countries, and that this year the increase will be 8·5 per cent. for the United Kingdom and 4·5 per cent. for the total OECD countries. That is at least one of the answers to the question of the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) why we have lost jobs. They have been lost because of the inefficiency, out-of-dateness, uncompetitiveness and unawareness of what competitors are up to in industry after industry, and political party after political party. For many years the Tory party was as guilty as the other parties of being unaware of what was happening outside the United Kingdom.

Within the overriding priority of dealing with inflation, I hope that it will be possible to reduce interest rates. Their present levels are especially damaging to small businesses and to all those with mortgages. Today many more people have mortgages because more people are buying their homes than when we first came to office. I hope that more funds — even more than my right hon. Friend could announce today—can be made available for housing and house repairs. They are essential in constituencies such as mine, which have many ageing houses teetering on the brink of becoming slums, and many ageing constituents in need of specialised safe accommodation. During the past six years a marvellous job has been done in that respect. When I walk round my constituency I can see how many new roofs and windows have been installed, and the effect of the enveloping scheme in Rumney street. Much more remains to be done, and what better way to provide work and socially necessary investment than through housing?

Just as the Government have done so much to further home ownership and bring to reality the dreams of many people, I hope that my right hon. Friends have taken careful note of the opposition from all quarters to the proposals to review the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1972. The need to lighten the bureaucratic and tax burdens on small businesses and enterprises is well recognised by all Conservative Members. Nevertheless, the virtual free-for-all proposed in the use of private houses is not, and never will be, accepted.

Equally unacceptable is the extraordinary, and extraordinarily damaging, proposal of the South Glamorgan county council to raise local rates by 25 per cent. I quote from a letter that I received last week from one of my constituents. He writes:

"Dear Mr. Grist, I have just penned a letter to the Rev. R. Morgan to protest, most strongly, about the proposed 28 per cent."—

the figure has gone down to 25 per cent. since then, thanks to my right hon. Friend's actions—

"rate increase by S. Glamorgan. What you can do about it, I really don't know, but I feel I really must let my feelings be known, in the hope that others like me will put on enough pressure to reverse this diabolical situation.

Let me say I am, and always have been, a Socialist, but"—*[Interruption.]* The fact that I cannot read this properly speaks for former education standards.

"whatever happens next year neither I, nor my family, will ever vote Labour again . . . I am being used as a political pawn and I object to that.

The Rev. Morgan blames the present Government—and I admit that there is some truth in that."

That is fair enough.

"But I feel there is also a lot of bad management and many crocodile tears being shed. I pointed out to him for instance that much can be saved with a more competent Administration than exists at the moment."

The Audit Commission would agree with my constituent in that respect. He concludes:

"the effect on industry, small businesses and so on could be catastrophic."

My constituent is quite right. I told him that I would be making use of his letter today. There speaks a local resident who understands better than the county council the effect of rates rises on businesses.

We all appreciate that the change in rating support this year favoured cities at the expense of counties to some extent, but it was nevertheless a remarkable achievement that Cardiff city council held its rate steady. It is equally remarkable that the county council should put up its rate by 28 per cent.—a staggering figure and the greatest in Wales. Even now, the 25 per cent. increase that it is now going for will have profound effects. For example, a firm such as Amersham International will have its rates bill increased by £37,000.

Such increases, when applied to all the hotels, shops, and other businesses, firms and manufacturers around South Glamorgan, mean that claims by the county council that making cuts would cost jobs hide the fact that increases in costs mean that jobs go elsewhere. The person who retires is not replaced, the extra hand who could be taken on is not. These effects are not so easily seen, but they are there, and they make the area that bit less competitive than others.

Clearly, money is being wasted, for example in the education system, as schools are run half-empty, and painful decisions about their future are being shelved. That damages not only the economy of the county, but the opportunities for our children, who are consequently robbed of a wider curriculum and better equipment as a result of spending on echoing classrooms and underused facilities.

A further opportunity that is wasted locally, and this applies to county hall, city and local health authorities, stems from the appalling refusal to put out services to tender. Only by doing so can we be sure that local ratepayers are not being asked to subsidise inefficiency. The savings for many authorities have been outstanding and nationally the Government and the National Health Service have saved over £50 million by going out to contract. For instance, Ogwr council, in a slightly different league, has saved over £100,000 by putting out its building and local housing maintenance for tender. Bath city council, a little town in comparison to South Glamorgan, has saved £63,000 by putting out to tender catering in the council and the sports hall. Dudley council

has saved over £600,000 on school cleaning and Kent county council has saved nearly £1·4 million on the same service. There is now a long list of such savings. When will local authorities and health authorities in South Glamorgan and elsewhere wake up to their opportunities in this sector?

We should all be looking for opportunities. By their taxation policies, investment schemes and general ethos, the Government are seeking to promote a risk-taking and opportunity-taking state, and a responsible one.

This brings me to the teachers' dispute. I declare an interest as the father of two boys taking their O-levels in a local comprehensive school. Not all teachers are taking part in the dispute, and all credit to them for putting their pupils first. Many teachers, including some now taking action, are first-rate in their jobs, many are perfectly adequate, and some are downright poor. Most deserve higher pay, and, especially where their subject is in short supply, notably higher pay.

However, there must be a pro for this quid. The terms insisted on by the Government of assessment, job definition and increased in-service training are neither remarkable nor onerous. The only remarkable thing about them is that they have not been the norm for years. To deny that and imperil the future of our children as so many teachers have been doing, especially those in the NUT, is a scandal and a shame on the teaching profession. Let us hope that the current talks lead to better treatment for teachers and pupils alike.

We heard little today from the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside about the multifarious and manifold promises that he goes around making in Wales, but even they pall beside the £24,000 million extra expenditure promised by the Labour party leaders. Even if such promises could be kept, which is almost unthinkable in reality, the resultant rise in taxes and inflation would bleed the economy dry. Investment would flee the country, the pound would crash and inflation rocket. What choice then for jobs to maintain all the social expenditure called for by the Labour party? The country's course must be that set by the Government — realistic but imaginative. It must not be the opportunism—or occasionally the dishonesty—built on populism shown by the alliance. It must be built on a coherent, well-tried and deeply-rooted philosophy.

5.27 pm

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): In these debates, it is easy to go over the Government's global failures in their policy in Wales and look at the massive and increasing unemployment figures that are blighting every part of the Principality, at the increasing dereliction of our housing stock and the increasing waiting lists, and at the effect of public investment in social services, which have caused such misery in the Principality. I propose not to look at the global figures.

The hon. Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Sir R. Gower) enjoined us to be, as he intended to be, non-partisan and non-parochial. I shall be parochial and partisan—I make no apology for that—because these debates give us a good opportunity to invert the process of looking just at the overall picture, and instead look at the effects of Government policy in our localities among the people whom we have the privilege to represent.

I came back from my constituency today in a state of anger and shock at some of the things that I had seen and learned. I shall mention only two factors contributing to my state. The first came when I picked up my local newspaper, the *South Wales Evening Post*, of 27 February. One page has the heading "We Want to Work". It has photographs of 24 people in the local area, whose ages range from 19 to 59. On the left of the advertisement, we are told that the feature has been made possible by generous donations from various companies. What are we coming to when decent people have to go through the humiliation of parading themselves in such a way?

I do not criticise the local newspaper, which is trying, albeit against the odds, to get these people into jobs. I do not criticise the jobcentre or the advertisers who paid for the advertisement. Least of all do I criticise those who are desperate for jobs and who are prepared to suffer the indignity of having their faces put before their friends, relatives and neighbours in a kind of cattle market. Conservative propaganda would have us believe that the unemployed are in some way at fault. That is reflected in the Government's social security policies for the unemployed. If the Government looked at the employment histories of those 24 people, they would say, as I do, "What a waste of talent and training." Decent people are being forced to allow their photographs to be so published in a local newspaper.

The Government were completely unprepared for this avalanche of job losses. I recall that, at the second meeting of the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs, Sir Hywel Evans, who was then the permanent secretary at the Welsh Office, was imprudent enough to answer a question about the figures that the Welsh Office was working on for the expected ceiling in unemployment. He said that they were working on the basis that unemployment would peak at 125,000. The Government have massaged the figures, but they still show that unemployment is over 170,000.

The Government were completely unprepared for what has happened. Their policies mean that they are ideologically and psychologically ill-prepared to deal with a situation that is largely of their creation. Who can doubt that the policies pursued in 1979, 1980 and 1981, when the value of sterling was high, were responsible for the destruction of so much of the manufacturing base upon which Wales depends? During the last five years, 2 million jobs in manufacturing industries in the United Kingdom have been lost. Wales has lost far more jobs than any other part of the United Kingdom because of the structure of its economy. Wales is dependent upon public investment in the economy as a whole.

I had my second shock over the weekend when I met two trade union representatives from the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Centre at Morriston in my constituency. The traditional theme of this Government has been to cut the public sector, to curb trade union rights and to increase the privatisation of services. The hon. Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Grist) praised those policies a few moments ago, but let us look at their effects in one place, the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Centre.

In practice, the Government's policies mean that, because a three-year cleaning contract expires on 24 March, the DVLC management has negotiated a new contract with Exclusive Cleaners Contract (Western) Ltd. The old contract was for £287,000. The renewal tender costs amount to £155,000. Therefore the DVLC — in effect, the Government — can say that £132,000 of public expenditure is being saved. The director and the personnel chief at the DVLC are happy and the contractor is no doubt happy; he is keeping his profit margins.

[Mr. Donald Anderson]

But what is the effect on the cleaners—women who are already on low wages of £27 a week gross? The effect will be a reduction in cleaning staff from 139 to 102—a loss of 37 jobs—a reduction in cleaning supervisors from five to four and a reduction in wages—let us, in our comfort, listen to this—from £1·80 an hour to £1·50 an hour. There is also to be a reduction in hours from three to two-and-a-half. Thus, the women employed as cleaners at the DVLC will have to cover a larger floor area, because there will be fewer cleaners, in a shorter time. To add insult to final injury, their holiday pay is to be abolished. They have been told by the contractor that they can take it or leave it. If they do not like the new terms, he will go to the jobcentre, where he will find women who are more than ready, in a high unemployment area, to take their jobs.

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): Does my hon. Friend accept that these figures, appalling and unacceptable as they are in their meanness and in their penny-pinching character, are made even worse when one bears in mind that, over the life of the last three-year contract, there has been an increase in inflation of over 15 per cent.? One therefore has to bear in mind that an increase would be necessary just to keep the wages at their original value.

Mr. Anderson: My right hon. Friend makes an entirely good point. They are miserable wages for women who are at the bottom end of the working sector. Many of these women are from one-parent families, or they are the only breadwinner in the family. The industrial relations legislation does not cover them. The Government have so dismantled the protection that was available to workers that the fair wages legislation has disappeared. This means that they can either take it or leave it. Is this the brave new Tory world? Is this the model for other privatisation contracts in schools, hospitals and Government service?

The unions at the DVLC advise me that the next group of workers whose jobs may be contracted out could be typists and the reprographic staff. In their defence the Government cannot say, like Pontius Pilate, that they were not responsible. They cannot be absolved from their responsibilities. They must have known what would be the effect of the contract into which they were entering. There will probably not even be a public expenditure saving. There are to be job losses which will have a consequential effect upon social security expenditure because the families of those who are made redundant will have to be maintained. Even according to the narrow and petty economics of this Government, it does not make economic sense. They have increased the misery of these miserably low-paid workers in west Glamorgan.

I shall contrast the effect of that policy on these women in Swansea with what is happening in the City. The Secretary of State is personally much more at home there than in dealing with low-paid workers. The investment climate in the City has seldom been more favourable. There has been a bid frenzy in the City and a shares boom.

If they wish, those ladies on slave wages at the DVLC in Swansea can read in the newspapers that during the last 12 months there has been a shares boom of 26 per cent. and that there has been an 8 per cent. increase in the last month. They can read about the City gold frauds. The bullion fraud amounts to an estimated VAT loss of £500 million. They can also read about the salary explosion in the City. The Government are doing nothing about that. There is to be a salary explosion in preparation for the "big bang" deregulation which is to take effect in October. The salaries of many young men in their twenties will be increased from £30,000 to £60,000 per annum.

Mr. Best: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Anderson: No.

They toil not, neither do they spin. They are pushing around figures in the City, yet these ladies in Swansea are to have their wages of £28 a week, gross, reduced to £25 a week.

Mr. Best: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Anderson: No, I shall not give way.

That is the direct result of the Government's policy. It is a mean Government who pursue such policies. There is a sour smell of decline about the Government's values. Perhaps the party of the City cannot comprehend the effect of their policies on those ladies in my constituency. Those effects—deliberate in that they arise from Government policy—should shame the Government.

A critic wrote of an earlier state of national malaise in which

"wealth accumulates, and men decay".

Wealth is certainly accumulating as the two-nation divide deepens as a result of Government policies. The Government's priorities are those of the City while men and women decay. Our people are the losers, and the Government should go.

5.40 pm

Mr. Keith Best (Ynys Môn): I was going to say that the hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) was carried away by his own rhetoric, but it was not even rhetoric because much of it lacked any semblance of plausibility. The hon. Gentleman declined to give way to me as is his right, although it does not make for good debate, when he referred to share prices. He will be aware that recent new issues have been heavily oversubscribed if they appear to have any chance of going to a small premium. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that if that amount of private money is available in the United Kingdom it should be harnessed to the kind of infrastructure projects that both he and I wish to see?

Mr. Anderson: I see nothing wrong in principle in harnessing every element of private capital to help build the infrastructure in Wales. I heard the appeals made to the City by the Secretary of State in Cardiff, but they were rejected because the prospective profits did not suit the City. If the hon. Gentleman disputes the figures that I gave, I assure him that every one of them was based absolutely in fact.

Mr. Best: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that statement. I shall remind him of it when we debate privatisation of the water authorities. He has now confirmed that, like me, he believes that private money should be harnessed wherever possible, rather than always relying on the public sector. The dinosaur attitude of the Opposition suggests that they are still living in the 1930s and 1940s when it was thought that the only way out of certain difficulties was to use the public sector rather than the more adventurous and successful attitude of the present Government. Why bleed the taxpayer and increase

inflationary pressures by creating a heavier public sector borrowing requirement — a method that the Labour Government tried and failed — when there is the alternative that we now see? It is no coincidence that companies going into the private sector invariably do well after privatisation because there is a new sense of entrepreneurial movement forward which was totally lacking when they were in the public sector. I shall give an example of that later.

Mr. Williams: Inadvertently, I am sure, the hon. Gentleman is misrepresenting the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson). My hon. Friend referred to inflation in existing share prices. Those shares represent past investment, so their prices merely represent the price at which existing investment is changing hands. There is no accretion of investment as such. The privatisation of BT is a good example. Within a month or so, shares first issued at 50p were changing hands at £1·90—an increase of £1·40, not one penny of which was added to the investment in BT or received by the Government in extra taxation, but all of which went in windfall profits to shareholders.

Mr. Best: I am sure that the mistake is mine, but that is a different point. The right hon. Gentleman will agree that there are two aspects to this. The first is whether one can harness private sector capital for purposes hitherto regarded as the preserve of the public sector. As I understood it, the hon. Member for Swansea, East agreed that, wherever possible, private sector funds should be harnessed to achieve what in the past has been regarded as a matter for public sector investment. That is exactly what the Government are doing through privatisation, especially in the water authorities.

The second aspect is the movement of share prices. I remind the right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) that many people of very modest means throughout the country, probably including a number of the right hon. Gentleman's constituents, who had never owned a share in their lives, took up the BT share offer because they wanted to have a stake in their country, an opportunity hitherto denied them.

Mr. Williams: They already owned BT.

Mr. Best: The right hon. Gentleman digs himself a deeper grave by saying that. The general public did not own BT. The right hon. Gentleman's concept of public ownership is quite different from ours. To him, it means that the state owns the assets. To us, it means that members of the general public own the assets. That is a fundamental philosophical difference between us. The right hon. Gentleman merely digs himself into a deeper hole by making that apparent.

The right hon. Gentleman will be very disappointed by the attitude of the Labour Opposition Front Bench to those assets which have been returned to the general public by the Government. The Labour Opposition Front Bench—I could say, uncharitably, under electoral pressure—knows that it would be electoral disaster to seek to renationalise those assets, to re-acquire them by the state and to confiscate them from the members of the general public in whose ownership they should properly remain. That is true public ownership, and there will be no Opposition commitment to dismantle it.

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rymney): The hon. Gentleman talks about ownership by the British public. Does that include the 20 per cent. of BT shares sold on the New York stock exchange in the first week for £180 million? What contribution did that make to development and investment in Britain?

Mr. Best: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman is now a convert to the concept of dispersing assets as widely as possible. I look forward to hearing him press the Government for further privatisation to ensure wider share ownership by individuals rather than institutions.

Mr. Rowlands: Answer the question.

Mr. Best: The hon. Gentleman and I will agree on one thing—that, unfortunately, the percentage of individuals owning shares is still in decline compared with that of institutions. I regret that, but I had not realised that the hon. Gentleman also regretted it. I am glad that he has now made it clear and that he accepts my premise that public ownership means ownership of shares by as many individuals as possible.

Mr. Grist: Does my hon. Friend accept that what is happening to shares now is in remarkable contrast to what happened when the Labour party was in power, when savers, often individuals, and pension funds, into which virtually everybody was paying, were robbed blind by inflation, putting money into the Exchequer, not into people's hands?

Mr. Best: My hon. Friend is right. There is an inherent dichotomy in what the Opposition say. I do not think that I have heard one Opposition Member say that pensioners should not have Treasury bonds. What is the difference between having a Treasury bond which fluctuates in price and a share in the ownership of a company at home or abroad? There is no conceptual difference. That is another hang-up that the Opposition must face when considering private ownership.

Listening to Labour Members, one is reminded that the late Sir Winston Churchill said:

> "The inherent vice of capitalism is the unequal sharing of blessings. The inherent virtue of Socialism is the equal sharing of miseries."

That can never be more uppermost in one's mind than when one has the misfortune to have to listen to the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones). If anybody is capable of sharing misery as widely as possible, he has the greatest voice for that in the House.

I want to concentrate on a matter of critical importance which has been adverted to already—the problem of unemployment. I was interested to read in the *National Institute Economic Review:*

> "Each year that goes by with unemployment at the present level represents additional loss of national output, income and economic well-being. Moreover, both the social and the economic consequences of unemployment may well be cumulative, so that the longer that action is delayed, the worse the ultimate condition of the country will be even after unemployment is reduced."

I do not suppose that any right hon. or hon. Member would dispute that contention. The argument arises over how best to overcome that difficulty.

If we had been having this debate 20 or 30 years ago, it would have been regarded as impossible for a Government to sustain office with the levels of unemployment that are experienced now in the United Kingdom, and in Wales in particular. The fact that the Government have sustained office and the fact that, unlike their predecessors, the Labour Government, they not only

[Mr. Best]

won the 1979 election but went on to win the 1983 election, proves two things. I shall be charitable and say that it may well have had a lot to do with the state of the Labour party rather than policy but it also had a lot to do with the public realisation that the answers to unemployment are not as facile as the Labour party sometimes suggests. It is because of that root change in the understanding of the British people that the promises of politicians to overcome the level of unemployment through massive public expenditure are seen to be false. That was why, notwithstanding the high level of unemployment, the British people still voted in a Conservative Government.

Labour Members — I say this to them in all seriousness—must address their minds to why that was so. They must ask themselves how it can be that they are still promulgating the policies of yesterday and still articulating the same remedies now as before the 1983 election and yet they lost that election and lost it overwhelmingly. They must look into their souls and philosophy and wonder whether they have got it right.

It is accepted that the answers are not easy. I fully appreciate that the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside makes up in simplicity what he lacks in academic argument. But his answers are not persuasive. They will not persuade the people of Wales. The hon. Gentleman believes in massive public expenditure. He thinks that is the answer. But I must remind him of what the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) had to say only the other day to the London Business School. He said:

"The days of the Keynesian dash for growth are over, at least for the Labour party."

I do not know how long the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside will hold his place on the Front Bench if he continues to push out what he did a moment ago, because he is at variance with the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook. The right hon. Member for Sparkbrook went on to say that a Labour Government would only proceed "as the inflation constraints allow."

That was an interesting description of the state of the Labour party today, because it was an acknowledgement that the control of inflation must come before expenditure to increase employment. That is an interesting acceptance by some Labour Members of the realities of life that I have been mentioning.

The hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside often talks about Holyhead in debates on Welsh affairs and in Welsh Question Time, but it is obvious that he does not often go there. If he did—unless he flew, like some of his ideas in fancy—he would have to travel along the A55 and he would realise that massive public sector investment, in excess of £400 million, is going into roads in north Wales which will have the most dramatic effect on the income and economy of my constituents in Anglesey. Anglesey has a great deal going for it. It has a beautiful environment and a multiplicity——

Mr. Ray Powell: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You will recall that on the last occasion on which we had a debate on Welsh affairs, several Labour Members were not called because Conservative Members took more than their allotted time. I draw that to your attention, because Mr. Speaker made an appeal for short speeches. The hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Best) has been speaking now for 16 minutes. One would have thought that he would have appreciated the appeal from the Chair and at least made a short contribution. If he is to make a contribution, let it be a contribution to the debate.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Speeches so far have been commendably short, and I hope that we shall continue in that way so that we can hear every hon. Member who wishes to speak.

Mr. Best: I shall adhere to your injunction, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I appeal to the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell)—if he is capable of noticing an appeal when it is made—not to seek to intervene from a sedentary position, as is his wont, so that he does not delay me. No doubt he will then have an opportunity to make his contribution.

The improvement of the A55 will have a dramatic impact on the economy of Anglesey, as also will the improvements——

Mr. Rogers: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Best: The hon. Gentleman is delaying the debate.

Mr. Rogers: The hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Best) referred to my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) making his remarks from a sedentary position. In fact, my hon. Friend was standing. I know that he is short, but he was standing.

Mr. Best: I shall not respond to that. I would not want to see the hon. Member for Ogmore having to stand on the Benches in order to prove that he was standing rather than sitting.

I hope that when my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary replies to the debate he will take on board my exhortations for bypasses along the A55 on Anglesey. He has been extremely helpful in that predicament that I have brought to his notice. It is largely the result of those representations and my hon. Friend's kind response to them that we have a consultants' report on the bypasses coming about. I hope that the contents of the report will come to fruition.

A nationalised industry, Sealink, cried out year after year for investment in Holyhead, and no investment was forthcoming. However, as soon as Sealink was privatised, there was investment of £2·5 million in a deep-water berth at Holyhead. These matters speak for themselves.

The Welsh Office has provided £220,000 in grant under the urban programme for the development of a fishing facility at Holyhead. Following discussions that I had with a New Zealand company, I am happy to announce that the production of electronic pool tables will begin in Holyhead in the summer. Welsh slate will be used, which I know will be of great assistance to the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Thomas).

MEM is making advanced switching gear and Wells Kelo is undergoing restructuring. Anglesey Aluminium has seen an investment of £9 million, which has given it a more secure future than it has ever had previouly, but it will be going ahead with only half its work force. When I was first given the privilege of representing Anglesey in 1979, Anglesey Aluminium had 1,300 employees. That work force has now been halved. No Labour Member in his right mind, however rare that occurrence might be, would blame the Government for a reduction in the work force as a result of a diminution in the demand for aluminium worldwide. As I have said, the plant has a more

secure future now than ever before. That is a case of massive manufacturing investment, but a reduction in the work force.

Things are moving elsewhere in Anglesey with the restructuring of Associated Octel at Amlwch and with £500,000 of European money gong to Halal in Gaerwen to enable a packaging facility to be established.

Last week I met the chairman of Pringle, which has recently bought Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrnirobwlrllandysillogogogoch station. The chairman told me that the company is spending £1 million at that site on its manufacturing capability. I met an old Army friend of mine last week whose colleague has developed a vehicle which is being tested by the Ministry of Defence. Apparently it has a one-in-three chance of being accepted. If it is accepted, it will be produced by Laird for both the domestic and export markets.

Much is happening which is good news for Anglesey, but the tragedy of unemployment in Holyhead, which is at 25 per cent., means that no one can afford to be complacent. That is why I began by mentioning unemployment. Indeed, it is the subject on which I wish to bring my remarks to an end.

I suggest that three courses of action should now be taken. First, we should set up task forces in order to concentrate resources on areas in Wales with unemployment rates of 25 per cent. or more. The National Institute Economic Review shows that if we can reduce unemployment by establishing a structure which is related to manufacturing, there will be a direct correlation between a person gaining employment and a reduction in the unemployment register. Secondly, sectoral regional aid should be directed to support manufacturing industry. Thirdly, National Health insurance contributions, the welcome reduction of which was introduced in the 1985 Budget, should be directed to those under 25 years and to the long-term unemployed.

If we were to reduce the cost of employing those who are most in need of assistance and employment—those under 25 years and those who have suffered long-term unemployment — we would not have to talk about reducing wages for those people. Instead, we would be able to ensure that employers found it more attractive financially to employ people in those categories than others. If we can keep labour unit costs down, and, therefore, inflation, we help to combat the pressure for higher wages, which so often reduces our competitiveness.

Mr. Rogers: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Best: If we were to introduce these measures——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers) wishes to raise a point of order.

Mr. Rogers: When we last had a Welsh affairs debate, Mr. Speaker, some hon. Members were unable to participate because of the excessive length of certain Members' speeches. You have said, Mr. Speaker, that if our contributions are reasonably short, everyone will be able to participate in this debate. The hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Best) has been speaking for 25 minutes.

Mr. Speaker: I am aware of that. I understand that the hon. Gentleman is about to resume his seat.

Mr. Best: I was about to do so, Mr. Speaker. Before you entered the Chamber, Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers) raised a point of order and delayed the progress of my speech. He has caused that to happen yet again and he must be held responsible for the delay.

I was saying that if we were to introduce the measures to which I referred—I hope that it will be announced in the Budget that they will be introduced — we could make an even greater and more significant contribution to the reduction of unemployment which we all want to see.

Several Hon. Members: *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Many hon. Members wish to participate in the debate. Long speeches will not be helpful if they are all to be accommodated.

6.6 pm

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): I shall not take up the remarks of the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Best) — neither their length nor their rambling nature. I believe that the annual Welsh day should have something to do with Wales, and I accept that constituency matters will arise. However, much of what we have heard from Conservative Members has been extremely general and could have been included in almost any United Kingdom-wide debate. The annual Welsh day debate provides an opportunity to take stock of what has happened and what is happening in Wales. It enables us to study the balance sheet to see how things are moving and to examine the gains and losses. Over recent years there has been a saga of losses.

We heard a few moments ago that the hon. Members for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Grist) and for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Howells), and my hon. Friend the Member for Merionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Thomas) and I share a 12th anniversary. A seventh anniversary that stands out in my mind is that of the referendum on the Welsh Assembly. I should like to wager that if such a referendum were to take place today, the result would be very different from that in 1979. The people of Wales have experienced the consequences of voting against the creation of an Assembly.

I know that some hon. Members would argue that the first priority is to get the Government out of office as quickly as possible, and I recognise that there is validity in that argument. However, the long-term argument, which is even more important, is that we must ensure that a similar Government are not blown into office by the next ill wind. Such a Government would not be elected by Wales but Wales would have to suffer them although they were voted in by other parts of the United Kingdom. Our priority should be to obtain a system of government that keeps the Conservative party, that lot on the Government Benches, out of office permanently. We must have a system that stops them messing up our country's prospects.

It is worth recalling what happened from 1974 to 1979. In that period, many and varied arguments were advanced by Conservative Members, and regrettably by some Opposition Members, against taking any step towards greater Welsh autonomy. We were warned that it would kill off jobs. We had 80,000 unemployed at that time and we were told that unemployment would be very much worse if Wales gained greater autonomy. There are now 180,000 unemployed. We were told that, in the absence of an Assembly, regional policy and assistance would take

[Mr. Dafydd Wigley]

off. We know what has happened. It has been killed off in the meantime. There is a great need for a new start for the young unemployed in Wales. That must be a reason for us to put a question mark against those who say that, provided we keep clear of Welsh autonomy, everything will be fine and dandy in Wales and London.

We were told that housing programmes would be cut if we had an Assembly. We did not have an Assembly, and housing investment in Wales has halved since the Government came to office. The people of Wales are suffering from inadequate housing and long waiting lists.

What would have happened to the hospital investment programme if we had had an Assembly? We were told how many hospitals could be built between 1979 and the end of the century if we kept clear of an Assembly. We kept clear of it and we know what happened to the promises. We know what happened to the promises of hospitals being built in Porthmadog, Western Dwyfor, other parts of Gwynedd and many other parts of Wales.

We were warned of what would happen to the road building programme if we had an Assembly. I accept that there is a continuing programme along the north Wales coast, but all parties know what happened to the county roads in Gwynedd, Dyfed and Powys. An increasing number of potholes and less and less investment—yes, we paid in terms of road programmes.

We were warned that splitting Wales from the rest of Britain, even with the minimal devolution talked about, would threaten investment in industries such as coal. Since 1979, the number of jobs in the coal industry has been more than halved. More than one third of the jobs in the Welsh coalfield have gone during the past two years. There were promises of investment in Margam, but they were not fulfilled. So much for the promises that, if we kept away from the idea of autonomy and were good boys, all would be well.

We were told that an Assembly would take money and power from local government but, during the past few weeks, we have seen what has happened to rates. Increases have been necessary because the Government have withheld grants. Yes, power has been taken from local government—it has gone straight to Whitehall, and we in Wales are paying the price in terms not only of lost resources but of lost control and a loss of plans and strategy for Wales. Powers have been centralised not in Cardiff but in London. There has been higher taxation for fewer services and no control.

We were told many things by certain hon. Members during the run-up to 1979. We were told that, if we had a Welsh Assembly, water rates would increase. The threat was that democratisation of the water authority would mean much greater rates. As soon as the Conservative party came to power in 1979, it did away with the Water Charges Equalisation Act 1977 and immediately, at the stroke of a pen, added £4 million to the Welsh water bill.

We were warned what would happen to the Welsh language if we had a Welsh Assembly. We are now living with the consequences of the statement by the tribunal at Colwyn Bay that county council and social services departments in Wales could not employ Welsh-speaking people to look after Welsh residents in old people's homes. The House is not willing to do anything about it.

There has been a long saga of arguments. One hon. Member said:

"there is not a single major deficiency in Welsh life or a single major problem in the Welsh economy that will be touched by devolution or any of the proposals in the Bill. Not a single interest of poeple anywhere in Wales — whether it be democratic, cultural or political—will be advanced one inch by devolution in Wales."—[*Official Report*, 18 January ,977; Vol. 924, c. 147.]

Mr. D. E. Thomas (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): Who said that?

Mr. Wigley: Good question. The then hon. Member for Bedwellty, who is now the right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock), said that. We have all made mistakes from time to time. I hope that the Leader of the Opposition has learned from his mistakes and from what has happened since then. I hope that he has learned particularly the lesson that, by playing the game with the Conservative party in the run-up to the 1979 referendum, he gave the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) the keys to No. 10 Downing street. The Welsh people are paying heavily for that folly.

We are not advocating a return to the 1979 model or a resurrection of the arguments used then. I put it to the House that there is a strong need for Wales to have more control over its affairs and for greater foresight than we had in 1979. We have paid economically in terms of jobs, houses, regional policy and agriculture. We have paid socially in terms of the cancer of unemployment and the social depression killing off initiative and hope. It is no use Conservative Members talking about community self-help when the Government have put such a damper on aspirations in Wales. We have seen the effect on a generation of the policy of "Get on your bikes and look for work."

We have paid politically by suffering a Tory Government whom we in Wales never elected and by the lack of democratic answerability of authorities, such as the water and health authorities. The hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Best) is trying to persuade the health authorities to save our ambulance services, just as we are. We know that our democracy is such that we cannot get into the same room as the representatives of the health authority and the Welsh Office to discuss this vital problem. That is the skin-deep nature of our democracy. The Welsh Office is totally lacking in sensitivity on planning appeals and similar issues which can have devastating effects on many communities, towns and villages in Wales.

The price paid is, at best, a total collapse of morale and, at worst, a total alienation of young people. A high price has been paid in terms of alienation. People wanted a framework within which they could work to improve the position in their country, but they were denied it. They wanted to put forward ideas, socially, economically and culturally, but the 1979 vote succeeded in killing off the exciting ideas bubbling up in the 1960s and 1970s.

The Secretary of State has said more than once that he is looking for new ideas in Wales and for positive thinking for the future. Does he not realise that the Government have helped to extinguish the flames of hope that burned in the 1970s? We were told that the answer for Wales would be found in a Select Committee. I am a member of the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs. Its members strive to do a good job but it is confined to looking at one subject at a time. We need a body that constantly monitors Government services in Wales. The Select Committee deals only with an investigation, when we need a greater

power of initiating positive policy. The Select Committee deals with recommendations, but we want a body capable of executive action, not just of talk.

Mr. Keith Raffan (Delyn): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the Select Committee has powers to carry out one-day inquiries into a particular crisis, event or organisation, if it decides to do so? The Select Committee has made wide use of that power since the last election.

Mr. Wigley: But when the Select Committee uses those one-day opportunities, its recommendations are voted down by Conservative Members, as happened with the plant breeding station at Aberystwyth.

The Select Committee can certainly do some work, but it is not enough. It is not a replacement for an assembly or for a national parliament motivated to sort out Welsh problems.

What has happened to the Welsh Grand Committee? It has not met since December, and we are almost through this quarter of Parliament. The Welsh parliamentary party —an all-party group—used to meet regularly. It now meets only once in the lifetime of a Parliament to elect people to serve on outside bodies and then goes back to sleep until the next Parliament. Welsh matters are rapidly disappearing from the House and it is nonsense to pretend that all is well and rosy in the garden. We have a total lack of control over our destiny. We have fewer opportunities than we had 20 years ago to discuss matters in an all-Wales forum. Under people such as Huw T. Edwards there was a Council for Wales. It was a non-elected body but at least it could bring thoughts together. It has been chucked overboard and there is nothing in its place.

People with common interests — a rugby club or social club — have an opportunity to elect a body to make decisions on their behalf. Of course the Welsh people can do this locally—at community, district and county council level—and we can do it at Westminster and in Europe, but not on an all-Wales level. There is something sacrosanct about that level. Power has to be kept in the hands of bureaucrats who can foist on the people policies they do not want. In recent years, we have been moving backwards with a vengeance.

I warn friends in the Welsh Office who may be sitting close at hand that, unless they are made directly answerable to Wales, questions will be asked about the justification of the Welsh Office. Unless the Welsh Office acts in an all-Wales context—bringing forward positive policies responding to Welsh circumstances, not just acting as a rubber stamp for the Department of Education and Science, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the Department of Health and Social Security and all the rest—what is the justification for having a couple of thousand civil servants? We need something new and positive out of them, but we are not getting it. There is no point in having a Welsh Office which brings only bureaucratic inertia to Wales. We want something that provides a new dynamism, a Welsh response to the chronic conditions in Wales.

Dr. Marek: I am interested to hear the hon. Gentleman's remarks about the Welsh Office. Is not one of the problems of the Welsh Office the fact that it is too small and that it has to cover too many different aspects of work, which means that the quality of decision cannot be as high as it is in Departments in London which have the necessary expertise?

Mr. Wigley: I accept that in many cases the Welsh Office is weak in members of staff and in its range of expertise. None the less, it can gear policy to circumstances in Wales, but that is not happening sufficiently. There are many small countries such as Wales; one thinks of a country such as Norway. We can boo-hoo, but they have far fewer civil servants than we have in London and they are doing a better job of governing their country than our civil servants in Wales. We need a new start, a new dynamism in Wales. We need a new democratic answerability and we need a body which co-ordinates policies on an all-Wales level, bringing policies together in order to answer the needs of Wales, not the needs of the City of London and south-east England, as we heard a few moments ago. People of good will should come together now to accept the need for a co-ordinating body and for new initiatives.

We all accept that mistakes were made by all of us in the 1970s, but let us start looking forward to doing something ourselves to sort out our own solutions, not bleat and moan that London is not doing this or that. Until we do that, no one will do it for us. We need a solution now, after seven bleak years. We need a democratic Welsh Parliament, Assembly or council—whatever it is called —which co-ordinates policy and brings it all together on an all Wales level.

I hope that, when the hon. Member for Carmarthen (Dr. Thomas) replies for the Labour party, he will give us some idea of how the policy of the Labour party works on those lines, side by side with its policy achieving greater democracy in Scotland.

I began by referring to the need for more than temporary palliatives running as far as a piece of elastic which stretches no further than the next election, if we are unlucky, and to the election after that if we are lucky. That elastic will pull us back into the mess we are in today, and whatever alternative Governments build it will be demolished by another Tory Government. The only solution to the problem is an attempt to democratise our lives.

We in Plaid Cymru want long-term solutions. At the end of the day we feel that only in Wales will those solutions be found. It is up to us in Wales to find the machinery of our own salvation — in Wales, not in London. Until we get that, the rest is transient, trivial and temporary. If Wales has any future it must be up to us. The sooner the people of Wales realise that, the better.

6.22 pm

Mr. Gwilym Jones (Cardiff, North): I find it most interesting to have this opportunity to speak in our annual Welsh day debate immediately after the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley). Many hon. Members would say that he is always interesting to listen to and I would often want to take time to hear what he has to say. I felt today that we heard the same passion that is always displayed in his contributions but I am not sure that we heard the same considered tones that we might otherwise expect from him. Perhaps I could forgive him because I believe that Opposition Members feel the need to appear more and more Left to appease the key people behind them at home.

The hon. Member for Caernarfon invited us to contemplate the Welsh debate by looking at the balance sheet of Wales to see how it all adds up. I am inclined to

[Mr. Gwilym Jones]

go a little way down the road with him, but much of what he said was projecting a balance sheet of politics and Welsh political life.

When this debate ended last year my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary, who will reply tonight, replied then by pointing out that there were more Conservative Members in the Chamber than members of the Opposition. I think that he was right to mention the significance of that as one of the turning points in Welsh political life.

As we look at the balance sheet of Welsh political life, seldom has a Conservative Government had the opportunity to look across the Chamber at so many marginal seats. That is a delicious prospect. Those seats are in all parts of Wales. I look across to where the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) sits. With only 2,000 more votes, that will fall our way. The right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) is not in the Chamber but he was here earlier. With a similar number of votes, almost a handful, his seat will fall our way. The hon. Member for Gower (Mr. Wardell) is in his place. With only an additional 1,300 votes, that constituency would fall to the Conservative party. The hon. Member for Carmarthen (Dr. Thomas), who is replying for the Labour party, will know how closely the Conservative party is breathing down his neck.

Dr. Roger Thomas: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the Conservative candidate for Carmarthen in the past two elections who cruised well on the tide of Thatcherism decided to disappear from the constituency with the introduction of milk quotas?

Mr. Jones: I think that the hon. Member for Carmarthen will reflect that he is not right to suggest that. I think that he might agree that our recently selected candidate in Carmarthen will at least prove to be the equal of our previous candidate, if not superior. I predict that when the hon. Member for Carmarthen relinquishes his seat it will be to our new candidate, who will take over as the hon. Member for Carmarthen.

Let us not confine this to south Wales or west Wales. I would like to give the Liberal party full credit for its temporary place in the House. The hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Howells) made a contribution earlier. He is not here but he has a small majority that will come our way. The hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) waves his pen at me and returns to his notes. [HON. MEMBERS: "Give way."] I do not think I will. We have been much interrupted and there has been criticism about the length of speeches.

The hon. and learned Member for Montgomery is a recent gain in the House and I think that at the next election his seat will be a gain for the Conservative party. I do not even hold out as long a tenure for the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Livsey).

I shall return to the Labour party Front Bench. The hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) has a majority of about 1,600.

Mr. Raffan: Less.

Mr. Jones: I apologise. That is still a marginal seat. There is the other marginal seat in Clwyd, that of the hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek). The hon. Member for Caernarfon gave me the idea for this political balance sheet. I look forward to travelling to that most attractive mountainous part of north-west Wales. I look forward to the early days when we see the seats of Meirionnydd Nant Conwy and Carmarthen falling to us. When were the Conservative party ever able to look from the Government Benches at so many marginal seats?

A major part of our Welsh debate should be occupied with our great concern about the disastrous actions of the Labour party where it is in positions of elective power in Wales. Traditionally, our debate is held on 1 March or as close to it as possible. In 1986, more so than in any other year, we are very mindful of the rate fixing episodes which take place in every district and county council in Wales. Especially burnt into all our souls must be the various decisions that are being taken by the Welsh county councils. Those councils have conspired to produce what in the words of one of their leaders was described—shamefacedly, I hope—as "monstrous increases". What better description can there be for the way the rates are going up and the prospect now facing the people of Wales?

I am sorry to say that that is nothing new for us in South Glamorgan. We have been in this position before. In 1975 we had a 94·5 per cent. increase in the rates and in 1982 a 54 per cent. increase in the rates. In 1986 we now have a 28 per cent. increase from South Glamorgan county council—or what would have been 28 per cent., as my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Grist) pointed out. It is now down to about 24·5 per cent. thanks to the intervention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales. It seems that the percentages that I mentioned are decreasing, but at the same time we must remember the success that our Government have had in winning the battle with inflation, which now makes a 24 or 28 per cent. increase more significant than it would have been in past years.

Lest it be too obvious, I should like to mention the electoral pattern that lies behind the rate increases that we in South Glamorgan have seen at least twice previously, and now all of Wales is seeing. In 1975, when we had the first massive rate increase, it was engineered the wrong way round, because the following year we had local elections — the city council elections — and, hardly surprisingly, the Labour party suffered a defeat. The Conservative party took control in 1976.

The year after, in 1977, the Conservative party took control of South Glamorgan county council. Unhappily for the ratepayers of South Glamorgan, the pendulum swung back the other way in 1981, when Labour regained control of the county council, admittedly by the narrowest of margins, with the casting vote of the chairman. That meant that at every council meeting the Labour party was usually dependent on its Liberal allies to sustain it in office. However, at least Labour learnt in the intervening period that instead of going for such a massive rate increase one year before an election it should go in for a massive rate increase one year after the election. There was a 54 per cent. increase, which included a supplementary rate. Now, thankfully, that is not possible.

When the 1985 elections came, Labour was returned to power in South Glamorgan. Due to the electoral reverses of the Liberals, particularly in my constituency, Labour could cheerfully ignore its Liberal allies. The policy was still the same. One year later there was a 28 per cent. rate increase, now to be a 24·25 per cent. rate increase. It takes

no genius to predict that that is motivated by the same electoral considerations. The 9 per cent. budgeted increase in the spending of South Glamorgan county council is not for spending this year. A little bit will be let out in time for the district council elections in May 1986, a little for electoral, party political purposes, but overwhelmingly it is for stoking up the balances. In the same way as in 1985, it will be used in an attempt—a forlorn attempt, I trust —to buy electoral victory in 1989.

That is the cynical cycle of the Labour party in power in Wales, but what is the price of that cynicism so cyclically applied? Where is the caring Labour party, constantly referred to by the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside? He seems to talk about the caring Labour party in every part of Wales but Alyn and Deeside. I wonder whether he has now given up any forlorn hopes of defending his own marginal seat in Alyn and Deeside? Is there still such a thing as a safe Labour seat anywhere in Wales? [HON. MEMBERS: "Yes."] But where is the caring Labour party? What is the answer when a pensioner asks, "How can I pay for a Labour council?" What is the answer to the people who will lose their jobs? I am sad to say that it was in my constituency that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State visited a company and received the unwelcome briefing on how many jobs would be lost through having to meet the rates increase imposed by South Glamorgan county council.

Dr. Marek: This is a point of information. The hon. Gentleman asked whether there was a safe Labour seat in Wales. I draw his attention to the seat of my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot), who got over 70 per cent. of the vote. That is probably the safest seat in the whole of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Jones: I am not sure whether to be grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. Is it significant that he did not mention his own seat, or is he starting a rumour that the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) will make room for the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside? I wonder

I was trying to bring to the House's attention the plight of companies in my constituency. I am sure that it is not just one company. How many jobs will have to go to pay for the cost of all those increases, not just in South Glamorgan? Surely many, if not all, employers are in the same boat.

Mention has been made of the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs. I recall it taking evidence in north Wales, when a representative of one of the county councils was before us. We got on to the subject of past patterns of rate increases and the future implications. The representative sought to assure the Select Committee that his council, and, for that matter, all county councils in Wales, were all too well aware of the impact of high rates on jobs and job opportunities. I can remember him even volunteering the further assurance that the hard Left was not in control of the Labour party in Wales. That description was meant to cover places such as Liverpool and the Greater London council.

Mr. Best: No one is in control of the Labour party at the moment.

Mr. Jones: Perhaps the representative meant to add a codicil that the hard Left was not in control at that time. In the few short months that have passed since the Select Committee took its evidence in Flint on Courtaulds, all those assurances and statements have flown out of the window.

There has been a wide welcome for the Green Paper on the reform of rates. While every hon. Member could find imperfections in the Green Paper's proposal of a community charge and the other components, I think that in all our hearts we would join together in saying that, at the very least, it is infinitely preferable to the present system. It seems to be the only answer to the way in which Labour councils are choosing to increase the rates—the only answer for the pensioners, the unemployed and everybody else who will be hard hit.

I can readily understand the calls by business and industry for rate capping as the only answer to the latest savage attack being mounted on their finances, and, more so, their real fears that that is but a trend that will continue, as councils bleed employers to the maximum, perhaps attempting to establish the highest possible non-domestic rate as a prelude to the reform of rates and the levels that councils will have to operate from when that happens. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will have to give the closest attention to those fears of business and industry.

Those monstrous increases are not necessary. I ask hon. Members to come to Cardiff to see the example of the council of the capital city of Wales, which levied its rate for this year last Friday. There is to be a nil increase. Effectively that has all-party support. We have two other Left-wing parties on the Conservative-controlled city council. Neither party chose to table an alternative rate for debate on Friday. The city council's rate is being held. It shows that it can be done. Thank goodness that it is being done. There has been a threat of a 28 per cent. increase on the ratepayers of South Glamorgan, but at least with the contribution of the city council the burden on the people in Cardiff, and in my constituency, is only—I use the word advisedly—16 per cent. That greatly benefits the ratepayers.

I particularly welcome the statement made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State earlier that low spenders will receive priority in his consideration when he next examines the allocations of taxpayers' money. I very much hope that Cardiff and other similar councils will benefit not only because they are low spenders but because we can be confident that taxpayers' money will definitely benefit the ratepayers and will not be frittered away or used to stoke up the balances.

In conclusion, I would briefly like to mention what might be the greatest complaint against the Labour party in Wales today. That complaint arises out of the Labour party's contribution to Saturday's rugby defeat. On Friday I was amazed to read the first letter in the correspondence column of the *Western Mail* written by Mr. J. Vaughan-Jones, the Labour party's research officer. Mr. Vaughan-Jones' letter tried to make a statistical case—and we all know that there are lies, damned lies and statistics—that a Welsh win on Saturday meant the writing would be on the wall for the Tories.

However, as no one would accept that a Labour victory is feasible, even though we are aware that the other Left-wing parties are busy forging alliances to help bring about a Labour victory, clearly all the omens were against the Welsh rugby team as they went out to face France at Cardiff Arms park on Saturday. A veritable pall must have descended on the team. Everyone must have realised what were the implications for the hoped for victory against

[Mr. Jones]

France in the light of that letter in the *Western Mail*. It will be a long time before the people of Wales forgive the Labour party for its damaging interference in Welsh sport, Welsh culture or even, as some would describe it, the religion of Wales.

I hope that the hon. Member for Carmarthen, when he replies this evening, will give the House the assurance that this damaging intrusion will not be repeated and that the officer of the Labour party involved will retreat, never again to comment on Welsh affairs.

6.42 pm

Mr. Gareth Wardell (Gower): Today was to be a special day for me as a bus full of pensioners from my constituency were to grace the Strangers Gallery. I am pleased that they postponed their visit for another time.

I should like to bring to the attention of Conservative Members the effects that the Government's proposals for the reform of social security will have in a particular area of the life of the Welsh people.

The reform was supposed to be needed to simplify the system and to direct help to where it is most needed. Of course, all of us in the House who advise constituents on welfare rights and maximising income recognise the need for simplifying the regulations. However, it seems that the Government have gone through the yellow book with a red felt pen and slashed thick red calculation lines through the pages referring to the death grant, pension schemes, maternity grants, single payments, hospital fares, widowhood, free school meals, extra heating and diet additions, invalidity benefit and housing benefits, among others. The Government have sometimes added their own mumbo-jumbo so that people will continue to be overwhelmed when they try to find out which benefits they are entitled to claim. The so-called simplification is basically a new way of denying crucial help at times of greatest need.

The new system will also mean that, far from directing funds to people who need them most, those who need extra help will get as much and no more than others in need. For instance, Shelter calculates that some single parent families will lose up to one-eighth of their net income while some couples with older children may gain from the Government's £450 million cut in housing benefit.

Of course, Conservative Members will know that that is what the review is all about—cuts. To reduce public spending, the Government intend to cut massive holes in what we have regarded as being, and paid contributions to support, a safety net of a minimum income to prevent debilitating poverty in times of need.

On the best estimates that we have—the Government have refused to provide official figures — in Wales nearly 21,000 pensioners aged over 80 will lose up to £5 a week in benefits and housing benefit. Over 100,000 pensioners aged 60 to 79 will lose up to £5 a week. Almost 6,000 sick and disabled people, 6,000 low wage earning families, 18,600 unemployed families, and almost 65,000 single people, childless couples and widows will have their benefits—the supposed safety net—cut by up to £5 a week.

In total, more than 250,000 people in Wales will lose about £459,000 of benefits. That is nearly £500,000—an average across the population of £2 a week. In Wales, the pensioners, the sick and disabled, the unemployed, single parents, new mothers, students and their parents, widows and low wage earners will know what the review is about. It is about cutting costs and cutting public spending on public need.

Last week, we were supposed to rejoice at the Government's commitment to the welfare of pensioners by the uprating of benefits by 40p for a single pensioner and by 65p for a couple. If last week Conservative Members could support platitudes about "every little bit helping", they should know that 20p will pay the 10 per cent. Government enforced increase in Welsh water rates. The other 20p will exactly cover the price rise for a bus trip into Swansea for my constituents who still have a bus service. Will Conservative Members remain silent when ordered to vote for cuts of £5 a week for 120,000 Welsh pensioners who are, by definition, the poorest of Welsh pensioners?

Last Thursday the Minister for Social security went to the media to proclaim that the Government were hoping that all DHSS offices would declare February an exceptionally cold month, so that extra heating allowances could be paid. What absolute hypocrisy. First, the fact that the Minister had to make that statement shows that some benefit offices are so out to touch with reality that they have not got the message from the meteorological officers around the country that last month was the second coldest February of the century. By last Friday, only 360 of the 451 local DHSS offices had declared exceptionally severe weather in their areas. So much for local decision-making. That bodes ill for the working of the proposed social fund, which will also operate on the basis of local discretion.

Secondly, the Minister implied that the Government do not understand why people do not claim the extra heating allowance. More than 80 per cent. of those eligible to claim do not do so, and this represents a saving of £25 million a year to the DHSS budget. Claiming the extra benefit is difficult and, according to the welfare benefits handbook, the benefit is difficult to obtain. Claiming means going to the benefit office armed with fuel bills dating back as far as December 1984 and bank statements showing that the claimant has less than £500 in savings. If he has just bought a bed, for example, which takes his savings to less than that figure, he needs the bill for it and other documents to support his claim. Should he prove all this to the saisfaction of the S manual, he may get £1 a week, or less, for as long as long as the severe weather lasts.

Meanwhile, apart from the increase in the more mundane effects of enduring cold conditions, such as pneumonia, heart attacks, chest and other infections, and the proneness to falls and other accidents, the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys reports that this year more than an extra 100 people a day are dying of hypothermia compared with last year. That is despite increased awareness of the problem by caring agencies and volunteers. The House, as the guardian of the nation's well-being, should be ashamed of that. During exceptionally severe weather conditions, there should be an automatic bonus payment to all people on supplementary benefit and supplementary pensions and all those in receipt of housing benefit should be allowed to claim. That would be simple, cheap to administer—records are already kept of all those people — and effective.

Finally, the Minister for Social Security claimed that the Government have "dramatically increased" the payments for heating allowances paid as part of

supplementary benefit and pensions. He claims to care about people getting help, yet the extra heating allowance campaign was not mounted by the Government. It has been left to charities and welfare groups to advise people on the availability of help. I am sure that the House will wish to congratulate Age Concern on its initiative in distributing survival packs to pensioners.

The Government should have mounted a campaign in 1982 using, if necessary, the money that was left unclaimed after the exceptionally severe weather spell during that year. By the time members of the public have absorbed the information and realised their right to benefit and how to claim, all the extra allowances for heating will have gone. The new Social Security Bill abolishes them, in the name of simplicity.

The new income support scheme will include premiums for heating. No doubt they will relate closely to the present figures for heating additions, which are paid at three rates. The lower rate is £2·20 a week. A higher rate for a fully centrally heated home is available at £4·40. An even higher rate of £5·40 is paid to those who can prove that their homes are damp, unable to be draught-proofed and exceptionally difficult to heat. Yet coal, which is still the commonest form of heating in Welsh homes, in my constituency costs £14 for two bags, which is the minimum needed for one fire for a week. The South Wales electricity board's standing charge is 60p a week, before one takes into account lighting, cooking and heating for other rooms.

For years, Age Concern and citizens advice bureaux have been reporting that those rates are inadequate and that they result in hardship, physical or financial, by way of fuel debts and consequent disconnections. The rates are miserly and disgusting. Where is the Government's realism? They were quick and keen to increase energy prices as a cheap and easy way of imposing indirect taxation on us all. Where was their commitment and interest in ensuring that the poorest and neediest could cope with such increases without having to choose between debt and warmth?

It has taken the British preoccupation with the weather to bring this issue to the forefront of the public's mind. Now we all know about the problem and we know that improvements must be made. When the Social Security Bill comes before the House again, the people of Wales —especially pensioners— will be waiting to see how much Conservative Members really care about their needs and welfare.

6.57 pm

Mr. Keith Raffan (Delyn): In contrast to the passionate speech of the hon. Member for Gower (Mr. Wardell), I shall be my usual low-key self. I respect the hon. Gentleman's feelings, as I do his chairmanship of the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs, but he must be aware that the Government have substantially increased heating benefit and supplementary heating benefit. Would that the Labour Government had shown similar concern for pensioners and refrained from stopping their £10 Christmas bonus for two years running. That can hardly have helped pensioners to pay for their heating.

In reply to last year's Welsh day debate, the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) said that it was the "annual general meeting" of Welsh Members of Parliament—the day when we stop and take stock of the previous year in the Principality. The hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) echoed that sentiment tonight.

Tonight, I shall look back at and take stock of the part of Wales that I know best—my constituency. The most notable event in Delyn in the past year was not the closure of Courtaulds at Greenfield, our largest factory, but rather the vigorous, effective response to that closure by the local community, fully supported by the Welsh Office. Within hours of the closure announcement, I and the chief executive of Delyn borough council, John Packer, had arranged to meet the chairman and deputy chairman of Courtaulds. Within days, we had impressed upon them the fact that Courtaulds could not simply walk away from the community which had served it for so long and so well, as the company was allowed to do after the closure of the Castle works in 1977, with the loss of 1,500 jobs, after the rundown of the Deeside mill between 1969 and 1980, with the loss of 1,200 jobs, and after the earlier rundown of the Greenfield plant between 1973 and 1981, with the loss of 1,290 jobs.

Within weeks, Delyn borough council had drawn up detailed plans for the future of the Greenfield site and I initiated an Adjournment debate on the closure and the convening of the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs in Flint—as an aside, it was the first time that the Select Committee had met outside Westminster or Cardiff—to take evidence on the closure. Within months, the Government and Courtaulds had announced a package to regenerate Delyn's economy—to bring new industry and new jobs to the area.

Now, little more than 10 months after the closure announcement and seven months after the actual closure, the number one site at Greenfield has been transferred by Courtaulds to Delyn borough council. The site has been cleared of all toxic waste by the company and a former manager of Greenfield, David Watson, a high flier with Courtaulds, has been seconded to run the Delyn enterprise agency — shortly to become the Delyn Business Partnership. Plans are far advanced for new micro workshops on the site. A short distance away, at the former Grosvenor Chater works, the Greenfield young enterprise centre has been set up. This is an exciting project, under the energetic leadership of John Murray, designed to help young people to translate an idea for their own business into the reality of being self-employed.

The old adage applies: "The sky is darkest just before dawn." During the past year, we have begun to see the dawn in Delyn, even if the Labour party cannot. I should also add that the job replacement scheme has been encouragingly successful. Of the 600 people made redundant by Courtaulds at the end of last July, 240 have found new jobs. There are high hopes that the remainder will also be placed in jobs.

It is not only at Greenfield and in the immediate neighbourhood that we are witnessing the rebuilding of our local economy. I mentioned at Question Time today that at Point of Ayr the construction on the coal-to-oil liquefaction plant has begun. Completion is scheduled for December 1987, with the employment of 80 people. At Flint, the Delyn enterprise zone is beginning to make a substantial contribution to the development of a new, diverse and dynamic local economy. In the words of the chief executive of Delyn borough council, Mr. John Packer:

[Mr. Keith Raffan]

"Perhaps the most enouraging features are the developing commitment of the private sector, and the very positive contribution to the formation and development of small companies, which would not have been possible without enterprise zone benefits."

I notice that the hon. Member for Carmarthen (Dr. Thomas) is listening carefully. I hope that the Labour party is also listening carefully. If it had its way, there would be an end to enterprise zones. The shadow Home Secretary, in his former incarnation, said in a celebrated statement that he would have none of them.

I am aware—I say this in my usual generous spirit—that Labour party policy tends to mutate. I will give the hon. Member for Carmarthen a second chance. I hope that, when he winds up, he will tell us exactly what Labour party policy is now, today, on enterprise zones. It may have changed from yesterday. That is quite possible, as we have seen Labour party policy change before within a short time and on an ad hoc basis. I hope the hon. Member will respond directly to the point, but if he does not I am sure he will give way to my intervention.

If the Labour party is still against enterprise zones, I must warn Opposition Members that that policy will be a vote loser second to none in my constituency. As an issue, it will make Sunday trading look like an afternoon tea party. Since designation, 500 new jobs have been created in the Delyn enterprise zone. That is a remarkable achievement when one considers that for nearly 18 months after designation only two and a half acres of development land were available due to the extensive nature of existing industrial dereliction. The council has now completed its reclamation programme and it has carried out a substantial proportion of essential infrastructure works. As a result, during the past year there has been a quite remarkable response to the opportunities now offered by the Delyn enterprise zone—three new factories were completed, two are under construction, four sites are under offer with the potential of 700 jobs and only three sites totalling just over seven acres are not under offer.

I emphasise the words in the Delyn borough council's report on the enterprise zone:

"Enterprise zone benefits have been the critical factor in securing the location and development of each of these companies."

Considerable public sector pump priming has secured significant private sector commitments and new small businesses are beginning to develop. Much has been achieved, and great credit is due to all those involved—particularly to the local borough council, and to the councillors of all parties who have worked so hard together.

The Labour party at the local councillor level seems to have a vision and a far-sightedness not shared by the Opposition Front Bench. I have tried to get them to convert the Opposition Front Bench, and I hope that in time—after another election defeat or perhaps the one after that—they will be persuaded. Great credit is due not only to the borough council but also to the Welsh Office, which has supported it. I am delighted to give way to the hon. Member for Carmarthen.

Dr. Roger Thomas: Will the hon. Member tell us, despite the near-miracle which he has described to us this evening, what has been the actual fall in unemployment in his travel-to-work area?

Mr. Raffan: I will come to the economic statistics later. I shall be quite happy to give these statistics to the hon. Member as I come to them later in my speech, if he will allow me to do so. I have no intention of hiding them. Indeed, I had planned to give them to the House. They are, sadly, very high. There has been a significant increase in employment which would not otherwise have happened but for the determined action of the borough council.

I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman by his words seems to imply an attack upon the local Labour councillors. Such an increase in jobs would not have been achieved but for the determined efforts of the borough council, supported imaginatively and effectively in financial terms by the Welsh Office. I hope that the hon. Gentleman is not being affected by the disease which afflicts the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside, for his intervention has boomeranged.

Dr. Roger Thomas *rose*——

Mr. Raffan: No, once is enough—I do not want to mutilate the hon. Gentleman.

Much has been achieved and great credit is due to all those involved. More would have been achieved—I hope the hon. Member for Carmarthen, as he is taking such a close interest in my speech, will support me—but for the tight physical constraints of the enterprise zone. There is a limited area of land available for development. This is preventing the enterprise zone from realising its full potential in contributing to the economic regeneration of north-east Wales.

The problem which the Delyn enterprise zone faces is simply its small size. It extends to only 263 acres, whereas the average for all enterprise zones in the United Kingdom is 360 acres. The amount of land available for development is in fact considerably smaller than 263 acres—only 136 are capable of being developed and only 89 of those are available for genuinely new development. The extension of the Delyn enterprise zone to cover the former Courtaulds Greenfield site would make up that deficiency and add 102 acres. That would bring the zone up to the average size for enterprise zones in Britain.

I know that the extension of the zone is ultimately a matter for the Treasury, but I hope that Delyn borough council and I can count on my right hon. Friend's strong support for the application to extend the zone. We want an average-sized zone—the same size as the enterprise zone in the constituency of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. The redevelopment of the Greenfield site and its inclusion in the enterprise zone will not only create jobs for Delyn residents. The review of the Clwyd structure plan has identified a shortfall of between 70 and 122 acres of industrial land in the boroughs of Rhuddlan and Colwyn. The addition of Greenfield would help make up that deficiency.

We must remember the famed mobility of the local work force in north Wales and the fact that over a third of the former Courtaulds Greenfield work force actually live in the borough of Rhuddlan. The redevelopment of the Greenfield site and its inclusion in the zone would of course principally help the town of Holywell, where one in four of the working population were employed at Greenfield.

I now come to the statistics for which the hon. Member for Carmarthen asked earlier. I always answer his questions; I hope that he will take note of that.

In January 1985, the unemployment rate in the Holywell jobcentre area — before the closure — was already 27·1 per cent. The male unemployment rate was even higher—tragically higher—at 30·5 per cent.

As many hon. Members will know, Holywell was at the heart of the industrial revolution in north Wales. But as L and R Leisure Consultants says in the Holywell regeneration study which it has prepared for the borough council,

> "Industrial life has drained out of Holywell . . . Mold has developed as an administrative and cultural centre. Flint is the focus of new industrial activity".

I might add that the fourth town in my constituency—Prestatyn—is established as a seaside holiday resort and retirement area. Holywell is the unemployment 'blackest' spot in an area, which has suffered from massive structural unemployment.

As I am sure the hon. Member for Carmarthen will concede, that has not simply happened since May 1979, when the Prime Minister crossed the threshold of 10 Downing street. The area has suffered from massive structural unemployment during the last 20 years. If the hon. Gentleman wishes, I shall give him the figures for the closures in my constituency during the time of the last Labour Government. I am sure that he will not share the amnesia of his hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) and forget that, during the time of the last Labour Government, unemployent doubled in the Principality.

That massive structural unemployment occurred because of an overdependence on the steel and textile industries. The destruction of our far too narrowly based local economy in Delyn means that we must do nothing less than create a new and much more widely based local economy if we are to make a significant impact upon unemployment in the area.

In Delyn, as is widely conceded by Ministers, officials and Members of Parliament, we have an enterprising and determined local authority. We have a labour force which Dr. Norman Wooding, deputy chairman of Courtaulds, has described as second to none, first class, hard working, highly motivated and extremely flexible. Dr. Wooding has gone further and said that he is personally prepared to recommend that work force to any company that is thinking of moving into my constituency.

All we need is for the land available for industrial development at Greenfield to be given enterprise zone status. When fully developed, Greenfield will have the potential of creating approximately 2,300 jobs, which will go a long way towards tackling the local unemployment problem. I repeat that the borough council deserves every credit for its determination, hard work, and imaginative drive to regenerate the local economy. In response to its straightforwardness, its direct approach and determination, I hope that the Government will continue to give in the future the very strong support that they have given in the past.

I have described developments in Delyn over the past year. I have given the good news—and it is good news —with significant expectations and hopes for the future. The picture that I have painted is true, but it is at variance, in sharp contrast, with the speech of the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside. That does not surprise those of us who have heard the hon. Gentleman's speeches in the past.

The hon. Gentleman belongs to the "weeping and gnashing of teeth" school of parliamentary oratory. As the Bible adds:

> "Behold he cometh with clouds."

The trouble is that, at the sight of the hon. Gentleman and his clouds, potential inward investors may flee. They do not know the hon. Gentleman with the same affection as we do. They do not hear him deliver his speeches, but merely read reports of his words. If they had to listen to him, they might be less convinced. In Nye Bevan's words, they might realise that he seems determined to make a trumpet sound like a tin whistle. Indeed, the hon. Gentleman's hectoring style is about as convincing as the last balcony speech of President Marcos before he made a quick getaway in an American helicopter.

The hon. Gentleman carries no conviction. We Conservatives know what he is up to. Like Marshal Foch —and Marshal Foch's words are highly appropriate to the Labour party—he says:

> "My centre is giving way, my right is in retreat; situation excellent. I shall attack."

The only slight trouble is that the hon. Gentleman lacks Foch's generalship, his style and his infantry.

If I were in the hon. Gentleman's shoes I would follow exactly the same strategy, although—I say this with my usual modesty—I would not make quite the same mess of it. How can anyone defend the last Labour Government, least of all the hon. Gentleman, who served in it, when they made a 20 per cent. cut in total capital expenditure, a 38 per cent. cut in NHS capital expenditure and a 36 per cent. cut in capital and current expenditure on roads?

The hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) has suddenly found an attraction in his pencil. How can anyone, least of all the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside, defend that record when faced by a Government who have raised capital spending in the NHS by 12 per cent. in real terms and on roads by 10 per cent. in real terms, and when faced by the Secretary of State who in 1986-87 has increased local authority capital allocations by 23 per cent. and urban programme expenditure by 20 per cent.?

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: Has my hon. Friend noticed the contrast between the correct picture that he has painted of a united area trying to regenerate the district and the characteristic support that the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) gave to a Labour councillor in Alyn and Deeside who said that I and the Welsh Office were not welcome in that district? That is absolutely characteristic of the destructive intervention that my hon. Friend has been describing.

Mr. Raffan: I wholeheartedly agree with my right hon. Friend. Humour apart, it is more than destructive. It is tragic that the Labour party for petty party political purposes, in order to scrounge a few votes, should demean itself by such a totally unacceptable and unjustifiable attack upon my right hon. Friend, his fellow Ministers and the officials of the Welsh Office. The Labour party should at least give credit where it is due, and applaud the achievements of the Welsh Office and the local authority to which I have referred.

I am a modest man, even though I have a 6,000 majority in my constituency. I do not regard that as safe, although like Churchill I believe that a majority of one is enough. I intend to have a majority of 16,000 at the next general election, and speeches such as that we have heard

[Mr. Raffan]

from the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside will enable me to convert my constituency into a permanently safe Conservative seat. The hon. Gentleman will not give credit to the Government's real achievements. He paints a black picture of Wales, which drives off not only inward investors but also companies from England and within our own community that wish to create new jobs. It is tragic that the hon. Gentleman demeans himself in that way.

I have sympathy—almost amounting to pity—for the hon. Gentleman. After all, he must worry not only about his past, but also about the future. The then second permanent secretary to the Treasury described the first year of the 1974 Wilson Goverment as a period "of collective madness". The madness that the Labour party now has planned would be infinitely longer, more intense and more painful should it ever be given the opportunity to implement its policies.

Generously leaving out one-off promises, at which the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside is so adept, as well as renationalisation—which I know is embarrassing for the Labour party, given that the Leader of the Opposition says that it is not a top priority whereas the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer) says that it must be—the Treasury has calculated the cost of Labour pledges to be £24 billion a year. There are only three ways in which to raise the money to pay for that extraordinary bill—to tax, to borrow or to print. The right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) has said that he will not raise the basic rate of tax to pay that bill, although he will increase the tax on those earning more than £30,000 a year. Even a 100 per cent. increase in tax on people earning more than £30,000 a year would raise only £1·5 billion, still leaving him with a somewhat uncomfortably large bill of £22·5 billion. Opposition Members could follow the helpful suggestion of my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury and increase value added tax, but it would have to be to 41 per cent., which might cause them slight problems.

I think that the Opposition will negotiate with Rupert Murdoch, buy his old printing presses, move them to Llantrisant and start printing notes like there was no tomorrow.

I am not surprised that the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside is not prepared to defend either his record or his party's policy for the future. If Labour's continuing——

Mr. Wardell: Leave him alone.

Mr. Raffan: I am working very hard, overtime for the hon. Member's promotion. He should be grateful.

If Labour's continuing civil war, and Militant and Mr. Hatton, do not put people off the Labour party, their policies surely will. They carry no credibility. They create only incredulity. Their former leader Lord Wilson of Rievaulx, now revered, considering those who have followed, put it in a nutshell:

"Labour gives a pantomime performance. It is a party of prehistoric policies."

We have had this evening yet another pantomime performance from Labour.

7.21 pm

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): I will not follow the hon. Member for Delyn (Mr. Raffan). That type of supercilious speech ends in electoral defeat. We shall wait for the electorate to decide. I suspect that, after the next general election, my hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) will be here and that the hon. Member for Delyn will not.

I want to look forward to a much more interesting and important aspect of the debate and to respond to the initiative that the Secretary of State launched this afternoon in the document "Community Investment: An Initiative for the Valleys". It will inevitably be a first response because the documents needs to be considered with great care. The hon. Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Grist) said that we come here and run down our communities. I do not believe that we have ever done that. Those of us who represent communities to which this initiative is directed spend our time arguing, fighting and campaigning for the very community investment that the document's title suggests.

I hope that we reflect pride, commitment and belief in our communities. We have lots of problems, and directing attention to them here should not be taken as running down or knocking our communities. We know and understand our problems and we feel angry about them, so we come here and express them.

The document purports to be an initiative on community investment, and to direct itself towards the environmental problems and challenges of our communities. It is not very difficult to identify those environmental problems—they are very easily observed and do not require detailed analysis. We witness them and live among them.

I would categorise the dereliction in three forms. The first is the huge, historic backlog of dereliction left to us by the Victorian coal owners and the iron masters in, for example, Merthyr Tydfil, Dowlais and Rhymney. It is a backlog of blasts, indiscriminate tipping and wasted land down the lines of our major roads, in and out of our communities. Such land overlooks the church that I attend —Christ church Cyfarthfa—and stands cheek by jowl with homes.

The second form of dereliction is to be found in and around urban centres. We have become increasingly resigned to it and accept conditions that would not be tolerated in other communities. The process starts with the decline of one of the traditional commercial properties or retail outlets that cannot keep up with the retailing revolution. The shop falls empty. Sometimes it just remains empty and sometimes it falls into such disrepair that it is cleared, so that only rubble is left. The rubble is almost as bad as the empty property. Such properties are often in the very heart of the town.

We have accepted a third form of dereliction. I still feel angry about it, but I cannot get my own people to feel the same way. It is what I call doorstep dereliction. It is found in ordinary streets. An elderly person dies, for example, and the house falls derelict. The rest of the street might have been redeveloped and have benefited from improvement grants. The problem can arise at the back of houses. The condition of back lanes in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) shook me rigid. Merthyr has done up most of its back lanes, or what we used to call gullies. Unmade lanes still survive, though. They grow weeds, such as those from which we used to make pea shooters. I accepted that as part of life. Derelict fencing might let the sheep in, which makes this doorstep dereliction worse.

I hope that I am not painting a picture of a derelict community, for it is far from that. The communities are tremendously vibrant. There is commitment. The money spent on homes shows people's determination to develop and improve. Nevertheless, the problems exist. It is against that background that I consider the community investment initiative to see whether it measures up to our need.

Mr. Stefan Terlezki (Cardiff, West): I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's anxiety about dereliction and the environment. Will he admit that Labour was in power for 15-odd years? The hon. Gentleman was a member of a Labour Government. What has he done about the environment and dereliction in his area?

Mr. Rowlands: I should not have given way to the hon. Gentleman, as I was trying to address myself to the future. If he wants me to accept some collective guilt from the past, I shall by all means take my modest percentage of it, but that is not the argument. We must try to improve matters. There was tremendous improvement under Labour. Perhaps it was unfortunate that we handed the running of derelict land reclamation schemes over to the Welsh Development Agency. I had the privilege to be a Minister in 1969 and again in 1974-75, and I saw what could be done through an expansive derelict land reclamation programme run by the Welsh Office. Each five years we should see progress and development. We are measuring progress and making demands for present and future community investment against that backlog.

I have read the document only since lunchtime, and I find it difficult to understand. It is curious, and I am not sure what to make of it. Paragraph 14 deals with the objectives, and states:

"The Government is anxious, therefore, with the co-operation of local authorities and the communities they represent. . . to help to bring about substantial"—

that is the key word—

"and visible improvements in the valleys and the environment of town centre areas and the areas immediately leading to them."

The message is that the Welsh Office and the Secretary of State, together with local authorities and community groups, will launch a substantial, visible improvement to our environment, both in the town centres and areas leading to them. I then looked at the document to see how we are to co-ordinate and finance that substantial improvement. Appendix I contains an illustrative list, which includes my constituency. I hope that it is not too parochial to use the illustration of my constituency.

One of the major needs in a community such as mine is to make the access to and from it as attractive as possible. The road built from Treharris Quaker's yard is a fine piece of engineering and, environmentally, a most attractive road as it opens up the valley. If I were driving an inward investor along that road even on a cold day with snow on the hilltops, it would give him a remarkably romantic introduction to our community. The road is designed sensitively, and I pay tribute to the designers for some of the finishing touches. The trouble is that then one hits the bottom of the valley and the next major area connecting Merthyr with the midlands is the slip road. It provides the major access to the Heads of the Valleys. I do my damndest to ensure that no one goes near that slip road if I can help it because it reveals the backlog of dereliction and the consequences of large-scale opencast mining. Virtually half the length of a major access road to our community is a disaster area in reclamation terms.

For that reason I turned with eagerness to see how the Government's initiative would address itself to such an area. Paragraph 1.2 of the Merthyr Tydfil illustration states:

"The approach to Merthyr Town Centre . . . is inevitably influenced by the somewhat bleak scenery and exposed nature of the road. While it is not easy to grow a great variety of trees in these conditions, much could be done by planting shelter belts and removing some of the more unattractive eyesores on the northern fringe of the town."

That worries me, especially as I would like to assist the programme to make it work, because it implies that the scheme is about planting and painting. I hope that the Secretary of State does not want to leave us with that impression. The access problem cannot be about the gentle issues of clearing up eyesores and investing in more tree planting. I am not demeaning or dismissing those ideas. Indeed, they have a place in our town centres, as other paragraphs suggest, and we can certainly produce such projects. However, the environmental access problem of my community requires a significant vision of change to the environment. It must also include the decision whether to allow opencast mining along the line of the road. That could continue the dereliction for years to come.

My worry about the document is that, compared with its objectives, some of the illustrations show an ambivalence to facing up to what are not small projects —although small projects are useful and important—and to substantial investment in the community.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: We are looking for a combination of big and small. I am listening with great attention to the hon. Gentleman's speech, and I hope that he will recognise that what we have done in Cardiff is beginning to trigger a major change. I hope that by a combination and variety of initiatives we can trigger a similar change of comparable scale. In putting forward suggestions, we are merely giving some direction to stimulate proposals. I welcome the type of proposals that the hon. Gentleman is making now.

Mr. Rowlands: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for intervening. As this is an important initiative affecting all our communities I shall spend a few more minutes on it. We shall want to fasten on to the triggering-off concept. The Secretary of State may have to convince us further that the initiative can work in Dowlais and Merthyr, as well as in south Cardiff and the docks. We must first understand the nature and character of the environmental problem with which we are grappling.

In paragraph 1.7 two different propositions about the environmental needs of the community stand cheek by jowl. One is tree planting along the river Taff. The point is made that sometimes jobs are half done and dereliction is not cleared up, even after important investment, such as in the Morlais Brook scheme. A huge slag heap lies behind and overlooks the technical college. We have campaigned for a considerable time for capital reinvestment to do something about that.

The Welsh Development Agency has treated land reclamation schemes which do not produce immediate industrial land as Cinderellas. The figures sound impressive, but matched against the needs and previous programmes in real terms, I am not sure that the WDA has given priority to investment in first-class land reclamation schemes of the type that we have been seeking. I hope that the document will act as a catalyst in bringing the WDA, the Welsh Office, local authorities and local community

[Mr. Rowlands]

groups together to ensure that the WDA plays a bigger and more prominent role than it has. During the past few years, the WDA has been less interested in that aspect of its functions.

Mr. Edwards: The hon. Gentleman is making an important point. I think that the WDA would say that it was a priority to prepare the ground for industrial sites in the recent past. However, the chairman has asked me to ensure that the WDA plays a major part in this initiative. It wishes to be involved in it, and regards it as a priority. It will seek to direct the resources for this type of objective.

Mr. Rowlands: I am grateful for that extremely important statement. The investment aspect in the document is extremely important, and the role of the development agency will be vital in making this community investment initiative work.

We have valuable land lying in wait close to, and in, the town centre. The document illustrates the case of the major railway site. I add to that the major Georgetown site, which is super. It is close to the town centre, but at the moment it looks as if it is developing—I hope I am not being critical of the borough council—in a piecemeal fashion. One grabs what one can. If somebody volunteers to carry out a big development on part of the site, rather than wait for a comprehensive and enveloping investment scheme, one grabs the first opportunity, because at least one has done something rather than wait for the grand design, for which one can wait for ever. Many local authorities have tended to go for piecemeal developments on sites such as the one about which I am talking.

We have looked with some envy at the way in which the south Cardiff scheme has got off the ground. Here is an opportunity that we would love to see in our area. We have no political hang-ups about the ideology of private investment combined with public investment to develop the community, as long as the developments are ones that we require and have mutually agreed.

I have been to the director of a major store and pleaded with him to look at the major central site close to the station. It is one of the prize Heads of the Valleys retailing or commercial sites. We have found that it is much harder, being 40 miles north of Cardiff, to trigger off the combination of public and private investment. Rather than say that we know everything, I would be grateful if the Secretary of State would help us to trigger off a Swansea or south Cardiff-type development. That would be ideal and would help us to balance the growing pressure on Cardiff and Swansea.

The director of one of the major retailing outlets told me that the Cardiff and Swansea developments are having a major sucking-in effect, and even the in-between communities such as Pontypridd are finding it harder to get such investment going. I do not say that the Secretary of State has a magic wand, but if he can help us to trigger off such developments and to achieve the success stories of Swansea and Cardiff, Merthyr borough council would, I believe, be the first to welcome it and give four cheers for it.

Mr. Williams: We are proud of what has happened in Swansea, as I expect that Cardiff Members are proud of what has happened there. However, one must recognise that real eyesores—the old dead docks—have turned into assets that are readily convertible and have created premium sites. Therefore, it has been relatively easy to attract private capital. The problem that my hon. Friend faces, for example with the coal tip, is that even when it is cleared, it is by no stretch of the imagination a premium site. Therefore, his area will need a larger infusion of public capital than the coastal strip needed.

Mr. Rowlands: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for underlining my point, which he has made rather better because of his experience and understanding of what happened in Swansea. Any results from the document will be dependent upon triggering off the mixture of public and private investment.

We want this community investment programme to work. We wish to give every support that we can to the initiative. We do not want it to be, and I am glad to understand that it will not and cannot be, a small-time paint and planting exercise. It must be something much bigger and more expensive. In that regard, I should be grateful if the Minister will tell us a little more about the extra allocations set out in the document. For example, £2 million has been allocated for housing programmes. Will we have to bid for six parcels of the £2 million, can all local authorities come in together, or is it to be selectively offered to two or three local authorities? There is also £1 million for urban provision.

I want to believe that this is the beginning of a major community investment programme. It is what we have fought for and will continue to fight for. However, we are worried that in its resourcing and financial provisions, it will fall short and will end up as nothing more than—useful and important as such things are—a rather better version of earlier schemes to clear up eyesores. I hope that the Secretary of State will come to the Heads of the Valleys standing conference and talk about the document. He has declined a general invitation, so let us make a specific invitation to him to come to discuss the document. We need to learn and listen as much as we want to tell him of our views and feelings.

We have seen remarkable developments on the coastal strip. We, as Members representing the communities in the Heads of the Valleys, want to see such exciting new investment in developments in our communities.

7.46 pm

Mr. Robert Harvey (Clwyd, South-West): With the exceptions of the speeches made by the hon. Members for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) and for Gower (Mr. Wardell) on heating allowances, which will strike a chord with many on both sides of the House, speeches by Labour Members have repeated the depressing and dismal litany of despair and gloom that we have heard month after month, week after week. It is all the more depressing because that litany fails to take into account the fact that Wales has a Secretary of State who has pursued one of the most imaginative industrial and economic policies to be found on the island.

We have seen how it is possible for the Government, by acting as an innovator, not a crutch, for dying industries, to stimulate a whole economy. One would have thought that Labour, instead of decrying this new, pioneering, innovative role for the state, would be learning from it and seeing where the old experience of the wrong kind of state interference has strayed. Instead, Labour

Members stick to the old dogmas that today, in the only strongholds that they possess—in Liverpool and in the councils that they still control—are ravaging the lives and well-being of those whom they claim to represent. In Wales, they seek to pull us back into the economic horse and buggy age from which we have emerged.

The strategy of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has been straightforward. It has been to stop wasting taxpayers' money supporting dead-end industries producing goods that no one wants, to stop disguising unemployment by this method and to pursue four major objectives. The first is to stimulate outside investment in Wales. Over the past three years, Wales has obtained about one fifth of all inward investment into the United Kingdom, and visits by overseas companies to Wales have been maintained at 300 annually over the past two years. By any standards, that is a staggering achievement. During the last year alone, 25 overseas companies announced that they were setting up bases in Wales, and there were 23 expansions by companies already operating in the Principality. We have heard a great deal about jobs tonight. Taken together, those projects will create some 2,800 new jobs and safeguard a further 1,300 existing jobs.

The second part of the strategy is to channel all available state aid to the task of creating new jobs. During the last year alone, 143 offers were accepted for regional selective assistance, worth more than £35 million. Those offers will help to create 6,679 new jobs and safeguard a further 4,745 existing jobs. In the five years between 1979 and 1985, 49,000 jobs have been created and 24,000 safeguarded at a cost of £158 million, in contrast to the appalling Labour record of 27,000 jobs created and only 8,000 safeguarded, at a cost of £80 million, in the four preceding years.

The third part of the Welsh Office strategy has been to develop the infrastructure needed to provide those jobs in terms of roads and factory development. Last year 282 units were allocated, creating 4,000 new jobs. The vacancy rate at these factories has now fallen to about 12 per cent. Since 1976 more than 9·6 million sq ft of new factory space has been built, 86 per cent. of it under the present Government's policies.

The fourth part of the Welsh Office strategy has been to pursue that dream of Welsh economists through the decades—diversification away from the two products upon which Wales depended for so long, coal and steel, into everything from colour television and vacuum cleaners to car engines, aircraft wings and printed circuit boards. That has been an imaginative, undoctrinaire strategy, using the state not as a burden or as a drag on industrial development, but as a helpful partner to private enterprise in bringing jobs and prosperity to the people of Wales.

In this debate, as in previous debates, the Opposition have made it clear that they reject this approach. They have a duty, though, to tell the people of Wales what they would do instead. Such fragments of an industrial strategy as one can make out from the mushroom cloud of negative gloom that pervades the Opposition Benches suggest the following. No doubt I shall be corrected if I am wrong.

First, from what it has said, I assume that Labour proposes to reopen those collieries and steelworks that it considers have been unjustifiably closed by this Government. The Opposition have a duty to tell us which ones, how much this will cost and for how long they propose to maintain non-jobs in this way. Are the Opposition able to provide an absolute assurance to those of my constituents who were tossed by a Labour Government on the scrap heap of colliery closures during the 1970s, with a pittance in redundancy payments compared with what has been offered under this Government, that that will never happen again?

The second part of Labour's programme will, I understand, be to undertake major public works projects to get people in Wales back to work. The Opposition have a duty to tell us what projects they are considering, in addition to the massive expenditure on new hospitals and roads that is already being undertaken by the Welsh Office, and by how much taxes will be raised to pay for them, or, if the money is to be printed, by how much they reckon inflation is to be permitted to rise.

Thirdly, a Labour Government would encourage greater local authority capital expenditure. Can the Opposition offer a categorical assurance that capital spending will not be slashed again as it was under the last Labour Government when things start to go wrong, as they inevitably will under their kind of programme?

Fourthly, Labour would direct investment into the areas that it favours. Can the Opposition tell us what will happen if the Japanese firms that have found a welcome in our valleys prefer not to be told what to do and pull out instead, or if the domestic investors that Labour wants to direct prefer to spend their money on consumption rather than to be told where to put it by those with the financial management expertise displayed by the Opposition?

Fifthly, as regards the rural economy, the right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock) has pledged to slash the European Community food surpluses. Again, I shall no doubt be corrected if I am wrong. Will the Opposition tell the House and the nation what effect that would have on the small rural communities of Wales that are already struggling in an increasingly hostile environment? I do not believe that the present farm crisis is being taken seriously enough by the Government. In Wales the effects have mercifully not been felt as badly as in the rest of Britain, which suffered a 43 per cent. fall in farming incomes last year. Nevertheless, the farm management survey, just published for 1984-85, shows that there has been a fall of 10 per cent. in the dairy and livestock sectors over the year. Net incomes in the dairy sector have fallen by 28 per cent.

I am also critical of the decision by the Welsh Office to subordinate justice to administrative convenience in the granting of the otherwise very welcome bad weather payments last autumn. But let the Labour party, for goodness sake, stop pretending that it has the interests of that capitalist class of farmers at heart and tell us how many farmers it intends to put out of business by reducing agricultural surpluses.

I shall end with a word about unemployment. Unemployment in Wales and in Britain is too high. I believe that in the next Budget the problem must be addressed directly, along the lines suggested by my hon. Friend the Member for the Vale of Glamorgan (Sir R. Gower). I hope that the unions will play their part in addressing the problem by ending their practice of seeking higher and higher wages for those in work at the expense of those who are out of work. I am convinced that anything like the industrial strategy proposed by the Labour party would have a devastating effect upon the jobs and prosperity of Wales. The Opposition seem to be incapable

[Mr. Robert Harvey]

of learning from experience, but I urge them to take a leaf out of the Government's book and to start putting the state at the service of Wales, not Wales at the service of the state.

7.56 pm

Mrs. Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): No amount of huffing, puffing and posturing by Conservative Members can mask the fact that for Wales this period of Conservative government has been a painful and unmitigated disaster.

I wish to associate my remarks with those of my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) who referred to the report that was published this afternoon by the Welsh Office, "Community Investment: An Initiative for the Valleys." He made a passionate case for the valleys, a case that the Opposition have made constantly since 1979 when this Government came to office, and he spoke for all Opposition Members who represent the valleys of south Wales. We feel passionately about the problems that face our communities —the dreadful unemployment rate, the waste of young and middle aged people who want to work but who cannot find work. Day after day they write out applications for jobs. When one has completed 50 or more applications but still has not been offered an interview, one can imagine —perhaps some cannot—the despondency felt by those people. They see no hope.

A man of 35 came to my surgery and told me about his attempts to get a job in Cynon Valley, which has the highest male unemployment rate in Wales and one of the highest male unemployment rates of any industrial area in the United Kingdom. As he went out of the door, he said, "I feel like throwing myself in the river." What does a Member of Parliament say to somebody who feels like doing that? Can one talk about hope? During the almost two years that I have been the Member of Parliament for Cynon Valley, I have seen the unemployment rate climb relentlessly month by month. That is why Labour Members constantly ask the Secretary of State what is to happen about jobs.

I welcome the report as a recognition of the improvements needed in the valley communities, but I must ask, as my hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) asked: how many jobs will the proposals in the report produce? I appreciate that that question may be difficult to answer at this stage, but it is one of the most pressing questions in the constituencies that most of us represent. I hope that in response to my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney the Minister will give more information about the £2 million capital allocation for housing and the £1 million urban programme resources mentioned in the report.

I agree that it is important to do something about the environmental problems in the valley areas, especially as we know that industrialists coming to an area look specifically for a good environment. We need to be more scientific about this in Wales, and in Britain as a whole, to discover precisely why industrialists go to some areas and not to others. The Irish Government have carried out a proper scientific analysis. One of the researchers on that project told me how surprised he was that Britain did not carry out similar analyses. My right hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) will recall that when the steel industry in his constituency was decimated the local council carried out its own investigation into why industrialists would or would not come to the area. That type of analysis should be carried out systematically and scientifically throughout the country. I hope that the Welsh Office will give special consideration to that aspect.

One of the worst aspects of the environment in the areas that we represent is poor housing. In the valleys of south Wales there is massive and appalling urban deprivation, which is increasingly unlikely to be tackled in view of the pitiful financial resources at the disposal of local authorities. In a recent study, the Cynon Valley, Merthyr and Rhondda were identified as the three most deprived districts of England and Wales. In the Cynon valley, 92 per cent. of private housing stock—about 40,000 houses —is in an unsatisfactory condition, and 48 per cent. of private houses have been deemed unfit for human habitation. The cost of rehabilitating the housing stock in that one valley is estimated at nearly £105 million. As the Secretary of State knows, the county council has been pressing for extra funds under the urban development programme, but I am sceptical about the likely result. The £2 million capital allocation for local authority housing will not even scratch the surface of the problems of one valley.

I do not wish to be churlish about the report, but I am sure that I speak for all my hon. Friends when I say that we hoped for a lion, but have been given a mouse. To deal with the problems of the south Wales valleys we needed a roar of indignation followed by resources on the scale that those problems require. Instead, we have been given a squeak, although even a squeak is welcome.

The Cynon valley has one of the biggest environmental pollution problems in Britain—the Phurnacite plant at Abercwmboi. The loss of any jobs in the valley is to be deplored, and that plant provides 600 jobs. Since the coal dispute ended, the pollution from that plant has increased, but it is difficult for people in the area to protest because the jobs are so badly needed. Last week 14 members of the Abercwmboi anti-pollution lobby came to my surgery and dumped bags of soot on the table in front of me— the result of just one night's emissions from the Phurnacite plant. When I asked how many of those people worked at the plant or had relatives who worked there, not one hand went up. Yet again, the pollution of the environment had to be balanced against the number of jobs provided.

If the Secretary of State is serious about dealing with the environmental problems of the valleys, and especially of the Cynon valley, he must ensure that the National Coal Board behaves responsibly towards residents in the area. People need the jobs but they do not need the current levels of pollution. Any responsible industry would ensure that people do not have to suffer such pollution just because they need the jobs. It is essential that pollution in the Cynon valley should be properly controlled.

The pollution from the Phurnacite plant is the first thing that people see when they come down the new road. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney, I welcome new roads. I only wish that the road to Merthyr came through the Cynon valley, but I am glad that my hon. Friend has such a splendid road in his constituency and that we have the important link road into the Cynon valley. I hope that there will be many more such developments. I certainly do not wish to vie for resources with my hon. Friend in the neighbouring valley, but in the present situation that is almost inevitable.

The Secretary of State and I constantly argue about Japanese firms. I should make it clear that we welcome any investment, Japanese or otherwise, in an area of such high unemployment. My only objection to the firm in question was to some of its employment practices. I am sure that the Government and Members on both sides deplore the pressure put on workers to take so-called voluntary redundancy because they had reached the age of 35 and were regarded as over the hill. I hope such practices are not common to Japanese firms generally and that there will be no repetition of a practice which I think the firm now admits to have been a serious error of judgment as well as a serious error in public relations.

The Secretary of State talks about community self-help in his report. We are not short of ideas, and he is well aware of that. My council has applied for money for industrial and commercial development in Aberdare, which is mentioned in the report. It wanted money to develop the commercial sector of Aberdare and various other corridors of land in the older industrial areas. It asked for £210,000. So far it has received £125,000. That is obviously not enough, and it needs the balance. An idea has been put forward which the council would put into action if only it had the money.

The council also wants to reclaim derelict land. My hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney talked about some of the worst eyesores in his area. One of the worst in my area is opposite the Phurnacite plant. It is a large hill, with black stumps of trees, which is burning underneath. Clouds of smoke can sometimes be seen above the trees. That is an obvious eyesore. It is on the main road and it needs to be removed if it is not to deter industrialists from coming to the area.

My council has put forward a list of schemes to the Welsh Development Agency for the forthcoming financial year. The total sum is in millions rather than thousands of pounds. The basic objective is to clear as many derelict sites as possible for the benefit of industry and the environment. The main schemes are Cmw Cynon and Deep Dyffryn, for which it needs £1·2 million; Aberaman and Cwm Neol colliery sites, Aberaman, for which it needs £1·1 million; and Penrhiwceiber colliery for which it needs £518,000. The council has ideas about clearing those sites, but again it needs the cash to do the job. If the Secretary of State is serious about wanting to clear up the environment in the Cynon valley, he will know that the council has put forward schemes for which it would be pleased to receive the necessary sums of money.

Where people live has important bearings on their health and well-being. Poor housing stock and low levels of household amenities are recognised signs of social deprivation. They increase the difficulties faced by people in coping with illness at home. They also militate against the early discharge of patients from hospital, particularly for families with young children and elderly people.

The south Wales housing officer group produced a report in 1984 which drew attention to the special housing problems in Wales which are compounded by the high percentage of pre-1919 homes compared with the rest of the United Kingdom; the high percentage of houses lacking basic amenities compared with England; the low level of spending per head on housing in Wales; and the particular problems of the elderly and other unwaged groups who tend to be concentrated in unfit housing.

We have heard a lot about severe weather payments, and we know that many elderly, particularly in our valley communities, are suffering because of bad housing. Many of those people have low incomes and are unable to improve their houses, even if they live in private accommodation, because they do not have the income to do so. Many elderly people come to our surgeries and show us how they spend their money, how much they get by way of pension and how little they can afford to spend on heating. Therefore, the improvement of the housing stock is necessary to improve their conditions as well. In 1984 that report concluded that a housing crisis lay ahead unless urgent action was taken to allocate resources for house building and renovation.

The Mid Glamorgan report on deprivation and health drew attention to the particular needs of the Health Service for people in Mid Glamorgan. It talked about the Black report, which drew attention to the association between social class and health, to the increased levels of illness among unskilled workers and to the links between poverty and ill health. The authority's strategic plan highlighted those statements and concluded:

"It will be necessary to exercise positive discrimination to the benefit of those communities in Mid Glamorgan whose social structure implies a greater need for services."

The Royal Commission on the National Health Service, of which I was a member, suggested that community health services are often inadequate in areas of social deprivation and that improvements are ugently needed. The Royal College of General Practitioners' survey of primary care and the Acheson report described geographical variations both in the problems encountered by primary health care teams and in the characteristics of primary care services delivered.

In the past, following the 1971 census, considerable efforts were made to analyse the collected data. Areas of multiple deprivation, broadly defined by the excessive presence of those factors which together show a low level of welfare, have been the target for social planning, particularly in the context of the physical environment in the past. Policies for positive discrimination are already, to a limited extent, present in the nation's health care strategies and RAWP, SHARE and SCRAW embrace a belief that areas of greater need should receive more resources.

Health care services alone cannot resolve all the problems identified in areas of social deprivation, but adverse social economic and environmental factors affect a disproportionate number of households in Mid Glamorgan. I have previously gone in some detail into the links between unemployment and health, and I shall not do so again this evening. There has been a lot of research into the effects of unemployment on death and sickness among people out of work, their spouses and families.

The work of people such as Harvey Brenner has shown a consistent relationship between depressions in national economies and changes in the death rate. A recent British study compared mortality rates among the unemployed and the employed in the week before the 1971 census. It clearly demonstrated excessive numbers of deaths among the unemployed, even after allowing for socio-economic differences between the groups.

There is, and there has been for 50 years, enough evidence to show that the duration of unemployment is associated with poor health and even death. In 1984 Mid Glamorgan had a higher unemployment rate for men and women who had been out of employment for one year or more than for Wales or for England and Wales together.

[Mrs. Ann Clwyd]

Long-term male unemployment is particularly high in the Cynon, Rhymney and Rhondda valleys, and the effect of long-term unemployment on the health of men and women out of work and their families has not been taken into account by the Welsh Office in its calculations.

All the evidence shows that Mid Glamorgan, with its large population, suffers disproportionate levels of illness and disability and at the same time suffers high levels of adverse social conditions, greater than other areas in Wales and England, and that is not simply a matter of the environment.

Much as I want to welcome the report—and I hope that I have been positive in my appreciation of some of the problems that it proposes to tackle—the other areas that I have mentioned this evening must also be taken into account and acted upon because they also affect people in the valleys of south Wales who are looking to the Government for an answer to the intolerable situation in which they find themselves.

8.20 pm

Mr. Stefan Terlezki (Cardiff, West): I shall not take up the remarks of the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd). Her speech was long and was not of great substance. She shed quite a few crocodile tears and indulged in a good deal of rhetoric.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Grist) mentioned Councillor Bob Morgan, the leader of the South Glamorgan county council. I remember Councillor Morgan saying that the Labour party in Wales is a broad church. If it is, it will need a broad churchyard to go with it. It is clear that a shepherd like Councillor Morgan is a leader only of sheep.

There is the presence of the Liberal-SDP alliance on the South Glamorgan county council. Part of that alliance is formed by the semi-desperate people who want Socialist policies as long as they do not impinge upon them personally.

Before I address myself to the South Glamorgan county council and my constituency, I shall make a few comments about the assertion of Opposition Members that the National Health Service has been subject to cuts, cuts and more cuts and that the Government have an uncaring attitude towards the NHS.

Since the 1983 general election, Labour party spokesmen have shamelessly promised the earth to every conceivable interest group. The cost of the Labour party's commitments has been calculated by the Treasury as £24 billion annually. I intend to give the facts and figures clearly so that they will not be misquoted by Opposition Members and will not be misrepresented in the propagamda leaflets which they so readily distribute in their constituencies.

The Labour party has a clear duty to explain how it would finance the introduction of a 38-hour working week, minimum wages and huge council house building programmes that would involve the expenditure of many billions of pounds. It appears that the VAT rate would have to be increased to no less than 41 per cent. to meet indirect costs. If the Labour party does not accept that its programme would lead to the expenditure of £24 billion annually, it must explain to the country generally, to Labour-controlled constituencies and to the House which items of its programme it will abandon. If it decides not to take either course, it will confirm that it has not moved forward from the apology of a programme that it put forward during the 1983 general election.

The Labour shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer, the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley), has been forced to acknowledge the scale of the Government's achievement. The right hon. Gentleman has admitted that the Government are right to say that, allowing for the normal corrections for inflation, health spending during the past six years had increased by 20 per cent. Where are the cuts talked about by Opposition Members, when their finance spokesman has stated categorically that expenditure on health provision has increased by 20 per cent. in real terms? That means that that area of spending is breaking all previous records. Top priority will continue to be given to the NHS and by 1988 NHS spending of £20 billion will mean that this item will be second only to spending on social security.

One of the greatest hospital building programmes ever is under way. The Opposition should realise that 58 major schemes, each costing over £2 million, have been completed. Nearly 150 more schemes are being planned, designed or built. In 1984, over 6 million in-patient cases were treated, which was 800,000 more than in 1978. There were 37 million out-patient attendances in 1984, over 3 million more than in 1978. Over 112,000 more elderly patients were treated in our hospitals in 1984 than in 1978. Kidney transplant operations increased by over 50 per cent. There are 5,000 more hospital doctors and nurses, 3,000 more general practitioners and 58,000 more nurses and midwives working to provide better patient care.

That is the national picture but it alone will not counter the talk of cuts, cuts and more cuts. It is the practical evidence of the results of record spending, especially in the form of new and improved hospitals, that will convince voters in different localities that the NHS is safe with the Conservative Government.

We can go to extremes and talk about expenditure of £24 billion, but where is the £24 billion to come from? Would a Labour Government borrow to finance that level of expenditure? Labour Members should realise that, when money is borrowed, the borrower has to pay interest. We all know that the previous Labour Government borrowed and that the borrowings still have to be paid back with interest. If it is Labour party policy to increase taxation and print money like confetti, how is it to face the nation in advocating such a programme? Does the Labour party want to bankrupt Britain? Does it want to return to the winter of discontent? Does it want to return to 28 per cent. inflation? Does it want to take the country back to the power which was once held by trade union barons? Does it want to take us back to the IMF and to mortgage Britain for generations to come? There is no alternative to facing the facts and to carrying on as best we can with the resources at our disposal.

We are all extremely sorry that unemployment is so high. Nothing would please me more than to see thousands of my constituents rising at 5 am or 6 am, clocking in at 7 am and working until 5 pm five days a week, earning wages unashamedly and being proud of having a job. I want to see that. I am sure that we would all like to see buses, cars and bicycles filling our streets in the mornings with people going to work in industries and coal mines for a week, a month, a year, or the rest of their lives.

There is no magic wand. It does not matter how much rhetoric there is or how much we pull the punches—the

fact is that we are part and parcel of the industrial world. Unemployment is worldwide. Unless the shop stewards, trade union leaders, management and work force get together, decide what is good for their jobs and industries and put their backs into the work we cannot expect unemployment to decrease. We must never price ourselves out of work. If we ask for wages in two, three or four figures, we shall create unemployment and, once again, hon. Members will be crying crocodile tears because unemployment has increased.

Unemployment will be sustained as long as we cannot compete and as long as we price ourselves out of employment. Some union leaders—I would call them apparatchiks—stop at nothing but continually demand money on the table before using their tools. Unless we compete, we shall always be in the fourth division and not in the first where we belong.

Mr. Brynmor John (Pontypridd): The hon. Gentleman wants to be the new chairman of Cardiff City.

Mr. Terlezki: I hope that the team will be in the second division next year.

I should like to consider my constituency, especially South Glamorgan county council and Cardiff city council. It is intolerable and unacceptable that South Glamorgan county council intends to increase rates by about 25 per cent. As a former member of the South Glamorgan county council, I assure the House that, before the election, Labour party members were politically bribing the electorate, promising anything and everything. They were promising to build bridges where there were no rivers, no highways or railway tracks. They were promising everything just for a vote. Now they have been elected, they are robbing the electorate.

It is true that, if one allows a Socialist a free hand, he will put it in the ratepayer's pocket. Before the ratepayer realises what is happening, £50, £70 or £100 a year will be levied in increased rates. First it is bribery and then it is robbery. That is typical of Labour councillors. The same applies to the SDP—those semi-desperate people. They cannot get out of their concentration camp, so they join the Socialist bandwagon and try to promise everything to everyone without being accountable.

I am sorry that my constituents will suffer because of mismanagement by South Glamorgan county council. I am proud—this has nothing to do with politics, unless the Opposition want to interpret in that way—that the city council, which is a good housekeeper, is not increasing rates. The city council must be commended for its courage and good housekeeping. I am sure that Cardiff ratepayers appreciate the fact that the city council is able to manage properly.

I am perturbed because South Glamorgan county council is deliberately selling playing fields in my constituency, preventing children from my school from utilising those grounds for sports and for annual and seasonal events. It is disgraceful that, for 30 pieces of silver, South Glamorgan county council is prepared to deny children of all ages, their mums, their dads and their grandfathers the right to enjoy participation in sport and other activities in summer and winter. That is deplorable. The county council has said that the Government are forcing the council to sell the land. That is a deliberate lie. The council is misleading the mums and dads. Councillors must speak the truth. If they will not, they must offer themselves for election. We will see whether they will be re-elected.

The South Glamorgan education authority is offering so-called peace studies in our schools. I deplore that. The teaching of so-called peace studies in some of our schools is totally phoney, as it is being used to push Left-wing and unilateralist propaganda at our young people. Our young people should be taught the "triangle"—how to read, how to write and religion. Teaching of so-called peace studies is a blatant perversion of the teacher's traditional role and responsibility. Parents should have the right to withdraw their children from political indoctrination classes. Parents want their children to be given a decent education in traditional disciplines and skills. "Peace studies" are a squalid abuse of our children and should be banned from our schools. That is vital.

I should like to go forward, but at the same time backward to 1985, when Marxism received a decisive rebuff in Wales. Arthur Scargill tried, like many aspiring dictators before him, to topple a properly elected Government, and he failed. His coal strike was planned confrontation on a titanic scale. "Profit" was the word which Arthur Scargill spat out in hatred; and, let us never forget, he drew ecstatic applause from the so-called leaders of the Labour movement for so doing. I was here; you were there—every time Arthur Scargill and his apparatchiks were mentioned, you applauded the name. You were supporting him throughout, and the coal industry——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. The hon. Member knows that he must not attribute those actions to me.

Mr. Terlezki: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The coal industry is being turned around because the miners are putting their jobs and the welfare of their families above doctrinaire politics. In place of Socialism, the people's democracy has arisen. Two thirds of the people already own their homes. They are now on the way to real ownership of the economy.

Mr. Rogers: Tell us which army you served in.

Mr. Terlezki: The Labour leader, who is starting to give an impression of Lord Wilson as Mike Yarwood, is beginning to realise that. The hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers) behaves in a way that is below his intelligence. He looks like Tom Jones' grass, only twice as green. No wonder he became a Member—the Europeans would not have him.

The voters in Wales will not be fooled when it comes to the next local election for the county council or city council. They certainly will not be fooled when it comes to the next general election.

8.40 pm

Mr. Brynmor John (Pontypridd): Welsh day is a curious mixture of the national and parochial but at the end of the day it is a little easier because one concentrates on one's own constituency.

I do not want to follow the relentlessly juvenile pursuit of the South Glamorgan county council elections, like the hon. Members for Cardiff Central (Mr. Grist), for Cardiff North (Mr. Jones) and for Cardiff, West (Mr. Terlezki). You can hardly wait for tomorrow morning, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and, after a debate such as we have endured,

[Mr. Brynmor John]

particularly the contribution by the hon. Member for Cardiff, West, I suspect, neither can I. When you do recover your composure to the extent necessary to peruse *Hansard*, I suggest that you peruse the amazing similarity in subject matter between the three speeches of the hon. Members for Cardiff, Central, for Cardiff, North and for Cardiff, West: three minds without a single thought.

I take on board the points made by the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Best). He made a misguided, but at least thoughtful, speech about the relationship of money in the economy and the effect upon investment in Wales.

I shall look at that with an example from my own constituency. What we are witnessing today is the accretion of money in corporations, to be used not for organic growth in promoting those corporations, but in takeovers.

Just such a triangle—it is almost as rubber triangular as the three hon. Members from Cardiff—is the Argyll, Distillers and Guinness triangle. I shall tell the hon. Member for Ynys Môn how I think Welsh employment is affected by the consequence of an unchecked growth and slopping around of money which is spare and which is not being used properly. Argyll has made a bid for Distillers. That is common knowledge. It is clear that Argyll wants only some of the commercial products which tie in most naturally with its shop activities. That means that a factory in my constituency which makes dry ice, which is badly needed for medical purposes, will be divested by Argyll if it takes over Distillers. It will mean the loss of 60 jobs and the loss of a great facility for the south of Britain.

Mr. Best: I will not detain the hon. Gentleman. I fully accept what he is saying about money slopping around, but I was endeavouring to say that it is a shame that we cannot harness private money for public sector infrastructure work. I do not accept that it is being done at the moment to the extent that I would like.

Mr. John: With respect, before we start wishing good works on the private sector, perhaps the Government should redirect their efforts within the private sector towards creating jobs and a manufacturing structure of which we can be proud and in which we can look forward to the future with some confidence.

The hon. Member for Ynys Môn said that he believed in public ownership. His public ownership involved people going along to buy one to ten shares, perhaps 250 shares, in a company. That is a myth, like the golden age. Even the privatisation measures which have recently been so lauded have been shown on analysis to be heavily biased in favour of large corporations and large institutional investors. Therefore, we have seen a transfer not from a monolithic state corporation to private individuals who represent the country in microcosm, but from what the hon. Member for Ynys Môn might call an impersonal state corporation to equally impersonal financial institutions. I do not believe that that is good. I am not in favour of an impersonal corporation approach, but I do not believe that going to the other extreme and making what is virtually a private monopoly——

Mr. Rowlands It is a private monopoly.

Mr. John: It is a private monopoly in the sense that the large institutions control the investors. I do not think that that counts.

Much has been said about the discussion document issued today about the valley areas. Some Conservative Members seem to think that the valley areas need to have everything done for them. Let me remind hon. Members, certainly those who have little or no experience of pre-war south Wales, that our areas were built upon self-help and self-education. If the hon. Member for Ynys Môn provided the money, he would run out of money before we ran out of energy.

I have no wish to dampen the initiative but I suspect that we will fire our energy once more, in great corporative pride, only to find that another recession has come about, with another financial cut. That will create a cynicism more erosive than anything else that has been done by the Government. If the Government mean what they say, they will take care to have the money to be ready to be spent.

I want to concentrate on the Pontypridd hospital, a symptom of health care in my constituency. I listened to what the hon. Member for Cardiff, West said. I have dealt with him several times but he is more used to talking than listening and more used to standing on his feet than reading *Hansard* but I would ask him to read what I say again. No one is saying that in absolute terms the Government have cut Health Service provision. The gravamen of the charge against the Government is that, now that medical and surgical techniques have exploded and there is great demand for techniques which were unavailable a decade ago, the Health Service is not matching demand.

I want to refer to my own area. The Under-Secretary, the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Robinson), has implied, as has the Secretary of State, that the real fault with the Mid Glamorgan area health authority is that it is profligate with its money. The hon. Member for Cardiff, West in part gave the answer to that. He said that we should look at all the extra people being treated. He is right: there has been a 41 per cent. increase in the number of X-ray patients seen at East Glamorgan hospital. There have been 88 per cent. more cardiology patients treated, an 80 per cent. take-up of home prescriptions in the pharmacy, a 66 per cent. increase in the pathology department and at our geriatric hospital, Dewi Sant, there has been a 736 per cent. increase in out-patients and a total increase of 121 per cent.

Hon. Gentlemen cannot have it both ways. I concede that more people are being treated, but the opposite side of that coin is that Mid Glamorgan area health authority must be using its revenue to good advantage to enable that to happen. However, when it runs short of money because of the explosion of medical demand and demand on the Health Service, it is told it cannot manage. It is told that a firm of accountants will look at it and that it is its own fault. So the Government propose to close the Pontypridd hospital.

It is inconvenient for the Government that this morning the *Western Mail* carried an item that showed that the Pontypridd hospital is the most efficient in Wales because its bed utilisation is 100 per cent. That far outstrips any other area. It is inconvenient for the Government that it is the only hospital in the area where beds are committed to general practitioners and it is doubly unfortunate, at a time when out-patient clinics and waiting lists are lengthening, that 8,000 people are treated at that hospital as out-patients, including rheumatology patients.

I ask the Under-Secretary to give this message to the Secretary of State. When he next makes one of his unmemorable visits to my constituency, will he please tell

the people what will happen if that hospital closes permanently to the 8,000 people a year whom it now treats? Are they to go on to the waiting list, lengthening it by another 10 per cent.? Are they to wait indefinitely while the Minister says, "We shall get around to that when another firm of accountants becomes more expert at the subject." Will that be the answer?

If the Government are so confident in their belief, why is it that Ministers failed to answer a request that I made to meet a delegation to discuss the closure of the hospital? This is the Government who brook no opposition, and who can take on all comers, yet they cannot take on a delegation from the constituency to discuss the closure of the hospital. Why is that? Why, in defiance of all parliamentary conventions, was my request for a delegation ignored? Concern has also been expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers) and others outside Parliament. That does not give us much confidence in the stewardship of the Welsh Office over health matters, if it can be insensitive to the demands of people who are asking to keep their hospital open. What is it like towards the patients themselves?

Therefore, I believe that Pontypridd hospital is not an optional extra. It is not a cigarette lighter in the motor car of the Health Service. It is a vital service. The county has better economic and social conditions than many of the areas represented by my hon. Friends, but it has a higher morbidity rate and greater suffering. Therefore, it has a greater claim upon the public purse for health reasons than many other counties. Unless the formula for funding reflects that, the people of Mid Glamorgan will be let down at a time when we cannot afford to let people down. Elderly and young people have an expectation of life that their grandfathers and grandmothers never had. To allow them to die wantonly and needlesly for lack of treatment would be the greatest crime of all.

8.52 pm

Mr. Ron Davies (Caerphilly): I am glad to see that the Secretary of State is back in the Chamber because I want to address a few remarks directly to him. This is the third time that I have heard him present his address at our annual Welsh debate. It inspired no more confidence in me than on the other two occasions.

The essence of the Secretary of State's remarks was that we have just about managed to survive; we have weathered the storm. The right hon. Gentleman talked about agriculture and said that the Government policy on milk quotas had not been that disastrous. He talked about the National Coal Board, and said that it had not been too disastrous—productivity is up. However, he did not say anything about the new pits and the investment that he talked about in his speech last year. We heard the right hon. Gentleman talk briefly about education and very briefly about the one new Japanese factory, presumably the product of his stewardship at the Welsh Office. We also heard him talk about the new valleys initiative.

It is not satisfactory when all that the Secretary of State can say to us at our annual debate is that we have managed to weather the storm and that things are bad, but it does not matter because they could be a darn sight worse. That is not an encouraging message.

Suggestions that we have weathered the storm or that things might be worse, or the manipulation of statistics to suggest that things are not quite as bad as they could be, are not satisfactory for the people of the valleys. There is only one criterion that has any value to the people of Wales, particularly those in the valleys. There is only one quality that they look for, and that is the quality of life that they enjoy. They are not concerned about the way in which the Welsh Office manipulates, or about the arguments from the Secretary of State and his Ministers about whether we have spent more this year than last year, or whether we are managing to survive. The only issue that is of any concern is the quality of life.

That depends entirely on employment. The only possible hope for our valley communities is opportunities for employment. The only hope for improving our environment is if we have people in work. The only way that our houses will be improved is if we have people in work, the only way to have a decent Health Service or education service is if we have people in work. Not only does that give them dignity and the personal security that they need to organise their own lives, but it gives the community the resources that are necessary to fund co-operative ventures. That central point is not recognised by the Secretary of State. Either he does not understand it or he will not acknowledge it.

In 1979, when we had the "Labour isn't working" election slogan, we heard all the excuses and all the criticisms of the figure of 1 million unemployed. We had all the suggestions of what was wrong with the British economy. We were told by the Tories that they had the answers. We were told that the problem was inflation. Let us concede the Government's success in reducing inflation from 10·1 per cent. in 1979 to 5·7 per cent. last year. We were told in 1979 that the problem was strikes, and that so many days were lost through strikes. Let us concede that we now live in a different era and now we do not lose 30 million days a year as we did in 1979. Last year the total of days lost was 6 million, one fifth of that total. We are told that British industry, was not profitable in 1979. Trading profits have gone up from £39 billion in 1979 to £68 billion in 1985. We were told that the exchange rate was too high. It has come down from $2·06 to the pound in 1979 to $1·37 to the pound in 1985.

Therefore, all that the Government said was wrong in 1979, by their standards, has been put right now in 1985. What do we have as a result? We have 25 per cent. unemployment in Wales. In parts of our valley communities, there is 75 or 80 per cent. unemployment. In my constituency four out of five people in housing estates are dependent on benefits. That is the product of the success of the Government's policies over the past seven years. The reason is that we have not had manufacturing investment. We heard some interesting arguments from Conservative Back Benchers, who said that investment is now at record levels. It is now lower in real terms that in 1979. In 1979 it was £8,230 million and in 1985 the figure was down to £6,780 million, the lowest rate of investment in manufacturing industry other than in Greece and Portugal, out of 18 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries surveyed last year. It is not a record to be proud of. It is at the root of the problem that we have in the valleys. We do not have employment or investment, so there is no cohesion in our communities.

Government spokesmen will tell us, "Do not talk about unemployment figures or about the 200,000 people in Wales who are unemployed. Talk about the people who are employed." Even on that basis, using the criteria that the Government prefer to use, in every county in Wales

[Mr. Ron Davies]

there are fewer people in employment now than there were in 1979. Every index reveals that there are fewer people in employment than there were in 1979.

In June 1978 there were 837,000 people in full-time employment in Wales. On the latest date for which figures are available, there were 745,000 people in employment. Whichever criterion the Government wish to choose, the figures show that the Government have neglected the people of Wales.

One would have thought that the Secretary of State for Wales, when he sits in Cabinet, would represent the interests of Wales. The Prime Minister and the Cabinet are now isolated from all opinion in the country. The Confederation of British Industry, the Trade Unions Council, the Churches, the House of Lords, the House of Commons, large sections of the Conservative party and large sections of the public all recognise that the Government are a disastrous failure and that the Government are retreating day by day into a bunker. I believe it is distressing that, in that bunker, the Prime Minister has a staunch ally in the Secretary of State for Wales. Instead of arguing the case for Wales, the right hon. Gentleman is encouraging the Prime Minister to believe that what she is doing to this country will be of long term benefit to our people. That is a terrible indictment of the Secretary of State whose special Cabinet responsibility is for the one area in the United Kingdom which has been worst hit by the Government's policies.

The Government say that there is no alternative. I believe that there is an alternative. The Secretary of State has today announced his new initiative. It strikes me as ironic that the Government, who for the past seven years have said that public expenditue is bad and that problems cannot be solved by throwing money at them, are suddenly now saying that they recognise the problem and that now is the time for a community initiative. I am aware that the Secretary of State has made some move and I welcome his new initiative. I welcome the fact that the right hon. Gentleman has now recognised that the Government have a role to play and welcome the new initiative, the new money and the new idea. I will encourage my local authority to make a submission and I hope that the Secretary of State will recognise the value of all the submissions when they are put to him.

I will not pretend that I have any regard for what the Secretary of State has done today. The Secretary of State's initiative is nothing more than a gimmick to divert attention from the real issue which should be the subject of today's debate, which is that, as a direct result of Government policy, one out of four Welsh people are out of work. The Secretary of State will not solve anything by using £3 million of public money to invest in the valleys. To use the Secretary of State's words, that will not even prime the pump. Three million pounds is £15 for every unemployed person in Wales.

The Secretary of State intends to put the money into the valleys of south Wales. If the right hon. Gentleman spent one sixth of that money in each of the six districts of Mid Glamorgan, that would not make a pinprick on the problems there. It would certainly result in some minor improvements but if the right hon. Gentleman spent that money equally in each of the districts in Mid Glamorgan —as he said, to promote employment opportunities— how many jobs will he create?

If we assume that £10,000 of public money will provide a job, he will provide 300 jobs. If that money is spent equally in the six counties of Mid Glamorgan, he wil provide 50 jobs. If all the money goes to Mid Glamorgan, the right hon. Gentleman will provide 50 jobs in the Rhymney valley. There are 10,000 people out of work as a result of the Government's policies. No amount of projects or schemes which depend on planting trees, tarting up the local bus station, painting the outside of public buildings — welcome though all those schemes may be — will do anything to solve the deep-rooted problems of the valleys.

We need real investment in new industry as it is only by having new investment and new industries that we will get the jobs we want, and if we do not get the jobs, the valleys will have no prospects or security for the future.

9.4 pm

Mr. Michael Foot (Blaenau Gwent): I should like to comment for a few minutes on the new proposals that the Government have made in relation to the valley communities. I follow in the footsteps of many of my hon. Friends who know intimately what has happened in the area and the scale of the problem. It is partly because of the scale of the problem and partly because of the effects that the problems are inflicting on our communities that we welcome almost any proposal that can bring any alleviation whatsoever. I welcome the proposal in the sense that it offers alleviation.

There is a certain irony in that I attended a meeting on Friday in my constituency which represented all the valley ares covered by the scheme and we discussed the matter. Local authorities from all the areas put forward a range of proposals. They had previously suggested that they should meet the Secretary of State for Wales, but he refused to meet them on the ground that he felt that it was better that such matters should be dealt with separately.

A few weeks ago, as soon as I heard about the proposals to assist the inner cities, I wrote to the Secretary of State saying that it would be unfair to leave out the valleys. However, the right hon. Gentleman replied that it might be better to continue with our present machinery. It is peculiar that, after all those refusals, the right hon. Gentleman, in the document that he distributed, should have said:

"These deficiencies can only in part be removed through financial injections."

He is talking about deficiencies in the valley towns. The document continues:

"The conditions arise partially from the industrial dereliction and economic decline; but they also stem from the absence of any co-ordinated action by local communities and the responsible agencies and authorities to work together with sufficient imagination and drive to make the very best use of the potential that exists."

All the democratically elected valley authorities have been crying out for exactly such co-ordination to help them to overcome their problems. It is strange that, at the very moment when the right hon. Gentleman refused to meet valley representatives, he should try to put some of the blame on them. However, we welcome the initiative, small and belated though it is, for the reason that I gave at the beginning of my speech.

I welcome the Secretary of State's reply to the question posed by my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) about the Welsh Development Agency. Some of us have been telling the

Welsh Office for years that it is absurd that the WDA, which does such good work, must make painful choices between spending money on assisting new factories or providing new factories and limiting the amount that it can spend on land reclamation and the development of sites. We have asked why the Secretary of State does not go to the Cabinet and ask for more money to enable the WDA and other authorities—I do not say that it can do it alone—to spend more on reclamation and development. To some extent, the right hon. Gentleman's proposals will mean that the WDA and other agencies will receive more money.

I assure the Secretary of State that there will be no shortage of schemes for which we shall need money and assistance under his proposals, but it is a great pity that it was not done years ago when thousands of construction workers first became unemployed. Indeed, in the valleys, many construction workers have joined the dole queue during the past five or six years, and we have pleaded with the Government to spend more on construction. We have a little money now. But if the projects are to work properly, that sum will be insufficient. One need only compare the £2 million or £3 million which the Government propose to spend with the figures which show what has been spent in Merthyr and Aberdare during the past six years, even on Government schemes. The amount is far more than £2 million or £3 million.

If investment is to be effective, it must be on a much bigger scale. We must also ensure that the Government do not remove with one hand what they offer with the other. They have done that many times. The Government who say that they will help us in some areas are the same Government who have removed much larger sums by cutting the rate support grant.

That is why I was so eager to press my question about the training scheme, although I have not yet received an answer from the right hon. Gentleman and I do not expect one now. I welcome the two-year training scheme. It is no good the Secretary of State comparing the present position with what happened under the Labour Government. When we were in office, much more training was provided, there were many more apprenticeships and many more people obtained jobs in industry. We welcomed the youth training scheme from the beginning, but it is completely unfair that a considerable part of the increasing burden of the scheme should be placed upon the local authorities, some of which cannot afford it. We have always been eager—the same could be said of all other valley constituencies and communities—to play our part in the YTS. Whatever our criticisms, we have always wished to encourage them.

What has happened? My local authority and all the other authorities—as the Minister would be aware if he had attended the meeting on Friday—are having to bear a considerable extra burden for the second year of the training scheme and for the years after that. The authorities are having to commit themselves now to this type of expenditure. The expenditure could be more than the proposed expenditure to be given to the authorities for this scheme. When the Government propose extra resources for local authorities—I repeat we are eager to make the best use of all the resources we can get out of this Government—they must also look at the way in which they cut resources in so many other areas.

There is a simple comparison between what happened under the previous Labour Government and what is happening now. We had to face the same problems—a world slump, rocketing oil prices, the consequences of such a price rise and increasing unemployment: We faced those problems. If the present Government achieved the figures which we achieved in the last months of office, they would be regarded as the biggest miracle since the loaves and the fishes. In the period 1979 to 1980, when my right hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Callaghan) was Prime Minister and when the right hon. Gentleman and his friends were placarding everywhere with "Labour isn't working", employment figures — the Government tell us to look at the employment, not the unemployment, figures — were greater than they have ever been in British history. They were certainly greater than they have been since. Employment has been heavily cut in this period, and unemployment is now greater than ever before. That is the simple comparison.

In the last year of the Labour Government, facing all the problems—and we dealt with all the democratic problems as well—we increased employment to the highest level ever achieved. This Government have increased unemployment to the highest level in the history of this country. Unemployment is worse in Wales than almost anywhere else.

We will certainly take any small consideration we can get from the Government and which the local authorities can use. We have been crying out for this for years. We shall try to turn this pittance into a real programme for tackling unemployment.

9.12 pm

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): My right hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) has put his finger on the problems from which the country has to suffer under the present Administration. I have listened to this debate this afternoon and the way the Government have misinformed the public and have said that A is A when it is not and that B is B when it is not. It has been their modus vivendi. That has been the Government's policy since 1979.

We have heard a number of speeches from Conservative Members this evening and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Pontypridd (Mr. John) has commented, they were of a similar nature. I hesitate to say that they were from the same brief, although that question springs to mind. What is at stake in the debate is not the Government's policies but the Opposition's policies. The Conservatives have asked what the Opposition will do if we come into government — which we will. The Conservative Members have told us that we will either have to print money or borrow money. The Treasury has worked out that our programmes would cost £26 billion. What Conservative Members did not say and what did not occur to them is that we would place a priority on employment.

If we had the country working again more people would be paying tax and that is where the Government's money would come from. It is no use Conservative Members shaking their heads. The Government are not interested in employment. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent has said, they have raised unemployment to the highest level ever. That is the essential difference between the Government and the Opposition. Consequently, they need taxation from elsewhere, and they have increased taxation to a higher level than I can remember. If a Labour Government get people back to

[Dr. John Marek]

work, those people will be paying tax because they will be earning money. That is what the next Labour Government will do.

Like my other hon. Friends, I welcome this latest initiative, but it is very little indeed. The housing aspect of it comes to £2 million, but the cost of building a council house today is between £25,000 and £30,000. In other words, all the money available this year will build about 80 council houses, yet we have all this trumpeting that at last the Conservative Government have seen the light and intend to do something.

Almost every Labour Member represents a council with a waiting list of about 1,000 people. How far will that sum help? It is an absolute pittance. The newspapers and the media must not be beguiled by the message of millions of pounds. A few months ago a report said that to put right the housing stock in the United Kingdom would cost £20 billion, but that is not mentioned by the Conservative party.

We must never lose sight of that fact, and I do not believe that the Welsh people will lose sight of it. They have had six years of this Government and see hospitals that cannot take patients because they are full and can only treat emergency patients. They see schoolchildren without adequate books, and they see social services crumbling before them.

Mr. Raffan: The hon. Gentleman has espoused a new aspect of Labour economic policy, which I am sure will be listened to with great interest by the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley)—perhaps with some horror. How quickly will he get people back to work? He said that he will use revenue from taxation to support this extraordinary programme, which has risen by £2 billion since I spoke. How will the hon. Gentleman support that programme between the time of taking office and getting people back to work?

Dr. Marek: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will excuse me if I do not answer now, but I have only three minutes left. Perhaps next time, when I have half an hour or an hour, I will be able to respond.

Whenever possible, this Government like to govern in secret. They were badly caught out over Austin Rover, and they will be caught out over the closure of the Cartrefle teacher training college. I hope that the Parliamentary Under-Secretary will tell us whether that college is to be closed. If it is, it will mean a couple of hundred redundancies, and it will have a marked effect on the rest of the north-east Wales institute as many of the courses are interdependent. There is much apprehension in north-east Wales, and in Wrexham in particular.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Wyn Roberts): I know that this matter was discussed last week at a meeting of the Welsh Advisory Board. The hon. Gentleman will know that there is to be a meeting of the committee that rules the board on 4 April under my chairmanship. No decision has been recommended as yet to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. Therefore, the hon. Gentleman is quite wrong in saying that a decision has been taken.

Dr. Marek: I understand from a telephone call to Cardiff that the working party has recommended to the board that Cartrefle college should be closed. I understand that on the chairman's casting vote—the chairman is a university person, and no doubt his university departments are quite safe — the board will recommend to the committee of the Welsh Advisory Board that the Cartrefle teacher training college should be closed. If the Government do not intend to close the college, will they say so clearly? If they cannot, I am sorry, but that is symptomatic of their treatment of Wales for the past six years.

My final charge is also of incompetence. The Welsh Office has allowed British Rail to single-track the line between Chester and Wrexham. The Welsh Office took BR's advice. How incompetent can the Government be? Now, of course, trains are delayed for two hours every week. The result is that nobody will take the rail service from Wrexham General any more. That is incompetence. The Welsh Office was beguiled. Instead of spending £22 million on the Gresford to Pulford bypass, they had to spend only £21·5 million because the bridges have to go over a single track. How stupid the Government are when they take such considerations into account, thus ruining the transport system in north-east Wales.

The Government are incompetent. They have been in office for six years and done no good. They should go.

Mr. Best: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have no desire to delay the hon. Member for Carmarthen (Dr. Thomas), to whom the whole House always enjoys listening, but I know that you will have noticed that every hon. Member who has been rising in his place has been called. I wish to put that on record only because of some of the interventions in my speech.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. The Chair is always very happy — it does not happen very often — when every hon. Member who wishes to speak has the opportunity to do so, as has been the case today.

Mr. Ray Powell: Further to the point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Some of us deliberately did not rise, in order to give others a chance to speak. If the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Best) had limited his speech, more Opposition Members would have been called.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I did the hon. Gentleman an injustice, and I apologise to him.

9.22 pm

Dr. Roger Thomas (Carmarthen): The Secretary of State must have set some sort of record today. He presented his seventh state of the nation report since attaining his high office. I must add hastily that the senior Under-Secretary of State for Wales must also be the proud possessor of a record. There cannot be many members of the Government who occupy the same post, allowing for departmental variations, as they did in 1979. Conservative Members can draw their own conclusions.

I am sure that I will not be in breach of any secret act if I say that the Secretary of State little thought that his leader would still be expecting him to carry the Wales portfolio seven years on. Moreover, it is likely that he has another two to go as there is every likelihood that this Parliament will run its full course.

It is singularly regrettable that the Prime Minister continues to feel that no other Conservative Member can be entrusted with the overall responsibility of the Welsh

Office. A little while ago, there were palpable signs that the understanding methods of the former Minister of State, who I am sorry not to see with us today, would have brought a welcome consensus to Welsh politics. That would have removed the monotony of clash and counter-clash of the past seven years. We fully understand the disappointment of several very able Conservative Members. I am not looking in any particular direction.

We have reshuffle after reshuffle, but no Welsh Tory Member ever appears to come to the top of the pack. It is a remarkable coincidence that there has been only the welcome promotion of the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Robinson). Not only have Tory Members not qualified to go to the Welsh Office, but none appears to have been suitably qualified to be a junior Minister in any other office of state or Department. What can they have been doing wrong? One notices many promotions among their counterparts in Scotland. There have been many changes in the Scottish Office, yet we do not appear to have had changes among Welsh Tory Members. I have often dwelt on that, but it is a matter for the Prime Minister.

The other day I watched a television interview with the Leader of the House. Apparently, he was told at a meeting of the 1922 Committee that one of the Tory Whips with a Welsh name was responsible for the promotion of so many wets into the Cabinet. I cannot understand how a Welshman would not do more for fellow Welshmen, and at least most of them are fellow Welshmen.

Year after year the Secretary of State requests patience and prudence from his critics because just a little more time is needed for Government policies to come to palpable fruition. Each year the tide is about to turn, and each year the unemployment tide obstinately refuses to turn. Our resources keep on ebbing away, and the latest to ebb away is North sea oil.

Thousands of jobs have vanished since 1983, let alone since 1979. How much longer do the people in Wales, especially those now in their second or third year without work, have to wait for Government policies to work? Positive intervention has become imperative. It is not only the accelerated pit closures of the past year that leave people jobless. Joblessness now roams the rural areas as well. Creameries, the backbone of rural viability, now become as desolate as the urban coal mines. In rural areas the spin-off effect of closures can be even more widespread and devastating.

We protest at the inadequacies of NCB (Enterprise) Ltd. It is miserly, if somewhat increased in funding, and it wholly fails to meet the massive pit closure redundancies. That limp scheme appeared late in the day, deceitfully publicised, but woefully short on practical application. Pits close, but coal is now extracted in many of our areas of south Wales by overpowering open-cast methods that bulldoze through much-loved landscapes, human amenities and surroundings. Opposition is cast aside scathingly, as if to oppose such gigantic schemes is a form of treachery and a denial of work by local communities.

I am sure that many Tory Members noticed the article in Saturday's *Western Mail*. The significance of the St. David's day declaration on the urgent need for powerful Government initiatives to expand the economy, thus ensuring that many who are at present without work are allowed to contribute usefully to society, cannot be over-emphasised. I am sure that hon. Members will know the names of those who have signed this declaration—Sir Cennyth Traherne, Sir Brian Hopkin, Sir Goronwy Daniel, Dr. C. W. L. Bevan, the Earl Lloyd-George, Professor Glyn Phillips. They are not notable people in the political life of Wales, not notable Welsh men and women. These people speak over and above party politics and their aims cannot be disregarded. The Conservative party cannot afford to sweep this declaration under the carpet. These people have no political axe to grind or political strategy to exploit.

The Labour party is not alone in emphasising the dire need for direct spending to reduce unemployment rather than rely on the haphazard beneficial effects of tax reductions. The support of the CBI has been further bolstered by last week's National Institute report. It said that tax cuts would have

"a paltry effect upon registered unemployment"

for what spending power is made available through tax cuts is either saved or frittered away upon imports.

Registered unemployment is expected to stay at 3 million well into the last quarter of this decade, the pace of growth for this year falls to just over half of that during the previous year and most economic experts tell us that by 1987 there will be an adverse trade balance, including oil balances. The Government are being deaf to much of their own hitherto loyal supporters, as the latter press for more spending on roads and infrastructure—that is what we heard from the hon. Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Sir R. Gower)—with warnings that frugality in this sector will lead to an even more helpless position in hard-pressed regions such as Wales and particularly the more inaccessible parts of Wales.

There is much to commend in a building improvement programme primarily aimed at finding work for the long-term unemployed young who are itching to work. The Select Committee on Employment feels that a scheme could reduce unemployment totals by over 300,000 over the first two years of its implementation. Such urban regeneration and the tackling of substandard housing provision would be of particular benefit to Wales because our valleys have long been left stranded by such neglect of a basic human provision.

Government policy, as exemplified by years that do not immediately precede an election, make no inroads. Such cynicism will linger long in the minds of the electorate, but I do not propose to give such a list of Tory marginal seats as the hon. Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones) gave of Labour marginal seats.

The Government's complacent inaction, as the teachers' industrial action continues to damage the prospects of thousands of children, has been lamentable. The more caring and informed Government supporters such as the right hon. and learned Member for Warrington, South (Mr. Carlisle), the previous Secretary of State for Education and Science, have pleaded for the setting up of a review body prepared to take full recognition of the position of teachers compared to similar and allied professions. Teachers, irrespective of union representation, feel that their training, qualifications and responsibilities are far from adequately remunerated and that their contribution has been taken for granted.

We have listened in this Chamber to teachers being accused of the worst form of hypocrisy and of aggressive self-interest, but the Secretary of State concedes that many teachers will leave because of poor wages and conditions

[Dr. Roger Thomas]

and that many potential teachers of high calibre quit prematurely during training because their future in the profession is so bleak and will be so deeply unappreciated.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State said that spending on education in Wales is at a standstill and that, with falling school rolls, this should mean, arithmetically, that greater provision can be made for each child. However, this is a false argument. No allowance is being made for providing greater choice and catering for more variable and diverse interests, let alone contending with more widespread parental expectations. Comparative education costs should not be confined to years gone by, or even, for that matter, to years ahead. Comparisons should be made with the amounts being spent by our main industrial and technological rivals. During the last six years, our efforts have failed lamentably.

In his wind-up speech last year during the debate on Welsh affairs the Under-Secretary of State for Wales said that the National Health Service was advancing on a broad and variable front, yet it is remarkable how few people express complete satisfaction with it, particularly when there are problems over admitting the elderly to hospital and when the social reasons for such admissions outweigh the medical reasons. There appears to be general unease about the frequency with which expert opinion and subsequent treatment has to be sought outside Wales.

The National Health Service was debated recently in the Welsh Grand Committee, but I make no apology for discussing it in this debate. To quote annual increases over the rate of inflation and increases in staff and increased out-patient attendances can be a very unsatisfactory and deceitful method of assessing advancement. Patient expectations may be difficult to quantify, but whatever area of medical activity one studies, investigations and treatment appear to be in greater demand as facilities become more widely available.

I shall quote one example. The costly medical advance of five or six years ago soon becomes regarded as old-fashioned and second best when the general public realise that something better is available elsewhere. The clever, sophisticated, and technically expert removal of fluid from around the developing baby in order to detect foetal abnormalities which meant that desquamated cells could be examined for chromosomal and other biochemical abnormalities was costly from the standpoint of training surgeons and pathologists.

However, it is now possible to obtain a specimen of the placental cells. Therefore, what appeared five or six years ago to be a remarkable advance has lost its technical glamour now that this new and even more costly method of examination has taken over. The latter technique is infinitely more costly, but the community demands that this technique should be provided. Abnormalities in developing babies can now be detected not at 19 weeks but at 10 weeks. This is a great advantage in case management, but it accounts for the escalating costs of the National Health Service. That is why a 2, 3 or 4 per cent. increase means that the NHS is merely standing still.

Similar examples can be found throughout the NHS. I have quoted only one example out of 30, 40 or 50 examples. When the additional costs are considered, a purely mathematical basis of year-to-year expenditure or year-to-year staff availability — as happened in the remarkably bland and anodyne Conservative party broadcast last week—completely loses its relevance.

Mr. Raffan: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Thomas: No, I have only one minute left.

We cannot afford to ignore the warnings of such bodies as the Alliance for Science of the effects of under-funding projects undertaken by such bodies as the Medical Research Council. That has led to a serious loss of expert staff and to the closure of units essential to our medical research capability.

Conservative Members may approve and even revel in privatisation, but the community as a whole suffers when Treasury frugality causes a shortfall in the public funding of medical research, with resultant over-emphasis on private funding which ignores the less important and more mundane sectors of research such as preventive medicine. The people of Wales know that the Health Service is not safe in the Government's hands.

9.40 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Wyn Roberts): I am glad that the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) and other Opposition Members in their various ways have welcomed the concept of the valleys initiative launched by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State today. The hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) was particularly constructive, and we shall carefully consider his helpful suggestions. The hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) was also most constructive, and I apologise for not having been in the Chamber to hear her speech.

It was entirely predictable that some hon. Members would complain about the level of resources allocated to the initiative. To them, I make two points. First, proposals are to come forward by the end of June and work on approved projects will not begin until the autumn. The additional £3 million initially being made available in 1986-87 is in respect of anticipated expenditure in six months only. The level of additional resources in future years will reflect the quality of the projects which come forward.

Secondly, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made clear, this is a pump-priming exercise aimed at triggering investment by the private and voluntary sectors. Community investment means just that. Moreover, these resources are additional to what is already being spent. I do not think that that point has been fully appreciated.

We are looking to local communities to come forward with ideas, energy and resources. Experience in Cardiff, Swansea and elsewhere has shown what can be achieved through public sector support for revitalisation in projects involving a partnership between the public and private sectors. The initiative is an exciting challenge to the valley communities to join central Government in an environmental programme which will transform the appearance of valley towns, making them more attractive places in which to live, work and invest. The hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) missed the point entirely. It is by adding to the attractiveness of the valleys that one creates work in the valleys.

Concern about unemployment has been at the heart of today's debate. That so many of our fellow countrymen

and women are out of work in Wales is a most regrettable fact, and we all wish that it were otherwise. Nevertheless, there are some consolations. The remaining 82·3 per cent —the majority—are in work, and those in work have been doing well. As my hon. Friends the Members for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Grist) and for Ynys Môn (Mr. Best) pointed out, one of the basic problems in the past year has been that the rate of earnings is still rising faster than the rate of productivity. Those in work must understand that their high pay rises are keeping the unemployed out of work.

We are doing our utmost to increase the number of people in work, and we have had some success. The total number in civilian employment in Wales rose by 2·1 per cent. between 1983 and 1984 — from 1,028,000 to 1,050,000—mainly as a result of an increase in the number of self-employed and those working in the service industries.

Wales is part of the United Kingdom economy, and between 1983 and 1985 the United Kingdom economy topped the growth league of major EC countries, despite the coal strike. Over the previous decade it was bottom of the league. In 1985 the United Kingdom is expected to have been the fastest growing economy in the EC and to have grown faster than the United States.

The Government's policies will continue to be directed towards a sustained and sound economic expansion, founded upon an efficient and competitive economy and a viable and strong economic base. Those policies represent the only practical way forward for improvements in the prospects for industry and employment. They are backed by realistic and comprehensive measures designed to deal with the net causes of the problems affecting the economy — measures to contain inflation, encourage enterprise, industrial diversification and growth and large-scale programmes of training and measures to promote employment.

I have heard nothing in today's debate which persuades me that those policies are wrong or that other policies hold out better prospects for Wales. The best hopes for Wales still lie with those policies, and when the time comes the electorate will show its faith in them and in us, too.

Many Opposition Members put their faith in increased capital spending, except for the hon. Member for Caenarfon (Mr. Wigley) who took us back to the referendum on devolution, and we had a resurrection of that elephant on our doorstep in this Chamber. He pleaded for new ideas, but I was not aware that he offered a single one.

Let us be clear that capital spending is not necessarily labour-intensive, so it is not the easy cure for unemployment that the Labour party thinks. But let us look at the Government's record.

Mr. D. E. Thomas *rose*——

Mr. Roberts: Under the Government, gross capital expenditure within the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has averaged over £743 million a year at 1984-85 prices. That represents an increase of almost 6 per cent. in real terms over the average annual spend over the last two years of the previous Labour Administration.

Mr. D. E. Thomas *rose*——

Mr. Roberts: That was £703 million per annum.

On roads we have spent an average of £185 million, an increase of 24 per cent. in real terms over similar spending in the last two years of the Labour Government.

Mr. D. E. Thomas *rose*——

Mr. Roberts: For industry, the average spend runs at about £80·5 million, an increase of 13 per cent., and for health and personal social services the annual spend is more than £54 million, an increase of 9 per cent. over the previous Labour Government's spending.

We have heard a great deal about housing. There was a large underspend by local authorities in 1981-82 and 1982-83. The facts are well known and I have rehearsed them before in the House. But over the past two years, total gross housing capital expenditure has averaged almost £250 million at 1984-85 prices, an increase of 6 per cent. in real terms over the average of the last two years of the previous Labour Government. So who are they to lecture us on housing?

All in all, our gross capital expenditure has totalled more than £4,460 million in Wales over the six years to last March. That represents a massive level of investment by any standard. There is silence on the Opposition Benches.

Mr. D. E. Thomas *rose*——

Mr. Roberts: Do Labour Members suggest that they could have bettered that record? No, they do not.

Mr. D. E. Thomas *rose*——

Mr. Roberts: Although I have heard much in the debate about the need for even more spending than the Government propose—my hon. Friend the Member for Delyn (Mr. Raffan) outlined the Government's expenditure plans extremely well—no one has said a word about how much money is to be raised and only little about where it will come from. Is it to be borrowed, raised by taxation, or possibly both? My hon. Friends realise that there is some confusion in the upper crust of the Labour party on this issue. There is talk of using accumulated local authority receipts, which amount to about £250 million to £300 million in Wales and £5 billion in the country as a whole. That cannot be enough to do anything but send local councillors on a grand slam of a spending and borrowing spree.

The source of the £24 billion, which was added to by the hon. Member for Carmarthen (Dr. Thomas), that the Labour party is dreaming of for Britain as a whole is taxation.

Mr. D. E. Thomas *rose*——

Mr. Roberts: No, I cannot give way to the hon. Gentleman.

The source of the £24 billion that the Labour party has in mind was referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, Central in a powerful speech and by my hon. Friends the Members for Delyn and for Cardiff, West (Mr. Terlezki). I do not expect Labour Members to be able to say what part of that sum is attributable to Wales. Some tax boffin — probably the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley)—said that it could be creamed off those earning £30,000 a year or more. When it was pointed out that the yield would not be enough, the Leader of the Opposition lowered his sights to those earning £20,000 a year, and that would produce £3 billion.

Mr. Ron Davies: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for the Minister to present to the House exactly the same speech that has been made by five of his Back-Bench colleagues this evening? Is this not an abuse of the procedures of the House?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is a point of argument, not a point of order for me.

Mr. D. E. Thomas: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I ask you to rule whether the Minister's speech amounts to tedious repetition of the speeches of Conservative Back Benchers.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The Minister is in order.

Mr. Roberts: I know that Opposition Members do not like to hear about the £24 billion that would be expended by a Labour Government. That goes for the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Thomas) as well.

Mr. D. E. Thomas *rose*——

Mr. Roberts: As I understand it, a Labour Government's purpose in spending that sum would be to boost employment. I must tell the Labour party that it would produce only a temporary boost. At the same time, it would destroy incentives to earn. In the longer term, jobs would be dissipated as inflation and interest rates rose. The truth is that a massive reflation would destroy jobs.

The hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside is prone to present the gloomier side of life in some of my hon. Friends' constituencies, especially that of my hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn, of which he seems to be especially fond. Let me picture for the hon. Gentleman the brighter side of life in his constituency. Since May 1979, the Welsh Development Agency has completed 77 factory units in the district. There is another 50,000 sq ft factory under construction. Currently six units are vacant and available for letting.

During 1984, 15 units were allocated to firms forecasting about 360 jobs. In 1985, seven units were allocated with a promise of 120 jobs. So it is not all gloom and doom, even on Alyn and Deeside. Obviously, it is not the same dawn as we have in Delyn, so wonderfully described by my hon. Friend the Member for Delyn.

The hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside referred to the recent report of the Select Committee on Employment. He suggested that the Government should spend £165 million in the next three years in Wales and that this should provide work for 37,500 people. We are considering the Select Committee's report. However, we must be careful in talking about expanding programmes that we do not take jobs away from those already in employment.

Mr. Ray Powell: Ha, ha.

Mr. Roberts: Projects under the community programme must provide work that would not otherwise be undertaken. I do not think that the union friends of the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) would like his laughter about the community programme taking jobs away from people. We must be extremely careful. The last thing anyone wants are schemes, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Paymaster General and Minister for Employment put it, of the lamp post counting kind. These are not of benefit to the community, nor do they provide any kind of satisfying work for the unemployed.

Mr. Rowlands: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Roberts: I have many points to answer.

The right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) has referred more than once to the two-year youth training scheme. The transitional funding arrangements for the two-year YTS are to be reviewed later this year. The Manpower Services Commission is confident that there will be enough places available for this year's school leavers. Indeed, a large number of providers showed a willingness to take up additional places had Mid Glamorgan county council reduced its YTS commitment.

The hon. Members for Alyn and Deeside and for Gower (Mr. Wardell) referred to the plight of the elderly in this severely cold weather. There were two speeches on the subject. The supplementary benefits scheme provides for extra help for claimants in periods of exceptionally severe weather when heating bills are higher than they have budgeted for. The DHSS has written to each of its regions emphasising that the severe weather payments should be given priority and that all appropriate steps should be taken urgently to publicise the arrangements to provide advice to all who need it. Supplementary benefit heating additions amounted to £400 million in the last financial year—about £140 million more in real terms than was spent in the last year of the Labour Government.

I assure my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Sir R. Gower) that the Government are committed to ensuring first-class crossing facilities of the River Severn. The fact that we have commissioned a study into a possible second crossing is proof of that commitment, and it is nonsense to suggest otherwise. Work on strengthening the existing bridge is well under way. There is no reason to doubt that, when these works are completed, the crossing will be capable of operating at its full capacity.

It is clear from the debate that Wales needs firm Conservative government and strong leadership now more than ever. Britain's needs are the same. In the past few weeks, we have seen the Socialist alternatives preening themselves for office and the alliance parties grooming themselves for a supporting role. Most of us have recoiled at the prospect. Such a Government would be abysmally weak and indecisive and would quickly succumb to pressures. Inflation would flare up, wiping out the value of people's savings and making our industries uncompetitive. All the gains made during the years of Conservative rule would be lost and the chance, which we still have, of creating worth while and lasting jobs would disappear. The closer one looks at the Socialist-alliance alternative, the more determined we become that it should never become a reality. We on the Conservative Benches all share that determination and shall fight to win people's hearts and minds to our cause. This Government have a clear view——

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed without Question put.

European Social Fund

10 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Ian Lang): I beg to move,

That this House takes note of European Community Documents Nos. 7711/85, a Commission Decision on guidelines for the management of the European Social Fund in the financial years 1986 to 1988; 9901/85, a Commission proposal to amend Council decision 83/516/EEC and Regulation (EEC) No. 2850/83 on the tasks of the European Social Fund, in view of the accession of Spain and Portugal; and 9854/85, Thirteenth Report from the Commission on the activities of the European Social Fund (financial year 1984), and welcomes the contribution to employment and training schemes made by the European Social Fund.

I should like to begin by thanking the members of the Select Committee on European Legislation for having provided us with the opportunity to debate the activities of the European Social Fund. The last time its activities were debated at length in this House was in 1983, and we should clearly have been remiss had we allowed much more time to elapse before we debated the fund again.

We shall, of course, want to consider during the debate the specific Commission documents set out in the motion before the House, which cover the fund guidelines for 1986 to 1988; the amending regulation following the accession of Spain and Portugal; and the Commission's own annual report on the fund's activities in 1984.

Before doing so, however, it would perhaps be as well to remind ourselves why the fund is in existence and what its objectives are. It was established in 1957 under article 123 of the treaty of Rome, which defined its main purposes as:

"to improve the employment opportunities for workers in the Common Market and to contribute thereby to raising the standard of living . . . by rendering the employment of workers easier and . . . increasing their geographical and occupational mobility."

The fund is thus essentially concerned with employment and training measures and provides financial support for schemes to help people who are unemployed, threatened with unemployment or under-employed.

There can be little doubt that those activities can never have been more relevant than they are today. In our debates in the House there is often a tendency to believe that unemployment is a uniquely British phenomenon. In fact, if we look — as we must tonight — at the Community as a whole, we see that it is a problem that besets the entire Community. Unemployment in the member states has risen from 2·4 per cent. in 1973 to 11 per cent. today. Indeed, since 1980, unemployment in the Community has doubled, reaching 13 million in 1985 — or 16 million if Spain and Portugal are included. Within these overall totals both youth and long-term unemployment have continued to increase. Between 1981 and 1983 long-term unemployment in the Community increased as a proportion of total unemployment from 25 to 39 per cent.

It is true that if we look at employment as opposed to unemployment we see a slightly more encouraging picture. In 1984 — the last year for which complete figures are available—there was an increase of 0·3 per cent. in total employment within the Community. In the United Kingdom in that year the increase in employment was 1·7 per cent. and our overall employment has continued to rise since then, as the House will be aware.

Mr. John Prescott (Kingston upon Hull, East): Does the Minister accept that in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, Britain's unemployment was always the average of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development European level? Since 1979 it has risen to about 2 per cent. above the average, which is equivalent to 1 million more people unemployed in this country due not solely to the world recession.

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman will have to bear in mind that the work force in Britain has been growing at a faster rate than in most European countries and the percentage of unemployment in the past four years has increased by less in the United Kingdom than in France, Spain or Germany. It is also worth pointing out that the United Kingdom has 65 per cent. of its working age population in work. That is 7 per cent. above the OECD average.

Clearly, no fund can hope to solve the problem of unemployment in Europe. That problem has too many deep-seated causes for it to be capable of being removed simply by more spending—whether that spending be at Community or national level. The reality is that for too long all over Europe we forgot that jobs are created only when businesses produce goods and services that people want at prices they can afford. That in turn requires a stable economic framework in which both inflation and public expenditure are kept under sustained control, not least so that business can plan with confidence in the future. It also requires a concerted attempt to introduce greater competition; to encourage enterprise and remove unnecessary burdens; to reshape our education and training policies to ensure that they are relevant to tomorrow's world; and to work towards a more flexible labour market that encourages small firms, the self-employed, part-time and temporary work and the removal of outdated working practices. It is now very notable how those priorities are shaping the policies not just of the United Kingdom Government, but of the Community and the member states as a whole.

Within that overall framework, however, it is clearly necessary at the same time to take more direct action to remedy the immediate and pressing problems of unemployment. The European social fund is a major instrument to that end, and I should like, without the slightest hesitation or qualification, to express the Government's appreciation of the contribution that the fund has made for some years past to both Government and non-Government programmes of employment and training in this country.

Last year the United Kingdom's total allocation from the social fund was some £300 million — that is approaching 25 per cent. of the total funds allocated in that year.

Mr. Eric Forth (Mid-Worcestershire): Is my hon. Friend yet able to tell us what he estimates will be the impact on the United Kingdom's share of the social fund of the accession of Spain and Portugal to the Community? He may recall that during the debate on the accession no one was able to give an estimate of that impact. Is my hon. Friend now able to tell us how he believes our share of the social fund will be affected by the entry of the new members?

Mr. Lang: There is no doubt that our share is likely to decline, not just because of the entry of Spain and

[Mr. Lang]

Portugal, but because several other countries are making increasing applications to the fund. However, the fact remains that we have derived substantial benefit out of proportion to our contribution to the Community over the past few years, and we continue to do so.

The United Kingdom is thus among the leading beneficiaries of the fund, and it is one of the most clearest and tangible benefits of our membership of the Community.

Among the major programmes to which the fund made a substantial contribution last year were the youth training scheme, the training opportunities scheme, the community industry scheme and training programmes for the disabled and for women. As from this year, as a result of decisions taken at last December's meeting of the Heads of Government of the Community, the fund will also be helping us to expand the enterprise allowance scheme—which, as the House will know, is proving enormously successful in encouraging the unemployed to set up new small businesses or to become self-employed.

At a different, but no less important, level, the social fund administration last year approved applications from the United Kingdom for support in respect of 1,500 projects being run by local authorities, charities, training institutions and private companies. There is no doubt that, without that support, the many programmes and projects in question would have had to be drastically curtailed and, in many cases, abandoned altogether.

So the importance of the fund to the United Kingdom is clear. It will be obvious from what I have said that the United Kingdom Government are naturally concerned that we should continue to secure the substantial benefit from the fund in the future that we have obtained from it in the past.

Of course, no situation is ever static, and the entry into the Community of Spain and Portugal — which we greatly welcome—means that there are now two more countries with major problems of unemployment bidding for the available funds. That is as it should be, for the fund is there to help alleviate problems of unemployment in all member states. Nevertheless, it is extremely important that the fund should continue to reflect the clear and undoubted needs of the older industrial areas of northern Europe alongside those of the Mediterranean regions when it comes to setting priorities for its future support.

I would also hope that the fund might be able to give a somewhat higher priority in future to the needs of the long-term unemployed. As I said, long-term unemployment in the Community — by which I mean those people who have been unemployed for over a year — has risen dramatically throughout the Community in recent years. In most member states of the Community it is now more than a third of total unemployment and in many it is closer to, or even above, 50 per cent. In the United Kingdom, some 40 per cent. of those unemployed have been without work for over a year. That is roughly in line with the Community average.

It is now, I think, generally accepted that the longer a person is unemployed the more difficult it becomes for him or her to get back into employment. That is why I should like to see a somewhat greater degree of priority given within the rules of the fund to support for measures in member states which are helping the long-term unemployed, whether through work experience, training or participation in work of benefit to the community.

As a Government, we should also like to see—as we have made known to the Commission—some redrawing of the priority areas boundaries which effectively set which areas of the United Kingdom are likely to benefit most from the fund. As with all decisions on boundaries, inevitably some arbitrary lines have to be drawn. There are, none the less, some clear anomalies, such as the exclusion of Powys and the Western Isles from the list of priority areas, which we should like to see the Commission look at again. We shall continue to urge the Commission to re-examine its present guidelines in this respect.

I turn now to the specific documents which the Select Committee has drawn to our attention. The first concerns the Commission guidelines for the management of the European social fund in the financial years 1986 to 1988. As the Committee noted in its report of 23 October last year, there is no doubting the importance of the activities which the fund supports which are in turn largely determined in any one year by the fund guidelines. The guidelines, adopted annually for a three-year programme, say which types of scheme will be given priority in different regions of the Community. I should make clear at the outset that they are adopted by the European Commission on its own responsibility, though the Commission naturally takes account of such views on the guidelines as member states may put forward.

Because of the heavy demands on the fund, the Commission proposed stricter limits on the types of scheme to be given priority in 1986. In slightly more detail, the guidelines gave priority to substantial training schemes involving at least 200 hours training. They also required training to contain an element of introduction to new technology, recognising the vital importance of this to people's future work prospects. Priority was also given to training in small firms adapting to new technology, and the existing priority for schemes for women, migrant workers and the disabled was reaffirmed.

The second Community document before the House contains the Commission's proposals for accommodating the needs of Spain and Portugal within the fund's budget following their entry into the Community. Before their entry, 40 per cent. of the fund was devoted to a number of regions within the Community judged to have special priority status. These included the whole of Greece and the Republic of Ireland, the mezzogiorno region of Italy and the whole of Northern Ireland. The Commission proposals were to extend these special priority areas to include the whole of Portugal and a number of regions of Spain. The Commission also proposed an eventual increase from 40 per cent. to 44·5 per cent. in the proportion of the fund allocated to these special priority areas.

At the December Social Affairs Council, which was attended for the United Kingdom by my right hon. Friend the Paymaster General and Minister for Employment, there was pressure from a number of countries to raise the percentage of the fund devoted to these areas to 50 per cent. While mindful of the needs of Northern Ireland, we were at the same time also conscious of the needs of the rest of the United Kingdom, and I am pleased to say that the eventual decision to raise the percentage of the fund to 44·5 per cent. but with immediate effect, was one which we judged to be a fair balance between the differing interests involved.

The third document before the House — the Commission's annual report for 1984—has inevitably become a little dated with the passage of time. This was the first year of operation of the fund after the 1983 review. It was a particularly good year for the United Kingdom, since we secured some 32 per cent. of the available commitments, and 38 per cent. of the payments made were to our schemes. We cannot expect to do so well every year, but the outline of the type of projects supported makes it clear that, as a nation, we are both imaginative and persistent in the variety and scope of the schemes we are putting forward to help the unemployed. The United Kingdom is very much in the lead on this aspect of Community policy, and we are pleased to see other countries following our example and getting support from the fund for similar programmes.

One statistic that emerges from the report is the increase in the applications to the fund—an increase of about 90 per cent. in 1984 compared with 1983—to a total of about 3,300. That figure rose again in 1985 to nearly 4,800 —a further increase of about 40 per cent. It is fair to say that the fact that this volume of applications is processed within the Commission by relatively few staff is a considerable compliment to those concerned in the Commission. At the same time—as they will know only too well—the continuing increase in applications has heightened some of the administrative problems associated with the fund's operation—not least the fairly long delays that can occur between applications and payments. These are matters which my Department continues to take up with its counterparts in the Commission with a view to identifying ways in which the administrative process might be made easier, and I hope that some useful changes may emerge as a result.

I hope that I have said enough to demonstrate the importance that the Government attach to the European social fund and to the clear benefits that it has brought to the United Kingdom. As well as leading to numerous local initiatives, it has helped us to mount at Government level several major programmes—such as YTS—which have much to offer not only within the United Kingdom but, by way of example, to the Community as a whole. At the same time, it is clear that the social fund, in attempting to ameliorate some of the worst problems of unemployment in the Community, has an especially valuable role to play as a positive expression of the Community's commitment to many of the less fortunate members of our society. Therefore, I welcome tonight's debate and I look forward to listening to the views of other hon. Members.

10.15 pm

Mr. John Evans (St. Helens, North): As the Minister said, it is almost three years since the House debated the European social fund. That shows that the Government do not wish to debate the many problems that exist in Britain and the rest of the European Community. The social fund was designed as part of the strategy to correct the regional imbalances of the EC. Originally, it was a two-pronged attack, with a regional fund to stimulate the growth of employment in the underdeveloped and depressed regions, and the social fund to assist with vocational training, and retraining for the young, the under-25s, the long-term unemployed — those who have been unemployed for more than 12 months — the disadvantaged, women, ethnic groups and the handicapped. No one denies that it was a fine principle—the idea of a Common Market in which the rich nations and regions would contribute to the well-being and welfare of the poorer nations and regions.

However, what has happened in practice? Has the gap between the richest and the poorest regions widened or narrowed? In 1975, when the European regional fund was established, the gap between the richest and the poorest regions could be measured on a ratio of 5:1. The poorer regions were five times poorer than the richer. In 1975, Britain had 1·25 million people unemployed and our trade in manufactured goods with the EC was roughly in balance. Since then, unemployment in Britain has trebled and the gap between the poorest and the richest regions has widened to a ratio of 7:1 or 8:1. The richer regions have become richer and the poorer regions, including much of Great Britain, have become poorer. Britain's deficit in manufactured goods with the EC has increased to an incredible and frightening £9 billion. That is a measure of what has happened to Britain since it became a member of the EC.

Mr. Forth: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the increasing disparity between richer and poorer regions is a fairly widespread phenomenon? For example, Athens is much richer than the rest of Greece, while Milan and Turin are much richer than the mezzogiorno in southern Italy. Is not the disparity a fairly constant phenomenon in every Community country? Therefore, does the hon. Gentleman agree that any Community wide attempt to reduce the disparities will run up against the fundamental laws and effects of economics?

Mr. Evans: That is the phenomenon of capitalism.

Mr. Forth: Yes, absolutely.

Mr. Evans: That is why the Labour party is opposed to the phenomenon of capitalism and to allowing capitalism to run rampant, so that the richest regions develop and grow rich whereas the poorer regions decline. The original concepts of the regional and social fund were to attempt to stem that tide. It has failed abysmally and later in my speech I shall give some of the reasons for that failure.

The backdrop to the debate is the massive growth of unemployment in the EEC. In the original 10 member states—we are now 12, of course, and we will discuss the accession of Spain and Portugal and its impact— there are more than 13 million people unemployed, 11·1 per cent. of the total work force in the original 10. With the advent of Spain and Portugal, the figure is over 16 million. I am sure the Minister will agree that one has to be cautious about the statistics issued by the various EEC countries. I have great difficulty in believing unemployment figures which tell me that the total in Greece is 5·8 per cent. whereas in the Netherlands the figure is 15·2 per cent. I suspect that the Dutch include everything in their unemployment statistics, whereas the Greeks are apparently measuring something else altogether.

Britain can hardly complain about figures and the way they are used, because the Government have repeatedly fiddled the unemployment figures and they are currently under-measuring the figure by about 750,000 people.

Mr. Colin Moynihan (Lewisham, East): Nonsense.

Mr. Evans: The hon. Gentleman says it is nonsense, but I wonder how he would describe the fiddles which the

[Mr. Evans]

Government have got up to over the past six years, the effects of which have been to under-measure unemployment by 750,000.

The amount of EEC money that is spent on the social fund is a relative pittance. It is also a pittance for the regional fund. According to the statement on the 1985 Community budget presented to the House in October 1985 by the Minister of State, Treasury, the payments for the social fund were £832 million and the expenditure on the regional fund was £950 million. That is the two-pronged attack on correcting the regional imbalances in the EEC — £832 million, when we have unemployment levels of over 13 million. It is hardly surprising that the social fund has had virtually no impact on ameliorating the problems of unemployment.

The figures and the categories that are covered by the remit of the social fund show that more than 5 million of the 13 million people were under 25 years of age. More than 4 million were classified as long-term unemployed —the very categories that the social fund was designed to do something about. As the Minister has pointed out —though not in the way that I would look at it—the applications for aid from the social fund far outweigh the funds available. In a debate of this nature it is always worth while to compare expenditure on the social fund to the expenditure under the common agricultural policy.

In 1985, the expenditure on the social fund was £832 million. The expenditure on the CAP was £12·148 billion. I put it to the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Forth) that that is one reason why the social and regional funds have had no impact on the distribution of wealth and prosperity in the EEC. The CAP has certainly succeeded in extending and expanding the wealth of the EEC but generally to relatively few pockets. The EEC spends 14½ times more money on growing food that nobody wants than on assisting and training the unemployed.

In that context, it is worth looking at the statement of the then Minister who is now the Prime Minister's PPS. Referring to the amount spent on the social fund as opposed to the CAP, he said:

"This situation provides further vindication—if any were necessary—of the Government's firm view that there should be a shift in Community spending away from agriculture and towards activities meeting other needs of high priority such as are covered by the regional and social funds." — [*Official Report*, 28 April 1983; Vol. 41, c. 1071.]

Those words mock today's unemployed, because there has not been a shift of a penny from the CAP towards either the social fund or the regional fund.

What of the future? From a British point of view it is somewhat bleak. Document 7711/85 gives the guidelines for the management of the social fund and document 9901/85 relates to the accession of Spain and Portugal. Document 7711/85 outlines three categories of regions or areas that will qualify for assistance under the social fund. The first relates to "absolute priority" areas. The second relates to the "industrial and sectoral restructuring" of certain areas, which mainly relate to areas in which there has been considerable rundown and redundancy in coal and steel, and these are assisted by the ECSC.

The third relates to

"areas of high and long-term unemployment".

In that context, about half of Britain qualifies. It is a depressing list of the areas that now qualify for assistance under the social fund—areas that have been decimated because of the Government's policies over the last six years. They are:

"Central, Cheshire, Cleveland, Clwyd, Cornwall, Derbyshire, Dumfries and Galloway, Durham, Dyfed, Fife, Greater Manchester, Gwent, Gwynedd, Hereford and Worcester, Highlands, Humberside, Isle of Wight, Lancashire, Lincolnshire, Lothian, Merseyside, Mid Glamorgan, Northumberland, Nottinghamshire, Salop, South Glamorgan, South Yorkshire, Staffordshire, Strathclyde, Tayside, Tyne and Wear, West Glamorgan, West Midlands, West Yorkshire; Workington (Cumbria), Coalville (Leicestershire), Corby (Northamptonshire)."

That is a measure of what has happened under this Government. Those once-prosperous areas now qualify for payments under the social fund.

But a different picture emerges from document 9901/85, which amends Council regulation No. 2950/83 on the tasks of the social fund. That document relates to the accession of Spain and Portugal. As we are all aware, these two largely impoverished Mediterranean countries have very high unemployment, and they have been added to the list of "absolute priority" areas. That applies to much of Spain and the whole of Portugal.

None of us would quarrel with that. Those areas have substantial problems, and in my view they will have a lot more now that they are in the Common Market. I welcome the advent of Spain and Portugal to the EEC. It just might help to bring the CAP crashing down around the ears of those who have benefited from it over a long period. That would be very good. If absolute priority areas are extended, that must be at the expense of other areas. The rate of assistance paid to absolute priority areas has been raised from 50 to 55 per cent. There has also been an accelerated rate of depreciation in the cost of training centres. The amount of assistance paid to projects that qualify under the social fund will be raised from 50 to 55 per cent. The amount available to the regions from the social fund will be increased from 40 per cent. to 42·5 per cent. in 1986, to 43·5 per cent. in 1987 and to 44·5 per cent. in 1988.

Mr. Forth: I am trying to follow the hon. Gentleman's logic. If his party supports Spain and Portugal's accession, which he says it does, and if his party believes in the redistribution of wealth to the less well-off, which I believe it does, will he support the redistribution of wealth from a country such as ours to Spain and Portugal? Does he agree that, with that very accession, the likelihood of reforming the CAP and reducing the share it takes of the EC budget becomes less likely? While welcoming the accession of Spain and Portugal, the hon. Gentleman and his party have reduced the opportunity to reform the CAP and reduced the take from the social fund for Britain.

Mr. Evans: I was a member of the European Assembly for three years and I have spent the past 12 years listening to stories about how we will reform the CAP. I have yet to see it happen, in spite of all the fine talk from a variety of sources. I said that the accession of Spain and Portugal might have the welcome side effect of bringing the CAP crashing down because of the contradictions that have been built into it.

If there were a substantial increase in the social fund, we would be able to meet the commitments which I assume that the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire wants to achieve as much as me. The Commission has stressed the importance of keeping the right balance

between relatively underdeveloped regions and those with serious unemployment. The words are fine, but where does the money come from to ensure that areas such as Spain, Portugal, Greece and the mezzogiorno receive help? It must come from areas such as St. Helens, which I represent, and Merseyside, although the problems there are growing almost weekly because of the Government's policies.

Page 36 of the 13th annual report tells us about applications under point C1 of the fund, which covers young people leaving full-time education. It says:

"In the case of the other regions in the Community, the United Kingdom obtained over 67 per cent. of approvals (61·84 per cent. overall) followed by France with 14·51 per cent. (14·21 per cent. overall). The Youth Training Scheme (YTS) accounted for the lion's share of United Kingdom approvals under point C1. Four applications presented by the Manpower Services Commission made up the entire amount requested (423·49 million ECU). Priority was accorded to three of these (232·97 million ECU and 309,000 beneficiaries) of which one bore the whole of the entire weighted reduction for the United Kingdom".

What impact will the reduction in the social fund moneys to Great Britain, flowing from the accession of Spain and Portugal, have on youth training scheme funding? Will the EEC provide less funding for it? Has the EEC responded to the new proposal for a two-year YTS? I understand that no agreements have been reached on funding from the Commission, but I would be grateful for information because it will affect the viability of the scheme as many employers are unhappy about signing people on for a two-year scheme.

Page 35 of the 13th annual report refers to certain types of practical training, such as that given by the Übungsfirmen or practice firms in the Federal Republic of Germany, or in the information technology centres, the ITECs, in the United Kingdom, which are regarded as work experience. I have an excellent ITEC in St. Helens, and I hope that the Minister can assure us that in future ITECs will get a fair share of whatever funds are available from the social fund.

I read a newspaper report about questions raised by a former colleague, Mrs. Barbara Castle, who for many years served in the House with such distinction. She asked at the European Assembly many questions about the social fund which require answers from the Government. Apparently, there was little response from the Commission. According to Mrs. Castle, the social fund is facing bankruptcy, and unless more money is allocated to it from member states, it cannot meet its commitments. There is considerable danger that the social fund will scrap assistance to such important groups as voluntary organisations that deal with the mentally and physically handicapped. Is there to be a supplementary budget? According to the report, a commissioner has said that that may be necessary. If there is a supplementary budget to ensure that the social fund has the correct amount of finance, what will the Government's attitude be? Even if that solves the crisis, will it not simply recur every year?

At present the common agricultural policy takes up 72 per cent. of the Community budget. Apparently, the CAP budget is growing remorselessly, and will grow even more because of the agricultural problems of Spain and Portugal. I have listened for 12 years to people saying that they would reform it, but it goes marching on. If we withdraw from the CAP, it will release hundreds of millions of pounds which we can spend on solving some of the problems in our regions relating to unemployment, training and retraining.

The vast majority of the British people can see no merit in spending so massively on crazy agricultural policies, while at the same time spending so little on employment and social policies which have merit and are worthwhile. The British people are right.

10.40 pm

Mr. Richard Livsey (Brecon and Radnor): We welcome the debate on the European social fund. It is an important subject, which addresses itself to the problems of managing a mixed economy. The Europeans have more faith in the running of a mixed economy than the Government, who have tended to follow monetarist lines and neglect the public sector. We must achieve a balance between the public and private sectors, and in the new fund there is bias towards public sector and small and medium-sized undertakings. That is a good mix for improving the economy not only of this but other European countries.

The objectives of equipping the work force and reducing regional imbalances in the labour market must be regarded as extremely important, and recruitment and wage subsidies are indicative of job creation. We know that geographical mobility is difficult to achieve, with many people not prepared to move from their communities. However, with services of advice and job creation, there are great opportunities within the European social fund to improve our economy.

As we have already heard, unemployment is a major problem that confronts us all, and particularly the hard-hit regions of Europe, not least those of Britain. In welcoming Spain and Portugal into the Community, we must not forget the problems in northern Europe. It is significant that the post of Commissioner for the social fund has been transferred from an Irishman to a Spaniard. This may have some influence on the policies operated in the social fund, which may concentrate more on the Mediterranean regions.

Mr. Forth: Is it not interesting to observe that Socialist Spain has an unemployment rate that has just gone up to 22 per cent.? One is left wondering what contribution a Spanish Commissioner, coming from a Socialist country with such a high level of unemployment, can make to improve the employment position in the community as a whole.

Mr. Livsey: Although Spain has such a high unemployment rate, it has suffered over many years from the ravages of dictatorship and Fascism. The accession of Spain will assist greatly in helping its stability and will create more co-operation in Europe and less likelihood of extremism in that country. I am not entirely convinced that Socialism will solve the problems—I agree with the hon. Gentleman there—but, none the less, it is a vast improvement that Spain is in the Community.

The authorities in the United Kingdom involved in the European social fund are the local authorities, the Welsh and Scottish Development Agencies, in my part of the world Mid-Wales Development and the MSC. It is interesting that, where the latter operates, there could be competition between the MSC and the local authorities where there is not enough agreement about the types of schemes that are adopted.

[Mr. Livsey]

However, it is worrying to note that some journalists who observe the scene believe—it can be seen from the figures—that there is an austerity drive in the European social fund and there may be a crisis in its funding, too.

It is believed that the new rules could hit Britain hardest. Concentration upon new technologies is very important, but in some of the poorer regions the new technologies have hardly blossomed. A very great effort is needed to introduce schemes of that type in those areas. The previous Commissioner, Commissioner Sutherland, said that the European social fund is ill-equipped and inadequate for achieving its objectives. More resources are required overall, yet the new guidelines are more restrictive.

About half of the United Kingdom is affected by European social fund aid. I ask the Government to give special priority status to regions other than Northern Ireland. Scotland, Wales and the north of England are areas of extreme deprivation. They should be included on the same basis as Northern Ireland. Since 1979 there has been an increase of 95,000 in the unemployment figures for Wales. In addition, together with Italy, Portugal and Spain, we are at the bottom of the incomes league.

Mr. Forth: And Greece.

Mr. Livsey: Yes, I take the hon. Gentleman's point. We are very poorly off, compared with the richer members of the European Community. Additional funding is needed. Efforts are being made to assist redundant workers through the urban aid programme. In-company training schemes are being provided in the textile industry. However, the old mining areas face a huge problem. Large numbers of miners have lost their jobs in the last 15 to 18 months. In south Wales alone during that period 6,000 miners have lost their jobs. I trust that the European social fund will be used to try to overcome some of the massive problems that have been created by these redundancies.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment referred to the fact that there are delays in receiving moneys that are due. This has caused some cash flow problems for firms that benefit from the European social fund. I make no excuse for mentioning my own area, Powys, which has been excluded from the European social fund. Reference has already been made to many of the areas that surround Powys. Powys is an island that does not receive aid from the European social fund. It is the only Level II region that has been excluded, even though it faces severe regional problems.

Phoney statistics have been used. Separate data were provided for the unemployment and gross domestic product figures. According to the Central Statistical Office, they were not officially available. In fact, they were not reliable. Powys and Dyfed were combined for GDP purposes. The result was that areas of south Powys were not included in the statistics, in particular those for unemployment. This has caused severe problems for Powys.

I hope that the Minister will look carefully at the problems faced by Powys. Since the last application in 1984, the Powys data show an increase in unemployment of 2·1 per cent. which means that unemployment in Powys is higher than the United Kingdom average. A study is being undertaken covering Dyfed, Gwynedd and Powys which might lead to integrated action under the European social fund for those areas. Wages in rural areas in Wales stand at 86·9 per cent. of the average wage for Wales as a whole. That is a very low figure in terms of British and European wage levels. That again underlines the need for special consideration to be given to Powys. It is a travesty that Powys and the poorer regions of Britain should not be included. They should undoubtedly have priority status.

10.49 pm

Mr. Don Dixon (Jarrow): My hon. Friend the Member for St. Helens, North (Mr. Evans) covered most of the points that I wished to raise, but I wish briefly to follow the comments of the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Livsey) about high priority areas.

It is disgraceful that the northern region is not a high priority area, as it has the highest unemployment in mainland Britain. I shall not give percentages because these are people who are unemployed. In Tyne and Wear 100,582 people are unemployed, of whom 46,000 have been unemployed for more than 12 months and 20,767 for more than three years. That is the extent of unemployment in my area under the Conservative Government, so goodness knows why it is not a high priority area for the European social fund. I hope that the Minister will put the northern region forward as a high priority area.

My hon. Friend the Member for St. Helens, North referred to the CAP. It is nonsense to compare the social fund with the CAP. Most male unemployment in Tyne and Wear is in heavy industry such as shipbuilding. Yet farmers are being paid to grow produce that no one wants. The Conservatives always complain about subsidies to the mining, steel and shipbuilding industries, but never about the huge subsidies to farmers under the CAP. It is like telling the Tyne's shipbuilders to build as many ships as they like because as soon as they get out of the Tyne we can scuttle them and build some more. That is how the CAP works for the farmers. That is the kind of nonsense that we get from the EEC. I hope that the Minister will deal with the points raised about that by my hon. Friend the Member for St. Helens, North and that he will take forward my plea that the northern region be a high priority area.

In Jarrow, one in three of the male population is out of work. The last ship repair yard closed two years ago, the last pit was closed more than three years ago and the last steel plant is being phased out this year. That is the level of unemployment faced in Jarrow this year, the 50th anniversary of the Jarrow march when 200 men marched to London to bring the problems of the regions to the notice of central Government. I do not like to use percentages, but I have to take this figure from the history books. At that time, unemployment in Jarrow was 79 per cent. Those 200 men marched to London not to get a crust of bread and a bowl of soup but for the right to work—the basic right of people in this country to go out and fend for their families and to have the dignity of a pay packet. It is a pity that we cannot get it through the thick skulls of Conservative Ministers that people want to work—they do not want to dodge it or run away from it. They want to do a useful day's work to fend for their families. That is what it is all about.

The Minister talked about training, but the Government closed the skillcentre at Killingworth, so there is now no skill centre north of the Tyne until one gets to Edinburgh. The Government say that we get more training under the

social fund, but a great deal of the social fund money that comes to this country is used to substitute for money that the Government are taking away from the regions.

I hope that the Minister will take on board the points that I have made in this brief contribution.

10.55 pm

Mr. Lang: I have listened with interest to the points made by hon. Members during this short debate. Whatever problems there may be, the House is, if I do not put too high a gloss on the remarks of the hon. Member for St. Helens, North (Mr. Evans), agreed on two things. The first is that the considerable support given by the European social fund to schemes of various kinds is valued and appreciated, and the second is that we must continue our efforts to secure support for those schemes in future.

We need to play our part in ensuring that the fund is an effective means of helping unemployed people throughout Europe. At the same time, no one can pretend that this type of support will solve all the problems that face us. It has a part to play but we will not help the unemployed by spending more than we can afford as a Community on such help. That is why it is vital to concentrate help where it is most needed. That is recognised within the Community but the problems arise when the hard choices have to be made.

The hon. Member for St. Helens, North agreed with the two priorities that I emphasised in my opening speech, that of youth unemployment—which is now falling in the United Kingdom—and that of the long-term unemployed. That, too, is an important priority which we have emphasised to the Commission. The hon. Gentleman will be aware of the many initiatives that we have recently introduced to try to help the long-term unemployed make their way back into work, particularly the Community programme and the introduction of the job start scheme.

The hon. Gentleman made the comparison between the money spent on the common agricultural policy and the social fund. We are working towards eliminating the costly surplus under the agricultural policy and we want to see a higher proportion of funds contributed to the social fund. However, if we had been in the Community earlier on in its formative years and had the support of the Labour party for membership at that time, we might have been in a better position to influence the development of the Community during those earlier crucial years.

It is churlish of the hon. Gentleman to underrate the importance of the European social fund which brings benefit to many hundred of thousands of people.

Mr. Evans: Will the hon. Gentleman accept that I did not underrate the importance of the European social fund? Will he accept that I have tried to get across that I would like to see the expenditure reversed and more being spent on the social fund than on the CAP?

Mr. Lang: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for making that clear.

The hon. Gentleman welcomed the entry of Spain and Portugal to the Community, but again I was sad that he did so in the hope of bringing the CAP crashing down. That is a somewhat negative approach to the matter. It might have been more appropriate to have welcomed the entry of those two countries, not just because they provide us with a larger market for our goods, but because we see the entry of two ancient European countries which are now two developing democracies and which deserve to be welcomed into the Community in their own right.

The hon. Gentleman asked about YTS funding following the entry of Spain and Portugal. The Commission has yet to make a decision on that or funding for other schemes for 1986. We expect that it will continue to get a good level of support in this, the first year of a two-year scheme. The support expected is taken into account in setting levels of funding for the scheme as a whole. At the same time, that does not mean that other small schemes such as information and technology centres cannot be funded. If a small scheme gets priority it will still be fully funded despite more of the budget as a whole going to Spain and Portugal.

The hon. Gentleman makes a fair point when he says that any increase in the proportion of spending going to the special priority areas will reduce the total proportion of the funds available to other areas but it is equally the case that within the special priority areas is the whole of Northern Ireland and we should acknowledge that the United Kingdom stands to benefit from both sectors of the fund.

I also took note of the special points made by the hon. Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon) in pleading the case of the north-east.

We have discussed tonight the current priorities of the fund as set out in the management guidelines, its record as shown in the latest annual report and the new demands which will come with the accession of Spain and Portugal. The decision on how to allocate the limited resources will not become any easier. The Commission has a difficult job in trying to balance all the interests concerned. We may not always agree with all of its decisions but we recognise the pressures and difficulties which it faces.

If we look at the fund's priorities it is clearly right that a large proportion should go to the worst-off areas both in terms of under-development and unemployment and structural change. It is right that some of the available resources should go to projects in the less hard-hit areas for the purpose of helping especially disadvantaged groups.

The hon. Member for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Livsey) suggested that more parts of the Community should be designated as special priority areas apart from Northern Ireland. I am sure he understands that that is a matter for the Commission. I would merely say that if there are too many special priorities, the benefit of being one and the advantages that ensue are diluted.

I am in complete agreement with the remarks of hon. Member for Brecon and Radnor about Powys. The 1983 gross domestic product and the unemployment figures at that time were the bases on which the Commission drew up its boundaries. I believe that they were wrong and that inadequate consideration was given to boundaries and some low-population areas. I assure the hon. Gentleman that the Government will continue to press the interests of Powys and those of the Western Isles. We believe that they deserve a better rating than that which the Commission has given them.

It is important that the fund should try to target support on measures that encourage change and growth rather than on the bolstering of inefficiency. We welcome the present emphasis on training for new technology and small firms. Tonight's debate has served to reinforce the view, which I expressed earlier, that there is scope for a higher degree of priority to be accorded within the fund to the long-term

[Mr. Lang]

unemployed, who represent throughout the Community an increasing proportion of the unemployed. The fund could do much to encourage the provision of programmes for them as it has encouraged programmes for the young unemployed.

We are pleased to have support from the fund for programmes such as the enterprise allowance scheme for those who are setting up on their own. Almost every other member state is following Britain's lead in this direction. Support from the Community has been a major factor in enabling us to develop these programmes on their current scale. I am sure that the same is true for many projects at local level.

The European social fund represents one of the most tangible and visible benefits to the United Kingdom of our Community membership. We shall continue to press on behalf of all hon. Members and those whom they represent, for efficient and adequate support from the fund for schemes to encourage employment. The issues which have been raised in this debate will help us to ensure that we do so effectively. Meanwhile, I hope that the House will agree to take note of the documents.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House takes note of European Community Documents Nos. 7711/85, a Commission Decision on guidelines for the management of the European Social Fund in the financial years 1986 to 1988; 9901/85, a Commission proposal to amend Council Decision 83/516/EEC and Regulation (EEC) No. 2850/83 on the tasks of the European Social Fund, in view of the accession of Spain and Portugal; and 9854/85, Thirteenth Report from the Commission on the activities of the European Social Fund (financial year 1984), and welcomes the contribution to employment and training schemes made by the European Social Fund.

Printing Dispute (Wapping)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Durant.]*

11.2 pm

Mr. Ron Leighton (Newham, North-East): For 28 years before coming to the House I worked as a printer on the *News of the World* and later on *The Sun* in Bouverie street. I am sponsored by the largest printing union, SOGAT '82.

Rupert Murdoch's callous and malevolent sacking of his entire work force of 5,500 without a penny of compensation or redundancy pay is an act of savagery unparalleled in British industrial relations. It is an affront to justice and ordinary human decency.

I shall begin with what the dispute is not about. It is not about new technology. That is something that the unions accept, and already operate on other newspapers. The truth is that in the Wapping machine room there is no new technology. The machinery there is secondhand. It is 16 years old and it has been in store. It is the same as that which was running in Bouverie street and Gray's Inn road. It is old letterpress machinery, with no facility for printing colour. The new technology in Wapping is in origination, in computerised photocomposition. This already exists and it is being worked with union agreement at the *Daily Mirror* and *The Mail on Sunday*. Let no one say that the unions are Luddite. Technology cannot excuse the barbarism that has occurred.

One of the most offensive aspects of this squalid story has been Murdoch's lies, the conspiracy of deceit, over months and years. One example is his cynical pretence of negotiating the transfer of staff to Wapping while all the time working deliberately and cold-bloodedly to eliminate the staff completely. One myth is that the company tried to negotiate for six years and could get nowhere. That is the opposite of the truth, as I shall show.

The staff at Gray's Inn road were not involved in negotiations because it was told that it was not going to Wapping. All the members of the clerical staff on all the newspapers were told that they were to stay put when the printing moved and that as a consequence they were not to be involved in the negotiations. The chapel and the department where I worked was the *News of the World* machine section. I have documents which show that what were called preliminary discussions were proposed by Mr. O'Neill for the company on 3 May 1983, when he invited chapel officials to tour the new building and then to fly to Finland to visit a modern printing plant. The management at that time gave clear, firm, categoric guarantees that there would be no compulsory redundancies.

On 2 January 1985, discussions had reached the stage where Mr. Britton could write the chapel a lengthy letter setting out all the areas of agreement and the company's proposals. He again reiterated:

"The company has given assurances that no regular employee need make himself available for voluntary redundancy."

These management proposals were accepted by a chapel meeting in January 1985.

On 12 January 1985, Mr. Isaacs, the father of the chapel, wrote, as he put it, "with pleasure" telling the management that relations appeared good. At the last meeting with the management, Mr. Isaacs stated that the chapel would

"accept all the constrictions laid down by management, and are prepared to move forthwith into Wapping to print the *News of the World*."

But all this was a blind; it was bogus; it was a cheat —for all along, behind the smokescreen of these phoney negotiations, Murdoch was advancing his secret strategy to provoke a dispute and sack the entire work force. All talks were broken off by the management in the spring of last year. The management said that Wapping would not be used for the *News of the World* or the *Sun* but for an entirely new title, *The London Post*. Despite the attempted secrecy and repeated denials, information leaked about people being bussed in from Southampton and about electricians doing production work. The talk of a new title was a further deception covering the final preparations for the production of the four Murdoch newspapers at Wapping and simultaneously throwing the entire work force into the street without a penny.

These 5,500 British workers, our fellow citizens, have been the victims of a disgraceful, cynical and carefully laid plot to deny them their basic entitlements under British law. The Government should explain whether they approve, whether this is the sort of industrial relations practice that they want to encourage. These thousands of people have in many cases given a lifetime of service to these publications, often predating Murdoch's ownership. They are not just statistics, but people, flesh and blood with lives, families, futures, hopes and feelings. Are they to be callously discarded and thrown without a moment's thought on to the dole queue?

By this brutal action, Murdoch saves more than £40 million, and possibly £60 million, in redundancy pay and gloats about it. But who picks up the tab? The answer is the taxpayer, in state benefits. So the Government are subsidising Murdoch's barbarism with millions of pounds. Are they happy about this? Do they approve? I hope that the Under-Secretary of State will tell us.

If Murdoch makes even bigger profits from his British operation by this shabby injustice — he told the *New York Times* that he expects a 75 per cent. increase in profits next year—what will he do with them? He will export them to America to finance his media empire there. Is this what the Government want to encourage and reward? Murdoch owns 95 newspapers worldwide, yet his four United Kingdom newspapers make more profits—some £50 million last year—than the rest put together. The thanks that the British staff got for producing those profits was the sack from an unscrupulous proprietor who has just sold out his citizenship to become Americanised so as to own more newspapers in America. A former British Conservative Prime Minister once described a business man as the "unacceptable face of capitalism". Is not Murdoch's the ugliest, most repellent, unacceptable face we have seen? Will the Government dissociate themselves from it, or endorse it?

Few would not now recognise that in Brenda Dean and Tony Dubbins the printing unions have two of the most reasonable, measured, temperate and realistic of leaders. They have leaned over backwards to reach an accommodation. The most far-reaching concessions were made to Murdoch to obtain union recognition: an unprecedented offer of no disputes without ballots; binding arbitration triggered by either party; a profitability, efficiency, productivity and job flexibility commitment; joint union comprehensive schemes; and fewer bargaining units—all this, plus direct input, both editorial and advertising. Let no one say that the unions were dinosaurs—not willing to change, to negotiate, to reach agreements taking on board new conditions and working practices. What more could the unions offer and still remain trade unions?

But Murdoch does not want, and is determined to destroy, free, independent unions. Instead he wants a single, tame, domesticated, client, yellow dog union, rather like the staff association at Government Communications Headquarters. He wants all industrial action, however minor, whatever the provocation, or circumstances, even at the end of disputes procedure and after a ballot, banned completely. He goes further than General Jaruzelski. He wants servitude. His lawyer's definition of industrial action includes refusing voluntary overtime and attending unauthorised meetings. For those offences, under the special form of legally binding agreement he wants, individual workers could be sued for damages and stripped of their homes and personal possessions. He deliberately and calculatedly laid down impossible conditions to engineer a strike.

A letter from the law firm of Farrar and Co. of 20 December 1985 to News International, advised on "the cheapest way" of

"dispensing with the present work force".

It explained:

"The idea is to catch as many employees in the net as possible."

It even advised:

"there may be some merit in having piles of dismissal letters at exit doors".

That was in case the industrial action was of short duration. They wanted to ensure that they caught everyone in time. The lawyers reminded the company:

"We talked of this some months ago".

In other words, they had been conspiring and planning it for a long time. Has anyone heard of anything more despicable and shameful in industrial relations? It is a form of industrial terror.

New technology should be welcomed by all. It should be a boon to all. Its introduction should be by negotiation, handled sensitively, in a humane way, especially for people who have given years of service. All sorts of calumnies have been spread about printers, even by the present Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, previously the Secretary of State for Employment. He alleged on the BBC television programme "Question Time" that he had personal experience 10 years ago of SOGAT Saturday night jobs at the *News of the World* being ballotted around the country and that they were paid £300 for one night. As I worked at the *News of the World* 10 years ago, I told him that he had grossly misled millions of people. I sent him evidence in writing which showed that pay for a long 14-hour Saturday night in 1979, seven years ago, including all the overtime, was around £50. Ten years ago it would have been considerably less. In other words, the Secretary of State, in his gross and crude exaggeration, was about 1000 per cent. wrong. I gave him that information in writing on 15 February, but I am still waiting for him to correct the falsehood and put the record straight.

Many of those sacked were women — clerks, telephonists, librarians, cleaners, sales staff and circulation representatives—by no means excessively paid, but all victims of the same brutal treatment. Will the Government stand up for them? We should not forget the journalists, or "journos" as Murdoch disparagingly calls

[Mr. Ron Leighton]

them, who were told, without consultation, to be bussed ignominiously behind the razor-wire fortifications at 24 hours notice, or be sacked. Those who honourably refused were dismissed with standard letters addressed "Dear Sir/ Madam". So much for press freedom and so much for the integrity and independence of the press. No wonder 108 journalists have left *The Times* since Murdoch took over.

We must all look at the grotesque operation of the law. If workers undertaking a strike after a ballot with an overwhelming majority can be dismissed, where is the right to strike? That could not happen in any other democratic country. Elsewhere, a contract of employment is suspended during a strike and reinstated afterwards. That must be rectified in this country.

What has been the effect of this Government's legislation? Within days of starting a lawful dispute following a ballot, SOGAT found itself snarled up and enmeshed in a dozen legal actions, its funds sequestrated, with a firm of chartered accountants controlling every penny the union owned. Was that the Government's intention? The union did not set out to break the law, ignore it, or be in contempt of it or to hide its funds. The union has been open and honest in its attitude. However, the law is geared to make it impossible for British workers to engage in a dispute and not be ensnared by it. Many hon. Members voted to restrict union activity, not to abolish it, but that is what has happened.

The legislation stopping secondary action was supposed to protect innocent third parties. Action was restricted to the workers' own employer and the employer's immediate first supplier or customer, but who is the employer if Murdoch sets up a maze of fictitious and allegedly independent companies? If former employees of Times Newspapers, or News Group newspapers knock on the door at Wapping where those newspapers are now printed, they find that the employer has disappeared and now calls himself something different. He calls himself London Post (Printers). It would be secondary action. Is that what was intended? The wholesaler would be the first customer, but not when Murdoch sets up a company between the papers and the wholesaler. Then any action becomes secondary.

To implement this chicanery, Murdoch set up six separate companies in the year before the dispute. Murdoch has exploited, twisted and manipulated the new laws to render trade union or collective action legally impossible. That cynical spectacle is causing a groundswell of public opinion against him. Even his own Wapping-produced *Sunday Times* of 16 February talked of

"the legal ring-fence that now forbids or cripples many traditional forms of industrial action."

The paper quoted Eddie Shah as saying that the dispute is being "suffocated by the law." Murdoch's own paper actually goes on to say:

"There is little doubt that so far in this dispute the law has operated almost entirely to corral and circumscribe the unions, to a point where some are wondering whether the balance of worker-employer power may have shifted too far."

An editorial in *The Guardian* talked of the

"shock on learning that 6,000 well-paid jobs can be junked overnight, without warning and without compensation or redundancy pay."

The trade paper, *Printing World*, talked in an editorial on 19 February of

"the unfairness of the position. Mr. Murdoch may well be congratulating his lawyers on the subtlety of their machinations, but others are aware that the employment laws are being twisted . . . For a company to divide itself into associated companies solely as a means of invoking the law against secondary picketing is a cynical manoeuvre. If that is the law then the law needs to be changed."

Do the Government agree with that? Will they now change those unjust laws? Does the right to withdraw labour still exist in Britain? Do workers have any rights at all?

The Labour party is clear about those anti-union laws. It will scrap the lot and start afresh, with workers' rights. But the existing laws are the Government's. Theirs is the responsibility. Are they prepared to restore some balance, fairness and justice? Will they give an assurance that they do not have yet another anti-union Bill coming along? The present laws not only permit, they positively incite, injustice, strife, division and bitterness and situations such as Wapping. Is that the Government's idea of "caring capitalism"?

What the House and the country will want to hear tonight is what the Government are going to do to promote a settlement. For the staff and the unions are not going to go away. The dispute and the picketing will continue until there is a settlement. A settlement can come about only by negotiation.

The electricians and the journalists at Wapping still have to live in the community. They will not want to work in those appalling conditions for ever. Already they are complaining to management. Engineers have refused to maintain the machines. The London press branch of the Electrical, Electronic, Telecommunications, and Plumbing Union who staff the Fleet street papers were not consulted or balloted. On 29 January this year they sent a resolution of protest to their union. The present situation with its unfairness, hardship and confrontation cannot endure for ever. There must be a resolution. I ask finally: will the Government use their influence to get the parties together, and encourage proper negotiations to end this evil situation?

11.19 pm

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney) *rose——*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Does the right hon. Gentleman have the consent of both the Minister and the hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton) to speak?

Mr. Shore: Yes, Sir.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton) for raising this scandalous matter in the House and giving me the opportunity to say a few words about it.

It is utterly deplorable that 5,500 print workers, men and women, should have been sacked by Mr. Murdoch. It is even worse that the circumstances should have been deliberately engineered so that they forfeited their redundancy pay and that their pension rights should have been put at risk.

It is a disgrace that the journalists employed on News International papers are compelled to work in an industrial complex surrounded by razor wire and security guards.

It is equally unacceptable, though so far little noticed, that the more than 3,000 people who live in Wapping—which I represent—should have their lives increasingly disrupted by a dispute in which they are not engaged and which they cannot influence. That disruption is happening in two principal ways.

First, convoys of heavy lorries leaving News International, escorted by police cars—sometimes with their sirens blaring—are being diverted away from the Highway, which is the natural route, and taken on a circuitous route through narrow streets in the heart of residential Wapping.

The noise of these heavy vehicles, the grinding of gears as they change down, and the speed with which they are driven, are a major disturbance and source of danger for the people who live in Wapping. That continues from mid-evening until well into the early hours of the morning. Minor accidents have already occured and more serious ones have been avoided by a whisker. The worst incident yet happened in Thomas More street on Saturday night, 1 March when a TNT lorry driver drove straight at a group of local people and demonstrating print workers. The road was very icy and slippery and the driver hit Mr. Tony Flint, a sacked switchboard worker, on the site and he was knocked unconcious and had to be taken to hospital.

My second point is that Wapping is being turned, for several days of the week, into a prison for the people who live there. It is now the most heavily policed area in the United Kingdom. People are constantly being stopped and questioned and asked for proof of identity when on foot. Residents driving home have had their cars turned back. That is a gross interference with the normal and lawful rights of free access to one's own home in one's own community. I have had many protests by letter and telephone from constituents and from such collective bodies as the Wapping tenants association, the Wapping parent action group and the trades council.

Clearly, no complete remedy will be found to these problems until the dispute is resolved. These are powerful and additional reasons why the Minister should abandon the "hands-off" and passive stance of his Department and lend his weight to securing an early and negotiated settlement.

11.23 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. David Trippier): I am grateful to the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) for giving me notice that he wished to intervene in the debate. I shall certainly consider the two specific points that he has drawn to my attention and if necessary I shall draw them to the attention of my colleagues in the Government.

I can tell the hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton) that we all want to see a swift and peaceful solution to this dispute. I am not here this evening to give advice either to News International or to the print unions about how they should conduct their business. I am certainly not here to talk about personalities. I must challenge the assertions made by the hon. Member for Newham, North-East about the fairness of the laws that the Government have introduced on industrial relations and I make no apologies for speaking about the law for which my Department is responsible.

Let me briefly remind the House what was left by the Labour Government when we came to power in 1979, as the changes that were subsequently made have a direct bearing on the dispute at Wapping. In 1979, trade union officials had immunity for the organisation of all sorts of excessive forms of industrial action, such as for example, indiscriminate secondary action, strikes—mainly about political matters—picketing at other people's places of work and secondary action to enforce the closed shop. In 1979, trade unions had almost complete immunity from legal action to recover the cost of the damage they had caused and at that time union balloting practices included balloting at inconvenient branch meetings and indirect block voting systems for union elections and strike votes by a show of hands at mass meetings.

The aim of the legislation that we have introduced step by step since 1979 has been to redress the balance of power in industrial relations, which had been shifted greatly in the unions' favour by the legislation of the Labour Government. Not even the hon. Member for Newham, North-East could deny that. We have given employers legal remedies against unreasonable action taken by trade unions in several situations. First, there must be a trade dispute between employees and their employer which is wholly or mainly about industrial matters. That means that unions can no longer organise political protests, which can greatly damage employers who have no control over the issues involved.

For all industrial action organised by a union, we have made immunity conditional on the holding of a properly conducted secret ballot in which the majority of those voting must say that they wish to take part in the action. It is important to stress that every person asked to go on strike must be given the chance to vote, and that is especially relevant to Wapping. They must be reminded that, by taking industrial action, they will be breaching their contract of employment that by taking strike or other industrial action, they are putting their jobs at risk. That is what our law requires, and that is again especially relevant to Wapping.

We have also limited the circumstances in which employees may take lawful secondary action. Where secondary action interferes with the performance of commercial contracts, or threatens to do so, its organisers must satisfy——

Mr. Leighton *rose*——

Mr. Trippier: The hon. Gentleman has already had a fair crack at the debate, and I agreed to allow the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney to intervene, so I have been left with only a short time in which to answer the debate.

If the secondary action is indiscriminate in its effects — for example, if its main effect is to disrupt the business of employers not involved in the dispute—its organisers have no immunity. The requirement, which is now most familiar, is that secondary action should take place at a customer or supplier who has a commercial contract with the employer in dispute, and be aimed at the supply of goods or services between them.

There are special provisions to cover the case where, because of a dispute, the employer in dispute transfers work normally done by his employees to an associated employer such as a subsidiary company. We did not, as some urged at the time, and some people seem to think now, outlaw all action in those circumstances. A reading of section 17 of the Employment Act 1980 will show that we gave unions the right to take action against any associated employer to whom work is transferred because of the dispute.

However, immunity for secondary action is subject to further conditions. Inducement to break a contract of employment has no immunity if it interferes with the

[Mr. Trippier]

supply of goods or services and the reason, or one of the reasons, for the industrial action is that the supplier does not recognise, negotiate with or consult trade unions or union officials, or because he employs members of a certain union or non-union members.

Mr. John Prescott (Kingston upon Hull, East): Another management brief, just as in the Silentnight debate.

Mr. Trippier: The hon. Gentleman would be amazed. I wrote most of it myself.

The law on picketing is also important. Where pickets interfere with the ability of employers to fulfil their commercial contracts, they and their organisers normally have immunity from civil law proceedings only if the picketing is at or near the pickets' place of work and the purpose of the picketing is peacefully to obtain or communicate information or peacefully to persuade a person to work or not to work.

Mr. Prescott: What about Murdoch?

Mr. Trippier: I have to tell the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) that daubing cars with paint is not peaceful persuasion by anyone's standards.

It is important to remember that picketing which is not peaceful and which, for example, leads to violent or abusive behaviour, intimidation or obstruction of the highway, is likely to involve offences under the criminal law. There is no immunity for people who commit such offences while taking industrial action, and they may be arrested and prosecuted by the police.

All this means is that the industrial relations scene to which the hon. Gentleman refers is light years away from the one that we inherited. I am pleased to admit that the number of strikes is at a post-war low and that the number of days lost shows a substantial decline.

Mr. Leighton: What about Murdoch?

Mr. Trippier: I said at the beginning of the debate that I would not refer to personalities.

This decline has been made possible partly by our laws, but our laws alone cannot take all the credit. They would not have succeeded if they had not reflected and kept pace with the views of ordinary working people. Ordinary working people do not want to be called out on strike without first being asked for their views, and that means not just a car park show of hands but a properly conducted secret ballot. Ordinary working people do not want to be dragged into somebody else's dispute.

I do not want to go back over old ground, but I think that the Labour party suffers from a peculiarly short memory. They were, after all, swept from power in revulsion against the wholesale spread of secondary action and secondary picketing that gripped the country in the winter of 1978. Our aim has been to see that never again will there be such wholesale damage done to employers, trade unionists, non-union members and the community at large by the spread of someone else's quarrel.

We have done all that we can to open the doors of new technology. The hon. Member for Newham, North-East said that that was not relevant, but I think that it is extremely relevant. So often in the past secondary action and mass picketing with its bully-boy tactics have been used to stop the implementation of new production techniques.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): What about Murdoch's bully boys.

Mr. Trippier: Standing out against new technology does not preserve jobs, it destroys them. Of course, not all the jobs that disappear in this way in the United Kingdom are lost for ever. Many of them are alive and well and living in our competitor countries, where there has been a longer tradition of shared objectives between management and work force. I have said before that I do not work to advise either of the parties in this dispute——

Mr. Prescott: What about Murdoch?

Mr. Trippier: I do not wish to get involved with personalities, as the hon. Member for Newham, North-East has sought to do, by referring in emotive language to one individual.

I want to end simply by noting that a new realism is developing in other industries and indeed, thanks to Mr. Eddie Shah, elsewhere in the printing industry. I hope that that realism will one day take root in Fleet street.

11.32 pm

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): I think that the Minister has disgraced himself tonight. He was asked important questions about Murdoch by my hon. Friends and he has not had the guts to reply to them or to state where he stands on Murdoch's role in this affair.

The Question having been proposed after Ten o'clock on Monday evening and the debate having continued for half an hour, Mr. Deputy Speaker *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at twenty-eight minutes to Twelve o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 4 March 1986

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

GREATER LONDON COUNCIL (GENERAL POWERS) BILL
Lords amendments agreed to.

Oral Answers to Questions

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

YTS

1. **Mr. Michie** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement about the relationship of Her Majesty's Inspectorate to the YTS Inspectorate being established within the Manpower Services Commission.

The Minister of State, Department of Education and Science (Mr. Chris Patten): The two organisations will be entirely separate. Contacts between them will develop as the pattern of work of the training standards advisory service becomes established. I am confident that the present constructive relationship between Her Majesty's Inspectorate and the Manpower Services Commission will continue.

Mr. Michie: Is the Minister aware that there is growing concern in education and training circles that a separate and distinctive inspectorate is likely to encourage further division between the two rather than what we all wish, which is much more co-operation. It also compounds suspicion that there is likely to be a difference in standards between education and the YTS.

Mr. Patten: Those suspicions are not well founded. Obviously there is some overlap between the functions of the two bodies, and there is a considerable need for liaison. I do not think it should be impossible to achieve that greater liaison.

Mr. Sheerman: The Minister, in one of his illustrious speeches, called for education and training to be part of the same thing — learning. Why, then, are the Government to set up a new kind of inspectorate that is different and does not talk on an intimate basis to the other and is not part of the same body? Why can we not have one inspectorate for all kinds of educational training?

Mr. Patten: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman reads my speeches. I do not think that it should be impossible to secure greater liaison. I think that there is a slight difference between on-the-job and off-the-job training. It is appropriate that there should be different bodies.

2. **Mr. Hoyle** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what recent representations he has received on the educational content of YTS.

Mr. Chris Patten: My right hon. Friend has received no recent representations on this aspect of YTS.

Mr. Hoyle: Does the Minister not realise that there is only 20 weeks off-the-job training on a two-year YTS course, as against the 26 weeks recommended by educationists and, indeed, the MSC model schemes? Does he agree that the lack of educational content makes a nonsense of the so-called quality training that he is seeking to achieve? It would be impossible to achieve.

Mr. Patten: No. The figure of 20 weeks off-the-job education and training agreed by the MSC for the two-year YTS is a minimum requirement. Longer periods will be encouraged when these are suggested by the trainee's needs when a vocational course is pursued.

Mr. Lawler: Unlike my hon. Friend, I do not have a brief to read from. Will he say whether the certificate of pre-vocational education will be widely available to YTS trainees during their two-year scheme?

Mr. Patten: We hope to develop CPVE in that way. I think I am right in saying that so far about 15,000 students in about 1,000 institutions are on the CPVE course. That is a good start and I hope to see better achievements next year.

Mr. Sheerman: The Minister's answer was rather complacent. Is it not a fact that the model scheme which the MSC pioneered had a 26-week off-the-job educational content? That was an important part. Is it not worrying that we read in the papers this morning that the only young member of the Youth Training Board is considering resigning because he is worried about the whole provision and the quality of YTS, and about whether there will be a guarantee that what a YTS trainee is promised is delivered by the employer?

Mr. Patten: I do not acccept what the hon. Gentleman has said. The intention of the two-year YTS is to enable young people to get the chance to work for a qualification, and I hope that we shall be able to achieve that.

National Union of Students

3. **Mr. Peter Bruinvels** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will introduce legislation making membership of the National Union of Students optional for students.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. George Walden): The Government have not closed their mind to the possibility of legislating on this and other student union matters, but have no present plans for doing so.

Mr. Bruinvels: Will my hon. Friend accept that many students, including those belonging to Leicester university Conservatives, deeply regret being forced to become automatic members of the NUS? Will he reconsider his answer, so that students can be given the opportunity to opt into the NUS rather than being forced to become members of a union which is devoid of the political views that they espouse?

Mr. Walden: I sympathise with my hon. Friend's frustration, but I understand that it is open to individual student unions to decide, on a democratic basis, whether to disaffiliate from the NUS.

Mr. Skinner: Is the Minister aware that he has a little local difficulty with the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Bruinvels), but that Labour Members agree that it sounds a sensible idea? If it goes ahead, will the Minister consider the possibility of a ballot, because the Government are always rabbiting on about ballots? The Government thought that it would be a good idea to have political fund ballots for all the trade unions. The result has been to leave the Government with egg all over their face, because some unions pay money to the Labour party now when they did not do so before.

Mr. Walden: I am slightly confused by this train of thought. The Government are not against ballots in any circumstances, but I repeat that we sympathise with the view of those who question automatic membership of the student union.

Mr. Stokes: Why is it necessary to have a National Union of Students at all? Why could it not be abolished? Does my hon. Friend recollect that many of us who were at university before the war got on very well without a union at all?

Mr. Walden: I suppose that theoretically the NUS could vote itself out of existence as well.

Mr. Janner: Does the Minister appreciate that while the NUS and, I am sure, all of us here deplore a violent response to expressions of view, however much we may despise them, it would be better for the Government to spend time discussing with the NUS the cuts that they are making in the standard of life for students, or they will disappear along with the union?

Mr. Speaker: Order. That supplementary was a little wide of the question.

Mr. Walden: The House has made known its views on the linkage of that supplementary question.

Physics and Chemistry Teachers

4. **Mr. Michael McNair-Wilson** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he is satisfied with the numbers of physics and chemistry teachers entering secondary education.

Mr. Chris Patten: No. The Government are particularly concerned by the sharp reduction in recruitment to physics training courses in 1985, and the potential impact on the numbers entering teaching next autumn. The more modest decline in interest in chemistry teaching could also be of concern if the trend continues.

Mr. McNair-Wilson: Is my right hon. Friend aware that at least one major British pharmaceutical company has told me that it would be prepared to release members of its scientific staff to teach in local schools if that would assist in the shortage? Does he welcome that initiative, and, as this is Industry Year, will he give some encouragement to it?

Mr. Patten: I give great encouragement to such initiative. Now that the dispute is, we hope, behind us, we should be able to get on with talking to education authorities, industry and others about how we can crack this long-standing problem.

Mr. Dalyell: In the light of the reports by the Institute of Physics and Sir Alec Merrison, well might the Government be concerned. What is the figure for physics students going into teacher training? Is it in single figures for the whole of Britain, as has been rumoured? What action will the Government take to put this deploraole and dangerous situation right?

Mr. Patten: I am happy to be able to tell the hon. Gentleman that the number is not in single figures, but in three figures. For those taking PGCE in 1985, the figure was 255——

Mr. Dalyell: For next year?

Mr. Patten: For 1985. That figure is still a great deal too low. The figure is not in single figures for next year either. I do not have the figure, but I shall let the hon. Gentleman have it. I am aware that the problem is extremely serious, and it is one which we must tackle by radical and imaginative gestures. I hope that it will be easier to do that now that the dispute is behind us.

Mr. Patrick Thompson: I am pleased that my hon. Friend is aware of the seriousness of the problem, but does he agree that the shortage of physics teachers is leading to a serious imbalance in higher education and that many universities, including the University of East Anglia in Norwich, are reporting a surplus of highly qualified applicants in subjects like accountancy, while there is a shortage in vital subjects such a physics?

Mr. Patten: I am aware of that. The education service consumes its own smoke, and that produces precisely the kinds of problems to which my hon. Friend referred. We must look imaginatively at in-service training and retraining of people with other qualifications.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Is it not true that one of the reasons why people are not entering schools to teach these subjects is that the pay is not good enough? These people recognise that they can earn more in industry. What will the Minister do about that?

Mr. Patten: We want to see a better paid and better motivated teaching profession. I hope that serious negotiations will now start to create a career structure for teachers which better rewards teachers with responsibilities and with skills that are in short supply.

Mr. Holt: My hon. Friend rightly expressed the Government's concern over the shortage of physics and chemistry teachers, but does he share my misgivings that there is not, according to information from his Department, one teacher in the public sector teaching Japanese in what is Industry Year? What does my hon. Friend's Department intend to do about that?

Mr. Patten: Since my hon. Friend last raised that point with me, I have looked into the matter with great concern. However, I have not yet produced the teachers that he would like to see, but I shall report back to my hon. Friend on this matter.

Student Grants

5. **Mr. Dubs** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he last met the National Union of Students to discuss the level of student grants.

19. **Mr. Ashton** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he last met the National Union of Students to discuss the level of student support.

Mr. Walden: My right hon. Friend has received some 940 letters about the level of student grants for 1986-87 and last met NUS representatives to discuss student financial support on 3 December 1984. I last met NUS representatives on 12 February 1986.

Mr. Dubs: Will the Minister confirm that student grants are now 14 per cent. below the level in 1979 and that that represents a significant drop in the living standards of students? Is that not damaging for the future of university education?

Mr. Walden: I would go further and confirm that student grants have been dropping on and off ever since 1962, under both Conservative and Labour Governments. The fact that the number of students is rising to unprecedented heights under this Government hardly suggests that the level of grant is a major disincentive to higher education.

Mr. Pawsey: Is my hon. Friend aware that there are hon. Members who believe that the shortfall in grants could be made up by loans? We could adopt a system that is in existence in western Europe and the United States.

Mr. Walden: I note my hon. Friend's views on that matter, and I have made the Government's views clear on numerous occasions recently.

Mr. Donald Stewart: Is the Minister aware that the Government's policy appears to be that students will be able to attend universities only if they have rich fathers or if they have made sufficient earnings in the vacation? Is he aware that very few students have these options available?—[HON. MEMBERS: "Rubbish".] I am stating the facts. Will the country reach the position where we have to reduce the level of university education and so become a barbarian dung-heap?

Mr. Walden: That is neither the Government's policy nor the effect of their policies.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: Does my hon. Friend recall that when the levels of parental contribution were altered just over a year ago there was a great outcry against them? At that time many parents felt that they would face great cash-flow problems arising from the proposed changes, but that a system of student loans would have gone a long way towards reducing the genuine hardship which many students now face because their parents will not top up their grant to the level that the Government think is appropriate.

Mr. Walden: I note my hon. Friend's point.

Mr. Willie W. Hamilton: What proportion of the correspondence that the Minister has had on the matter supports the Government's view on student grants? Is he aware that only yesterday I received a letter from a student in Fife who says that he must give up the last year of his course if the 2 per cent. rise is imposed? Does the Minister agree that that is a disaster and speaks volumes about the Government's priorities?

Mr. Walden: I imagine that under this Government, as under previous Governments, few students will have written to welcome a cut in grant. I would be glad if the hon. Gentleman would send me the details of the case to which he referred.

Mr. Forman: Is it not the case that it is not merely the level of student grants which has caused anxiety, but the overall problem of student finance, which comes from a variety of departments and quarters? Will my hon. Friend explain why the review of student finance which at one time was anticipated was abandoned?

Mr. Walden: I am sure that my hon. Friend recalls our position, which is that once the Government decided against the student loans proposal, it was decided that there was insufficient material for the review.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: Does the Minister not believe that at present some students are suffering acute hardship because of the level of student grants? Does he believe that student grants can fall any further than their present level? Why cannot we have the public inquiry into student grants which was promised last year? It now appears that even some alliance Members are in favour of loans. Would it not be useful to have that inquiry to establish that loans are impractical and determine the genuine difficulty facing students today?

Mr. Walden: We are constantly alert for evidence of genuine difficulty of the type that the hon. Gentleman mentioned. Again, I extend an invitation to him to send me details. On the question of a review, I have nothing to add to what I said a moment ago.

Mr. Meadowcroft: Why do the Government assume that students can survive on up to 30 per cent. less grant than members of the Government had when they were at university? I am thinking, for example, of the Secretary of State for Social Services. Surely there should be parity between what members of the Government received and what students today receive?

Mr. Walden: We must take a broad view of these matters and look at the expansion, which, I insist, continues to take place and which is welcome. We must look at the burden of expansion which is placed on people with lower incomes than the majority of students will ever have, and think of a partnership beween students, their parents and taxpayers when financing that welcome expansion.

Politically Controversial Issues

6. **Mr. Robert Banks** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what response he has received to his draft circular on the treatment of politically controversial issues in schools and colleges; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chris Patten: The drafts were issued on 4 February, and it is too early for there to have been any significant reponse.

Mr. Banks: I congratulate my hon. Friend on this initiative. Does he agree that it is a cardinal principle in the teaching profession to maintain impartiality in teaching political matters, and that heads and teachers who express a strong political allegiance drive a wedge between the vital relationships of teacher and pupil, and teacher and parent?

Mr. Patten: I agree with my hon. Friend. I am sure the House will accept that brainwashing in the classroom can have no place in a free society.

Mr. Maclennan: What steps is the Minister taking to assist the police to do their proper job of giving advice about crime prevention in schools, which is being stopped in some Left-wing-controlled, Labour-dominated boroughs in London?

Mr. Patten: A very useful document is being produced by the Society of Education Officers and the Association of Chief Police Officers. That will be endorsed by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and myself. It is an admirable document and I hope that it will receive wide circulation.

Mr. Greenway: Is my hon. Friend aware that in my professional career I had a colleague who insisted on plastering his walls with posters of Chairman Mao, the hammer and sickle and all sorts of exhibitions of his love of Communism, and his teaching certainly had to be watched? However, he was the exception rather than the rule. The teaching profession, on the whole, contains its own integrity and most people are not given to political bias in the classroom.

Mr. Patten: I completely accept my hon. Friend's view. I think that the antics of a few discredit the hard work and conscientiousness of the overwhelming majority of teachers. I should confess to my hon. Friend that my moral tutor at Oxford was a former member of the Communist party.

General Certificate of Secondary Education

9. **Mr. Gregory** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether all schools will be in a position to commence courses for the general certificate of secondary education in September, as originally planned.

10. **Mr. Hardy** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the present position in regard to the state of preparation of the proposed general certificate of secondary education examination; and if he is satisfied that this examination course will be prepared by September.

Mr. Chris Patten: Preparations for the GCSE, under the national training programme, are substantial and thorough. Centrally produced materials, including videos and teachers' guides, have been made available to teachers and supplemented in many cases by further materials produced by the examining groups and the local education authorities. The training seminars for subject representatives from each school are being mounted and approved syllabuses distributed to schools. The onus is now on teachers to play their part.

Mr. Gregory: I welcome the amount of preparation that my hon. Friend has put into the timetable for the GCSE. Will he join me in deploring the fact that the militants of the National Union of Teachers have tried to prevent the introduction of these courses from September? Are they not at poles with the rest of their educational colleagues?

Mr. Patten: I agree with my hon. Friend. The NUT, along with other unions, pressed us to introduce this examination. It represents a major and important reform. I am sure that it will not want to scupper it at the same time as it is picking up the money which has been negotiated under the auspices of the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service.

Mr. Hardy: Are not the Minister and his right hon. Friend flying in the face of reality and disregarding the assessments of those closest to the situation? Is it not now clear that no valid new examination system will be ready by September this year?

Mr. Patten: I do not accept the hon. Gentleman's view. I know that he has a considerable concern in this matter, not least because I think that he has a child, as I have, who will be affected by it. We have made it clear that we are prepared to consider sympathetically any realistic proposals for adding to the literally unprecedented preparations which have been made for this examination. That remains the position, and we shall consider further any realistic proposals.

Mr. Rowe: Does my hon. Friend accept that in Kent we are grappling nobly with school rolls falling by some 30,000 places? The GCSE may benefit from teachers' training courses, but it also requires a range of new books and other equipment. Will the Minister give some assurance that the education authorities will be helped in their provision of those things?

Mr. Patten: We are considering the matter of resources. It is a matter which has been raised with us by many people.

Mr. Jack Thompson: Is the Minister aware of the extreme concern expressed by the Secondary Heads Association in the north of England, area 17, in a letter that it has sent to me expressing concern about the introduction of the GCSE? It supports the examination itself, but is concerned about the introduction in September and thinks that it is wholly unrealistic. The association has suggested that instead of schools starting the summer holidays in July, they should start a week earlier to allow teachers to have an in-service course.

Mr. Patten: I am hoping to meet representatives of the Secondary Heads Association shortly to talk about allowing training days at the end of the summer term. That is one of the suggestions that we are considering sympathetically.

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: Is my hon. Friend aware that as recently as 25 September, as far as heads in Devon were aware only the history syllabus had been authorised by his Department? None of the other syllabuses had been authorised. Unless syllabuses are known, teacher training courses cannot be planned and children cannot be advised on the courses they should take. That is why it is impossible for this examination to go ahead in two years' time without sacrificing one year's input of school children.

Mr. Patten: On a point of detail, it is the Secondary Examinations Council rather than my Department which approves syllabuses, as I am sure my hon. Friend knows. At the latest count, the SEC had approved 100 syllabuses. It is still on course to approve all the syllabuses by the end of April, so that they can be in schools by May.

Teachers already have available to them both the national criteria and the draft syllabuses. It is possible to

talk to parents or children about options on the basis of those draft syllabuses and the national criteria. I do not think that that point has been disputed by those to whom I have put it.

Mr. Freud: In view of the enormous logistical difficulties, quite apart from the dispute, does the hon. Gentleman accept that it would not be seen as a sign of weakness to postpone the examination for a year? Does the hon. Gentleman agree that if he does not want to do that it would make sense to close secondary schools for two days in the very near future, to give teachers a chance to catch up a bit?

Mr. Patten: The point about training days refers to phase 3 of the training, which is next summer rather than this term. We have looked at the position carefully, but I do not think that there is any option other than pressing ahead to make a success of this examination. Running O-levels and the CSE at the same time as we were trying to introduce the examination would not be possible.

Mr. Watson: Will my hon. Friend confirm that hardly any of the examination boards in England and Wales are in favour of any postponement of this examination? Will he confirm that work on preparing the syllabuses is virtually complete and that in most examination boards the training is well under way?

Mr. Patten: My hon. Friend is right on all those points, but I still concede that the timetable is tight and that the job of introducing the new examination is tough. However, I think that it is perfectly within our resources to manage that job.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: Will the hon. Gentleman accept that there are four basic criteria by which the new examination has to be measured? It must be workable for the teachers, credible to the parents, fair to the pupils and must win a high level of public acceptance from employers. At present, the Government are on course to fail all those tests. Is it not essential that the Government take urgent action to get a grip on this new examination and to turn it into a success rather than the failure it is turning out to be?

Mr. Patten: That is what we are intent on doing. I am not sure from the tone of the hon. Gentleman's remarks that that is his objective.

Education Expenditure

11. **Mr. Sean Hughes** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what assessment he makes of the level of public pressure for greater spending on education.

The Secretary of State for Education and Science (Sir Keith Joseph): I have no doubt that there is considerable public pressure for higher standards in education, and for the best possible return on the resources invested in the education service. The Government will continue to work towards those aims.

Mr. Hughes: In view of the recent comment by the Minister of State that one of the reasons for lack of increased public expenditure on education is lack of public pressure, will the right hon. Gentleman now tell us who is telling the truth? If the money has been available, why has the right hon. Gentleman spent the past 12 months telling us that there are insufficient funds to pay teachers the extra money they want? If the funds have not been available, what is the point in the comments of the Minister of State?

Sir Keith Joseph: The Government take the view, which I think is shared by the majority of people, that teachers deserve more pay for effective teaching, but that teachers should also carry out the duties they have habitually carried out in the past, minus midday supervision, but plus appraisal. The Government are making substantial extra sums available over and above the annual pay awards to achieve that dual purpose. The money is still available to provide more pay for effective teaching, provided the teaching unions agree to duties being part of the contract.

Surely it is obvious to all hon. Members that there is public pressure for many aspects of public spending. There is immense pressure for many more services and it is the duty of the Government of the day to sort them out into some order of priority. The fact that the Government have found additional money for teachers' pay, subject to the conditions that I have already described, is a recognition of that duty.

Mr. Key: Will my right hon. Friend accept that his words are welcome, particularly to those who believe that more money should be made available for education? Will he also accept that higher priority should be given to education in the overall political arena and that the majority of teachers, as represented by their unions on the teachers' side of the panel, accept that more money means acceptance of conditions relating to assessment and so on? Will my right hon. Friend comment on the implications of the ACAS talks?

Sir Keith Joseph: I agree with all of my hon. Friend's comments. As for his question about ACAS, we must all hope that yesterday's agreement will lead to fruitful negotiations.

Mr. Flannery: When will the Secretary of State admit that school standards are now higher then they have ever been? — *[Interruption.]* It is typical that the voices raised against that reality are those of Conservative Members. When will the Secretary of State realise that he is not paying teachers what they are worth, that they recognise him as the real enemy and that they make that clear in all of their organisations? When will he also realise that teachers do a vast amount of work for which there is no overtime, that they are going back to work embittered and angry, and that it will all happen again within a very short period of time?

Sir Keith Joseph: The Government have set aside substantially more money for the pay of effective teachers, on the conditions that I have described. That is the reality. No amount of vituperation from the hon. Gentleman will change it. As for school standards, there are many good schools, but there is surely, by common agreement, scope for improvement.

Mr. Mark Carlisle: As regards yesterday's settlement of the teacher's pay dispute, does my right hon. Friend agree that the leadership of the National Union of Teachers has shown yet again that it is prepared to do damage to children's education and harm to teachers as a body? Has not the time come to remind individual teachers who are

concerned about their individual professional standards and who are anxious to obtain higher salaries that they can join other unions instead?

Sir Keith Joseph: I agree with my right hon. and learned Friend that the behaviour of the National Union of Teachers seems to be appalling. It is willing for its members to take the money that has been negotiated by the other unions and the employers, but to continue the disruption. It is urging its members to stand in the way of the reform talks that we so patently need. I regard the NUT's position as utterly indefensible.

Mr. Benn: Has the Secretary of State turned his mind to the fact that in Japan only 1 per cent. of the national income is spent on defence and that one of the reasons why Japanese research and development and the manufacture and sale of high technology are more successful than ours is that we spend 6 per cent. of our national income on defence and thus divert money away from many things, including proper investment in education?

Sir Keith Joseph: But does the right hon. Gentleman accept that the Japanese Government and people do that only because they have accepted total protection from the United States? Would the right hon. Gentleman support a move by this country towards that kind of policy?

Mr. Latham: Regarding capital spending, which is very important to parents, would it not help my right hon. Friend to deal with this pressure if a rather higher proportion of capital receipts were made available to local education authorities to spend in their own areas?

Sir Keith Joseph: Yes, indeed, and if it were possible that would make the Government that little bit more popular. But the trouble is that when that policy was adopted two or three years ago the local education authorities together spent £1,000 million more than they had warned they would spend, which came near to wrecking the national economy.

Mr. Radice: Does the Secretary of State understand that parents are rightly asking for more books, more equipment and more effective teaching, so as to raise standards in schools? Why does the Prime Minisster seem concerned only with educational red herrings, such as vouchers and privatisation, which will do nothing to help the vast majority of pupils? When will the Government acknowledge that all our children should have the right to good quality education?

Sir Keith Joseph: The trouble is that the hon. Gentleman seems only to have read half of the annual report by HMI, which said that there was too little spending on books in many local education authorities, but went on to say that, with better management by many local authorities, money now wasted could be redeployed in favour of books, equipment and maintenance.

Inner Cities Education Project

12. **Mr. Simon Hughes** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what sum from the inner cities programme will benefit inner cities education projects.

Mr. Chris Patten: The main focus of the new inner cities initiative is to be on improving employment opportunities, supporting local industry and improving the physical environment. However, the urban programme is already supporting education expenditure of about £33 million in urban areas in 1985-86 and over £81 million of education expenditure, mostly in urban areas, is being supported by section 11 grants.

Mr. Hughes: I am grateful to the Minister for his answer. In the light of the opinion poll released this week, commissioned by ILEA, which shows that more people —40 per cent.—think that the quality of state education in inner London is poor, very poor or terrible than think it is good, very good or excellent, will he direct the educational funds aimed at inner cities to dealing with the quality of education in inner London, which is at the core of the problem, rather than allowing it to be directed to peripheral activities, which will not give youngsters the employment opportunities at which the inner cities programme is aimed?

Mr. Patten: The hon. Gentleman has made an important point about quality. If there was a direct relationship between quality and the amount of resources spent, standards in ILEA would be second to none, but, alas, that is not the case.

Mr. Spencer: When my hon. Friend visits Highfields in Leicester, following the initiative announced by his right hon. Friend, will he consider the need for single sex education and how that might be met?

Mr. Patten: Before I go to Highfields I shall, of course, talk to my hon. and learned Friend. I am sure that he will mark my card.

Mr. Freeson: The Minister must accept that the figures he has quoted are no more than a tiny fraction of the massive thousands of millions of pounds that are spent each year on education nationally. Does he agree that what is much more important, and is receiving little or no attention, is the shift of the main line budget for education into the inner city areas? Does he accept that there is a direct relationship between the amount of money available for refurbishing rundown buildings and the environment in which children have to grow up?

Mr. Patten: I have tried to deal with the question of the relationship between input and output in education. I did not mention all the funds that are going to the inner cities. I did not mention, for example, the money that is being paid under the education support grants. I do not think that the situation is as easy as the hon. Gentleman said. If it were just a question of resources equalling quality, we should not have to deal with some of the horrors that are on the scene.

Sixth Forms

13. **Dr. Twinn** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what advice he has given to local education authorities over the relative merits of school sixth forms as opposed to other forms of post-16 provision.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Bob Dunn): My right hon. Friend's advice is set out in circular 4/82. That circular made clear his belief that no single pattern of secondary organisation has overriding advantages of principle; it went on to urge local education authorities to choose the system most suited to local circumstances and preferences.

Dr. Twinn: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. If, as he says, there is no single pattern of secondary

organisation with an overriding advantage, does he agree that sixth forms of proven quality should be kept and that within any local authority area there should be a choice between staying on at school post-16 and going on to college?

Mr. Dunn: We are committed to retaining good sixth forms in schools of proven worth. The answer to the second part of my hon. Friend's supplementary question is yes.

Technical and Vocational Education Initiative

14. **Mr. Madel** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will make a statement on the progress of the technical and vocational education initiative.

Mr. Chris Patten: Seventy-three education authorities throughout Great Britain are now involved in the TVEI. All authorities have been given the opportunity to take part in this important initiative; most are already running projects, and proposals from a further 25 which wish to join in the final phase starting this September are under consideration. The Government are encouraged by the enthusiasm and commitment that the TVEI has generated among those involved. The pilot projects, which are exploring how the education of 14 to 18-year-olds can be made more relevant to adult and working life, are already providing important lessons. We are considering how these should be applied more widely.

Mr. Madel: As the effectiveness and popularity of the TVEI increases among parents and children, can my hon. Friend assure the House that the Government remain committed to the necessary increase in funding for the TVEI to meet increased demand?

Mr. Patten: The Government are committed to considering how the lessons that have been learnt from this extremely successful initiative, in which we are investing about £250 million of the taxpayers' money, can be more widely applied. That will, of course, have some financial implications.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Flannery** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 4 March.

The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher): This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Flannery: Is it not a matter of the deepest public concern that many old people have died and are dying of hypothermia in this bitter cold winter? How could the Prime Minister and the Government stand idly by and watch these poor people in cold, unheated rooms waiting for approaching death? What will happen now? Will the rich and wealthy members of the Government blame everyone but themselves, when everyone knows exactly who is to blame for the deaths of many poor old people?

The Prime Minister: May I make three points in reply to the hon. Gentleman. First, spending on help with heating has increased dramatically from 1978 until now. In 1978, £90 million was spent on providing help with heating, and we are now spending £400 million. There has been an increase in expenditure of £140 million in real terms. Secondly, the number of those eligible for heating additions has increased greatly. The House will be aware that 90 per cent. of supplementary pensioners are now receiving heating additions, compared with 70 per cent. in 1978-79. Thirdly, in addition to the £400 million that is already being spent, extra help in the form of severe weather payments is available in almost all of the 500 DHSS area officers throughout the country.

Mr. Ward: Will my right hon. Friend ensure that any member of the Civil Service who frustrates the efforts of the fraud squad to prevent the pilfering of public money by claimants is dismissed instantly?

The Prime Minister: I hope that no one will frustrate the efforts of the fraud squad, which is entirely independent. Its efforts must be allowed to bear fruit.

Mr. Kinnock: Will the Prime Minister join me and hon. Members on both sides of the House in applauding the initiative of Age Concern in providing 1,000 survival kits to old people, who it considers are most at risk from the cold weather? Does the right hon. Lady share Age Concern's view that, while it is doing what it can, the Government must act by issuing urgent heating allowances? Will she give the country an assurance that she will change the system of helping with heating costs so that we shall never again experience a winter in which poor people freeze to death for want of help with their heating bills?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman heard that help with heating bills has greatly exceeded anything that was made available in real terms during the lifetime of the previous Labour Government. He has heard also that of the 500 DHSS offices, almost all are making available the payment of extra severe weather payments. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services has arranged for massive advertising in the national press on the availability of extra help with fuel bills. This is being supplemented by considerable local effort.

Mr. Kinnock: Does the Prime Minister agree that the £140 million is somewhat misleading, in that it should be compared with the £1·5 billion which has been denied to old-age pensioners in Britain as a consequence of changing the formula for calculating old-age pensions? Does she further agree that pensioners and poor people are interested, not in swapping figures, but in how they pay their heating bills? May I ask her again whether, in view of the tragic experience of this year and last, she can assure us that she will change the system to provide a more generous, simpler and better advertised system of providing help with heating bills so that we never experience another winter of disconnection?

The Prime Minister: The amount available exceeds anything that was available before. The right hon. Gentleman is aware of that. I repeat that £400 million is available for help with heating. In addition, almost all of the 500 supplementary benefit offices are open for help with severe weather payments They are paid restrospectively, and there will be a massive advertising campaign to help with that. The right hon. Gentleman does not like the extent of the help that is available.

Mr. Kinnock: I acknowledge the extent. It is the effectiveness about which the right hon. Lady must answer. Why, if there is such help, has our death rate during the winter been three times that of the United States of America and four times that of Sweden? Will she now make changes that ensure that we stop the incidence of hypothermia? Will she recognise that the number of deaths last year was higher than the year before, and that the number of deaths this year will be higher again? Will she stop this awful mounting crisis by changing her policies?

The Prime Minister: Will the right hon. Gentleman recognise that £400 million is available now, as compared with £90 million during the winter of discontent, when not one Labour Member raised the matter in the House? Moreover, nearly 500 DHSS offices are open now for severe weather payments. What the right hon. Gentleman has been asking for is happening. He does not like the fact that it is being done.

Q2. **Mrs. Currie** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 4 March.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mrs. Currie: Has my right hon. Friend had time today to read *Today* and to reflect on the fact that modern technology also creates jobs? It does not just destroy them. Has she had time to reflect on the fact that none of that would have been possible without the Government's magnificent trade union legislation and their fostering of an atmosphere of free enterprise?

The Prime Minister: I agree that technology creates jobs. It enables industries to stay competitive. The record of our manufacturing and extractive industries in increasing productivity is excellent. All involved in them deserve congratulation.

Mr. Hume: Now that we are getting a substantial radioactive leak a week from Sellafield, does the Prime Minister agree that public concern has become public alarm and that there is no alternative to closing the plant down?

The Prime Minister: No, Sir. The nuclear power industry has the best safety record of any energy industry. It would be as well if that were fully recognised by some of those who criticise Sellafield. The Health and Safety Executive is carrying out an audit. I welcome the audit and believe that the facts should reassure people.

Q3. **Mr. Michael Forsyth** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 4 March.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Forsyth: Is my right hon. Friend aware that Central regional council, which last year gave £216,000 to the striking miners, is proposing school closures in rural areas this year to save less than £50,000? Will my right hon. Friend consider changing the system of funding education to reflect, per capita, the number of pupils attending schools, so that parental preference rather than political expediency rules the roost?

The Prime Minister: As my hon. Friend knows from the Bill now before the House, the Government are concerned to get greater parental influence in the choice of schools. All parents pay for education out of their pockets as taxpayers and ratepayers and are entitled to greater choice than they have, and all options are being considered.

Mr. Eastham: May I draw the attention of the Prime Minister to the fact that there is a mass lobby of engineers from British Leyland bitterly protesting against the possible sale of their industry to foreign interests? May I remind the Prime Minister that, when the sale of Westland Helicopters was going through, it was claimed by the Government that the work force had been consulted? Will the Prime Minister give an assurance that the work force of British Leyland will be consulted before there is a sale?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman will recall that the Government were not interfering with financial help in a rescue package with Westland. That was the basis of the decision. He will also recall that there has been, and continues to be, enormous help given to British Leyland. He is well aware of what the position is at the moment. The intention to make bids, or the indication that bids are to be made, should be in today, and we are not in a position to make any statement until all those bids are in and have been considered.

Mr. Beith: What contribution towards reconciliation in the coal industry can be made by a colliery review procedure which the National Coal Board ignores whenever it finds against it? What is sacrosanct now?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman is well aware that the colliery review procedure is advisory and that the final word is in the hands of the National Coal Board. That was always so.

Mr. Dickens: Will my right hon. Friend concede that the last Labour Government did very little for old-age pensioners? Will she also concede that it was the Labour party which snatched away the Christmas bonus which the Tory party introduced? Will she also concede that it was Tories who reintroduced the Christmas bonus for pensioners? How does my right hon. Friend think that Members of the Labour party can accuse us, in the way they have done earlier today, when they have been such a disgrace in the past?

The Prime Minister: I could not improve on the excellent way in which my hon. Friend puts the case. I hope that hon. Members will also remember that only last year the Opposition were supporting a strike that was designed to rob pensioners of heating and light.

Q4. **Mr. Meadowcroft** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 4 March.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Meadowcroft: Most people in need of extra heating have no real choice of the kind of dwelling they inhabit, and heating costs vary widely. Why do the Government base their heating costs on the individual, rather than on the cost of heating?

The Prime Minister: As the hon. Gentleman is aware, the rule has been changed since last year. Last year's rule was not found to be satisfactory and it is therefore now a matter of discretion, and that should enable us to give just the kind of latitude the hon. Gentleman wishes to have.

Sir Edward du Cann: Will my right hon. Friend look again at the figures for the appalling decline in Britain's

merchant fleet? Is she aware that hon. Members in all parts of the House are now desperately concerned about this matter and its implications, both for our defence policy and economically? We could not mount another Falklands operation if we wished, because we do not have the ships. More than 80 per cent. of British trade is now carried in ships with foreign flags. Is she aware that there are things that could be done to change the situation? Will she instruct her senior colleagues to see that they are done, and done without delay?

The Prime Minister: I know my right hon. Friend's interest in this subject, but I must disagree with him when he says that we could not mount another Falklands operation. We could. I would like to make that clear. The Government fully recognise the role that the merchant fleet plays in times of emergency and war, and the requirements are subject to continuous review. The merchant fleet remains capable of meeting all the needs of the armed forces. We have long-standing NATO arrangements to pool Alliance merchant shipping should there be war. The important thing for the future of our merchant marine is to ensure that British shipping can compete with the fleets of other nations on costs. That is one of the problems.

Mr. Terry Davis: In view of the widespread impression that the Cabinet is biased in favour of a takeover of parts of the British motor industry by General Motors and the rumours that are now spreading in Birmingham, will the Prime Minister tell us whether any member of the Cabinet has a relative working for General Motors or one of its subsidiaries?

The Prime Minister: I resent the implication of the hon. Gentleman's question. He is aware that bids are in today and that they will be considered, and they will be considered with one thing in mind — what will give British industry the best chance of jobs.

Northern Ireland

3.33 pm

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Tom King): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I would like to make a statement about the events in Northern Ireland yesterday.

As the House will be aware, the leaders of the two main Unionist parties had called for a day of action and protest. They invited everybody to stay away from work and stated that it was to be a passive and voluntary demonstration and that there should be no road blocks or intimidation of those going to work.

In the event, there was widespread obstruction, intimidation and some violence during the day culminating in serious disorder in east and north Belfast last night. The first incidents occurred before midnight on Sunday and disturbances continued until the early hours of this morning.

In spite of these difficulties, a very considerable number of people succeeded in getting to work, particularly in the commercial offices and public services, but many factories were seriously affected.

I pay tribute to the determination of all those who refused to be intimidated and exercised their right to go to work. I also pay tribute to the men of the security forces and particularly the Royal Ulster Constabulary for all the work that they did to seek to keep roads open for people to be able to get to work. However, there have also been a number of complaints when it is alleged that the police did not take action when it was required. The Chief Constable is preparing a full report on all the policing aspects of the past 24 hours.

To give the House some indication of the scale of the workload that the RUC faced, on the latest information available to me there were some 655 road blocks in the Province during the period, of which 441 were cleared. There were in addition some 80 cavalcades and demonstrations, which caused considerable disruption in a number of towns mainly around midday and in the afternoon. There were 57 arrests and the names of 184 people noted to proceed by way of summons. Sixty-five plastic baton rounds were fired and 47 policemen were injured. Last night there were a number of petrol bombs thrown, and there were over 20 shots fired in three firearms attacks on the police during the disturbances in the Loyalist areas.

The figures listed above give the details of a tragic day for Northern Ireland. Many Members will have seen some of the disgraceful incidents on television last night. These pictures have been shown all over the world and will do great damage to the reputation of the Province. The House will also have seen elected Members of this House making common cause with people in paramilitary dress.

The Government are well aware of the strength of feeling among many Unionists about aspects of the Anglo-Irish agreement. The House will be aware that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and I met the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux) and the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) last Tuesday. During a long meeting, my right hon. Friend put forward a number of proposals to help meet their main concerns and agreed to consider positively their suggestions that the Government should call a round table conference to discuss devolution in Northern Ireland. It was agreed that we would all reflect on the various suggestions that had been made and would meet again shortly. The prospects of constructive discussions instead of confrontation were greeted with widespread relief in the Province, only for that to be destroyed by their abrupt repudiation of this course following a meeting in Belfast late that night. They then decided to proceed with the day of protest.

The whole country can now see how tragic and totally counter-productive yesterday's action has been. It is now urgent that the Unionist leaders recognise again that the only way in which the concerns of those they seek to represent can be addressed is by constructive discussion and not by threats and violence. The degree of intimidation evident yesterday showed how little confidence many of the organisers had in being able peacefully to persuade their fellow citizens to join their day of protest. I make it quite clear that this Government, this Parliament, will not be intimidated either by the sort of violent actions that took place yesterday. I believe that an increasing number of Unionists, while disliking many aspects of the Anglo-Irish agreement, wish to look for a constructive way forward. The Government have made quite clear our willingness to sit down and discuss seriously the Unionists' concerns. In our parliamentary democracy, in this United Kingdom, that can be the only way.

Mr. Peter Archer (Warley, West): Does the Secretary of State accept that we on this side of the House share his abhorrence of the violence and intimidation which took place yesterday and which further alienated the sympathies of many people in Great Britain from the cause which it was apparently designed to promote?

Does the Secretary of State agree that if the protest was intended to demonstrate the strength of feeling in Northern Ireland against the Anglo-Irish agreement it failed as an indicator since we do not know how many people participated voluntarily and how many simply responded to intimidation? Bearing in mind the number of road blocks and the obvious evidence of preparations in advance, can the Secretary of State say whether investigations are taking place to ascertain whether the violence was planned and, if so, by whom? If it transpires that it was planned, will proceedings be initiated against those responsible?

While we join in the right hon. Gentleman's tribute to those police officers who strove hard, in difficult circumstances, to preserve order and to prevent intimidation, and while we offer our tribute to those who declined to be intimidated, he has referred to allegations of some incidents in which people were prevented from going about their business in the presence of police officers who failed to intervene. When the Chief Constable's report on these allegations is complete, will the Secretary of State report again to the House?

Will inquiries take place into reports that some off-duty members of the Ulster Defence Regiment were at the barricades? The Secretary of State has referred to suggestions from responsible leaders among all sections of opinion in Northern Ireland that they are prepared to meet those with whom they disagree to discuss how to make progress. Will he again invite them to meet together under his chairmanship and seek consensus, which will isolate the men of violence on both sides of the divide and offer a less dismaying future for the people of Northern Ireland?

Mr. King: I am grateful to the right hon. and learned Member for the way is which he has responded to the statement and to his right hon. and hon. Friends for their support in this matter. He may have seen in the comments of the Chief Constable before the strike the clearest signs that this was to be a peaceful, dignified and voluntary protest. It manifestly was not so—and that was made manifest in ways that showed considerable planning in advance. I know that the Chief Constable will want to investigate all the policing aspects of what occurred yesterday. He has already put on the record that any evidence of incidents of indifferent policing should be brought to his attention and will be investigated.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman asked specifically about an invitation to the parties in Northern Ireland to talk sensibly about these problems. I hope that we can get discussions going. As the House knows, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister put some specific proposals to the leaders of the Unionist parties. This could have provided the way forward, but was repudiated, although in Northern Ireland only — we have not received any official communication to that effect. I shall do all that I can to seek ways in which discussions can start. That is the only way. Violence will not succeed, and will be only counter-productive.

Sir John Biggs-Davison (Epping Forest): Is it not a tragic absurdity that, as a result of the Anglo-Irish agreement, a Unionist Government's only political friends in the Province should be Republicans? How do the Government propose to govern the Province—by force —or will they seek a constructive way out, and get in touch with the Taoiseach and adjust this damnable agreement?

Mr. King: My hon. Friend knows very well that what he said about the support for the agreement in the Province is not true, and that many people with no nationalist sympathies see benefits in this agreement and have supported it. Clearly the problem—and I hope that my hon. Friend will assist in this — is to get a true understanding of what the agreement is. The literature that was being passed out yesterday, in which the right hon. Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor) played his part, talking about the establishment of partial Dublin rule and allowing the agreement to bring about the all-Ireland that it seeks, makes one realise how great are the distortions still being perpetrated on the Unionist majority in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Stephen Ross (Isle of Wight): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that we share his sentiments about yesterday's appalling events in the Province? We are reassured by the last paragraph of his statement. That is the right way to proceed and we support him all the way. We acknowledge the genuine feelings of Unionists who have suffered grievously at the hands of the IRA, the Provisional IRA and INLA, but is it not time that the Unionist leaders in the Province and Unionists themselves recognise that there is not an inexhaustable supply of finance from the rest of the United Kingdom, and that people from the rest of the United Kingdom also have the right to say "Enough is enough"? What about the workers at Harland and Wolff and Short Bros, which have been financed by large sums of money from here? Why did they stay away from work yesterday?

Mr. King: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his support on behalf of his right hon. and hon. colleagues. Both my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and I have made clear our strong hope and desire that Northern Ireland should remain part of the United Kingdom. Perhaps one of the most offensive things about some of the aspects of the protests is the implication that we are seeking to undermine the position of Northern Ireland. The purpose of the agreement is to reassure the Unionists about the validity of the position of the majority, and to get the agreement of the Republic confirmed in an international agreement to say that there can be no change in that majority position without the consent of the majority. The House will see that, even in the face of that, there are those who will refuse to accept it, no matter that it is article 1 of the agreement and should be a great reassurance to Unionists in Northern Ireland.

Sir Peter Mills (Torridge and Devon West): Will my right hon. Friend bear in mind that the protest was not so much a demonstration but, in certain parts, a rebellion? Speaking from experience, I can say that nothing like that has happened before. Will my right hon. Friend also bear in mind that the £2,000 million poured into the Province at least demands some responsibility from the other side?

Mr. King: It has always been accepted in the United Kingdom that the areas in greatest need receive a greater subvention than other areas. In that respect, Northern Ireland is no different from other parts of the country in relation to the assessment of need.

However, in response to the first point raised by my hon. Friend, may I say that it is particularly tragic that at a time of considerable terrorist activity such an additional strain should have been placed on the security forces as was placed on them yesterday. That involved a massive redeployment of the RUC to maintain law and order and the rights of the citizen against the so-called Loyalist mobs in certain areas. People were definitely put at risk from terrorist attack in other parts of the Province.

Mr. J. Enoch Powell (South Down): In view of the concluding words of the Secretary of State's statement, will the Government take steps to proceed towards giving all the people of Northern Ireland a full share in what the right hon. Gentleman calls this parliamentary democracy?

Mr. King: I understand the right hon. Gentleman's views on this matter. I am not sure that his views are shared by the right hon. Member for Strangford.

The Government are anxious to achieve a system for administration in Northern Ireland on a basis that is widely acceptable to both communities. We have made that aim absolutely clear and the agreement is designed to encourage that.

Sir Eldon Griffiths (Bury St. Edmunds): Does my right hon. Friend recognise that it is wrong for him to come to the House and make splendid statements about not yielding to intimidation—which I agree with—when at the end of the day carrying out that policy depends on the courage and resolution of our security forces and, in particular, on the men and women of the RUC? Will he therefore show just a little more understanding of the human position of those police officers who are shot in the back by the violent minority and who now no longer have the consent of the majority and yet are gagged by their

[Sir Eldon Griffiths]

chief constable and do not receive, from his office, the support to which they are entitled in the grave circumstances which our country now faces?

Mr. King: I deeply resent the last sentence of my hon. Friend's remarks. I have made it absolutely clear that the RUC is aware that it as my full commitment and support. I have the greatest admiration for the RUC as a professional police force. I am well aware of my hon. Friend's concern about consultation and the rights of the Police Federation in Northern Ireland. My hon. Friend knows that that is under discussion at present.

Mr. Merlyn Rees (Morley and Leeds, South): Does the Secretary of State agree that yesterday's day of protest, which in some cases was near insurrection, and the plans projected for the weeks and months ahead to culminate in July can only seriously weaken the link between Northern Ireland and this country? In the light of that, it is no good the Government ignoring the situation. A number of us in the House faced such a situation in 1974. The situation exists today. The Government must talk with the Government in Dublin about what will happen if the link is stretched to breaking point.

Mr. King: It was precisely because of our recognition of the concern about the situation and about aspects of the Anglo-Irish agreement that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and I met Unionist leaders last Tuesday. The Unionist leaders went to that meeting, as they said, expecting the door to be slammed in their faces. As the whole House will know, when they left the meeting they held a press conference and the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley said that the deadlock had been broken. It is clear that a door has been opened. The tragedy is that when they returned to Belfast somebody else decided to slam a door in their face. We thought that we had succeeded in opening the way to sensible discussions. The best way to proceed is for the Prime Minister to talk to the leaders of the Unionist parties, who proclaim their loyalty to the United Kingdom. That is how I would like to proceed. After the futile, destructive events of yesterday, I hope that wise counsels will prevail and that people will return to honour that agreement.

Mr. W. Benyon (Milton Keynes): Does my right hon. Friend recall the great tragedy which occurred when the Labour Government gave in to the Ulster workers' strike? Is it not now time for strong nerves? Does he accept that most Tory Members are right behind him in upholding the laws of the United Kingdom?

Mr. King: It is a time for strong nerves, but I hope also for wise counsels. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his support. I hope that we can get the hon. Members involved to play their part in the House. Indeed, today one sees an increase in their attendance. I hope that we can debate these issues sensibly, and discuss the genuine anxieties of the people whom they seek to represent in this proper forum of the House of Commons.

Mr. John Hume (Foyle): Does the Secretary of State agree that, although the Anglo-Irish agreement has now been in place since 15 November, more than three months ago, it has not done any harm to any citizen in Northern Ireland? Does he agree that the only damage done has been self-inflicted, such as the serious damage to wide sections of the community yesterday? Does he agree that the agreement is about recognising the validity of both traditions in Northern Ireland, and that Unionists cannot stomach equality of treatment for the people of Northern Ireland? Does he further agree that equality is the true basis of dialogue which is essential, if the community is to move forward? Will he name the date for the talks that he wishes to hold, and my party will attend?

Mr. King: On the question of damage or harm being suffered, there are already signs of the benefits that come from the agreement. Any intelligent Unionist must take comfort from the switch in votes from the party supporting violence to the hon. Gentleman's constitutional nationalist party which occurred in each of the by-elections in which there was a contest between those two parties. Any Unionist who is willing to look fairly at the agreement will begin to notice the encouraging signs of better co-operation on cross-border security. That is overwhelmingly to the benefit of every person in Northern Ireland. I hope that the people will see through the lies that they are being told, such as that this is joint authority and this is Dublin rule. Those slogans, on which the by-election campaigns were fought, are wholly untrue, and people will increasingly realise that. I hope that then we shall get men of good will, who do not act merely from bigotry and prejudice, but are prepared to look fairly at the position of the minority as well as the majority. Then we can start sensible discussions to the benefit of all concerned.

Mr. Ivor Stanbrook (Orpington): If we go on like this, with the majority in Northern Ireland feeling threatened and some of them taking desperate measures, and with my right hon. Friend condemning them in the strongest terms, as he has today, will not even the minority feel threatened? Will not the position become far worse than it already is? Does that not point to the fact that the Anglo-Irish agreement was a blunder of the first magnitude?

Mr. King: In my statement I paid tribute to the number of people who, often at considerable inconvenience and with considerable courage, ensured that people were not intimidated yesterday. The vast majority of people in many areas got to work, despite all the difficulties. My hon. Friend also chooses to overlook the fact that only a week ago today my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and I met the leaders of the two Unionist parties and achieved an outcome which could have led to sensible, constructive talks. That is the way we must go, and the sooner the better.

Mr. A. E. P. Duffy (Sheffield, Attercliffe): Has the Secretary of State read the report on the front page of *The Irish Times* today entitled "Bottles, bricks and bigotry in Portadown" by Willy Clingan, a Northern Irish Protestant? He said that he saw none of the acivity, on the part of either the RUC or the security forces, which the Secretary of State claimed. I dare say that that was just a black spot, although I would be surprised if it was the only one. Will the Secretary of State assure the House that, should there be a recurrence of yesterday's events in Northern Ireland, there will not be a repetiton in Portadown, otherwise how will he and most hon. Members, who welcome the tone of the statement today, do their bit to help the RUC and the security forces to be accepted across the communities in the spirit of the agreement?

Mr. King: In the atmosphere of claim and counterclaim about what the RUC did and did not do yesterday, I thought that the most helpful thing for the House would be for me to give the best statistics available at this time. The House will realise from the figures I gave of the number of road blocks and the number which were removed that there were some gaps. I think that anybody would honestly say that it was quite a remarkable achevement to remove 441 road blocks over about 12 hours. I certainly am concerned, and I know that the Chief Constable is concerned, to learn any lessons that we can from the scale of the problems that were faced.

There is no doubt that the assertion, accepted in good faith and given by what the Chief Constable believed to be responsible leaders, about what was meant to be an orderly and dignified protest led, in some cases, to the police being too thinly spread in certain areas. That raised problems for them. I can certainly assure the hon. Gentleman that we wish to learn every lesson that we can.

Mr. Ian Gow (Eastbourne): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, however deep and justified is the hostility of the people of Northern Ireland—the Unionist majority—to the Anglo-Irish agreement, the scenes of violence we saw yesterday are not only deeply repugnant to everybody on this side of the House but also injure the Unionist cause? If my right hon. Friend should receive a request from the Government of the Irish Republic that the intergovernmental conference should not meet for, say, three months, would he consider it carefully?

Mr. King: I listened this morning to the entirely constructive remarks that my hon. Friend made in his broadcast when I was in Stormont. I respect the view that he has taken about the lack of wisdom of yesterday's action. I think that they were wise words and I wish that they had been heeded by more unionists.

On my hon. Friend's request and our attitude to it, may I say that we have entered into an agreement in good faith which we believe will bring benefit to all the people of Northern Ireland. If he is saying, for example, that we should suspend the discussion on improving cross-border security and the many steps that are being taken to make a more effective counter attack against terrorism, I think that that is a difficult proposition to make, but I note his comments.

Mr. John David Taylor (Strangford): Has the Secretary of State read the excellent analysis in *The Irish Times* today of the serious position developing in Northern Ireland by the former Cabinet colleague of the Taoiseach, Dr. Conor Cruise O'Brien? Does he agree with Dr. O'Brien's analysis that the Government rule in Northern Ireland without consent? Does he also agree that the Anglo-Irish agreement can be maintained only "by massive and sustained use of force"?

Since the Secretary of State has rightly said that the RUC was extended yesterday, and since it is improper to use 8,000 RUC men to impose the Anglo-Irish agreement on 1 million free citizens in Northern Ireland, what additional forces does the Secretary of State intend to use?

Mr. King: May I say before answering the right hon. Gentleman how pleased I am to see him here. I hope that he will persuade some of his colleagues that, rather than on the streets of Belfast and around barricades in the Province, the House of Commons is the right place to discuss these maters.

I failed fully to answer the hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Duffy). I have not read *The Irish Times* today, but I shall look at it later. It sounds like a similar version of the malign scenario that I think Dr. Conor Cruise O'Brien has painted for a considerable time about this matter. I do not accept that view. I believe that there is a more optimistic and hopeful approach to the affairs of Northern Ireland. I regard Dr. O'Brien's approach as the gospel of despair.

There will not be a strain on the RUC if responsible politicians tell the truth about the agreement and if they do not incite their supporters to acts of violence. Some hon. Members, not necessarily in the Official Unionist party but in other parties in Northern Ireland, have not been noticeable for their reticence recently. In that situation there will certainly be an extra strain on the police. I very much hope that we shall see people respect the rule of law and be prepared to talk sensibly about the right way forward.

Mr. Anthony Nelson (Chichester): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the prospects for the Anglo-Irish agreement depend in part on the tenor of his responses to yesterday's events? However misguided, disruptive and violent the expressions of the people of Northern Ireland yesterday, the underlying implication was that those people wished to remain part of the United Kingdom. Will my right hon. Friend recognise this sensitivity in statements? Does he agree that what is really needed is sensitive, quiet persistence in carrying through the agreement?

Mr. King: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. As I have made clear again today, and as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has made clear on a number of occasions, we understand the sensitivity of the Unionists about their position in the United Kingdom. We have sought to give not only the clearest assurances about it but our own personal commitment to it. We feel that that should be better recognised than perhaps it is by some.

Mr. Martin Flannery (Sheffield, Hillsborough): Is it not clear that what the Unionist leaders mean by democracy is having their own way—when they have a communalist vote which gives them the right to do as they please? Is there not another serious political lesson to be learnt? When the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux) and the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) went to No. 10 Downing street, they were the nominal leaders of the Unionists but, by the time they returned to Northern Ireland, they found that they had been replaced and that other people, including the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson), were the real leaders of the Unionist party. Is it not a fact that the speeches made in the past few years by the nominal leaders of the Unionist party have aroused something that was always latent and threatening? Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that it was not a day of protest, as many have said, but, at the very least, a semi-revolt of the most serious proportions? It is no good us pretending that it was not something like that.

Mr. King: It is true that some of the activities of the leaders and other leading members of the parties in the months since the signing of the agreement have raised, quite unjustifiably, the antagonism of people towards the agreement and increased the expectation of what could be

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achieved by their opposition. I think that some slightly wiser counsels have already broken through. People have recognised, as they have said, that it is not realistic to expect my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to agree to scrap the agreement. The agreement provides within its text for regular and frequent meetings—moreover, for meetings at the request of either party. The request for a suspension is therefore a breach of the agreement as well. Now people understand that the agreement is there. Sensible and constructive discussion must be the way forward.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I recognise the importance of this statement, but I must take into account also the other business before us today. I shall allow questions to continue for a further 10 minutes.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (Norfolk, North-West): Is my right hon. Friend aware that I spent all yesterday with true Loyalists in my constituency? Is he aware that, during that time, many of them expressed their profound dismay and disgust at the way in which other so-called Loyalists were behaving?

Mr. King: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. It is undoubtedly true that those sorts of things do great damage to the reputation of Unionism. I am certainly most anxious to see the way forward by discussion and not by violence and intimidation, which will only damage the Loyalists' own cause.

Mr. Roy Mason (Barnsley, Central): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that the vast majority of hon. Members wish him and his ministerial colleagues to remain firm and resolute against the re-emergence of paramilitary Protestant terrorism which we witnessed yesterday afternoon? Is the right hon. Gentleman also aware that, whether Members of Parliament are in favour of the accord or not, they would not wish him to be diverted from his course or to bow the knee to terrorism in Northern Ireland?

Mr. King: I very much appreciate those remarks, especially coming from the right hon. Gentleman. With his reputation in Northern Ireland for firmness of purpose in these respects, I think that they will be widely noted.

Mrs. Anna McCurley (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Unionist leaders would elicit far more sympathy from the rest of the United Kingdom if they participated more in aspects of the United Kingdom Parliament other than in just Northern Ireland affairs? What would happen if the Scots did this? We would feel isolated and different. I think that is why the Unionist leaders feel isolated and different.

Mr. King: This is one of the matters which we hoped we would be able to discuss and which we put forward in the proposals by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. It is true that one of the criticisms being made of the Unionists against the Government is that they are excluded from consultation and involvement in community affairs. The truth is that the Unionists are excluding themselves. They are absenting themselves from councils. They are not carrying out their proper duties in the Assembly of scrutinising the work of Northern Ireland departments. They complain about being excluded and, to cap it all, they absent themselves from this sovereign House of Commons of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Clive Soley (Hammersmith): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the British and Irish Governments, as the Governments of two sovereign states, have a joint interest in protecting the civil rights of the people of Northern Ireland and in enabling the two cultures to co-exist in Northern Ireland? Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that, if only for that reason, it is vital that no minority group exercises a veto over the democratically agreed policies of those two elected Governments?

Mr. King: The hon. Gentleman talks about joint interest. I should like to make it clear in case there is any misunderstanding that we have a clear responsibility, but we recognise the interest of the Irish Republic in matters affecting the nationalist community in the North. It must be clearly understood that there has never been in this agreement any question of joint authority. That is one of the lies told in some of the propaganda.

Mr. Barry Porter (Wirral, South): Does my right hon. Friend recognise that all Unionists either should or do condemn the violence and intimidation yesterday? Was that violence and intimidation not entirely predictable and, indeed, predicted? Is that violence likely to recur when the marching season starts? Will my right hon. Friend state in clear terms the offer to the Unionist leaders in terms of talks? Are those talks to be open-ended, without strings and with no options closed? If not, my right hon. Friend is wasting his time.

Mr. King: On the first point, if my hon. Friend is right and such violence was predictable, a heavy responsibility rests on the shoulders of those who called the day of protest. On talks, it was made clear by the two Unionist leaders that, if they entered into any discussion, it would not imply in any way acceptance of or agreement with the Anglo-Irish agreement and that they would wish to conduct the talks outside the ambit of any Anglo-Irish agreement. We understood that position. We made it absolutely clear that the talks on the matters discussed or on any other matters that they wished to raise could go ahead.

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): Does the Secretary of State still believe that the so-called Anglo-Irish agreement will help to bring about peace in Northern Ireland?

Mr. King: Yes, I do.

Mr. Michael McNair-Wilson (Newbury): Will my right hon. Friend elucidate on his reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Porter)? How are these talks to take place in the context in which there could be a constructive dialogue outside the Anglo-Irish agreement if that agreement is to stay in place?

Mr. King: I hope that my hon. Friend has seen a copy of the statement that was issued after the meeting that the Prime Minister and I had with the Unionist leaders. If he studies the statement he will see that various proposals were made. There is obviously a wide gulf and there is obviously total disagreement. Instead of harping continually on that, the intelligent way forward is to see whether there are areas upon which there can be agreement — not to concentrate upon the areas where there is disagreement.

Ms. Clare Short (Birmingham, Ladywood): Is the Secretary of State aware that the Unionists of Northern Ireland have always threatened violence in this way? That is how Ireland came to be partitioned. That is why there was such injustice and discrimination under Stormont. That is why Sunningdale failed. That is why Northern Ireland is the mess that it is. Always until now they have succeeded in that threat. Only if the British Government stand up to them and start to move forward can we begin to get peace in Northern Ireland.

Mr. King: One of the saddest aspects of yesterday is that many people will get the impression that the majority community in Northern Ireland are like that, when in fact the vast majority of Unionists are looking for a peaceful, prosperous and happy Province in which to live. They deserve a leadership that could look objectively at new proposals to see whether we can find a better way to go forward rather than the stalemate and the sadness of the last 12 or 14 years.

Mr. Michael Latham (Rutland and Melton): What kind of Loyalist puts on a hood and stands at a barricade? What are they loyal to? Is not the fact that they behave in that way doing tremendous harm to the instinctive support of the British people for the maintenance of the Union?

Mr. King: I find myself unable to answer my hon. Friend's question, because they were not even loyal to the protests in which they were supposed to be involved. As many hon. Members have said, nothing more destroyed the impact that that protest might have had than the visible intimidation, with the clear inference that if people were not going to work there were many other factors, except voluntary reasons, for not being there.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Were not yesterday's events, or something like them, foreseeable and foreseen with foreboding, and predictable and predicted by some of us who, with sorrow, went into the Lobby against the Anglo-Irish agreement? May I repeat the question that I put to the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) and my own Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, in 1969? Charles I, Sir Thomas Wentworth, Earl of Strafford, Cromwell, Peel, Gladstone, Lloyd George and, in our own time, other well-meaning politicians from this side of the water—who of them have had any success in Ireland? Is not the real problem us?

I make no criticism of the men of the British Army, but if there is what is seen as an English Army in Ireland, what else can we expect? Without being frivolous about it, because it is a very unfrivolous subject, if they can get behind Barry McGuigan, and if they can get behind the Northern Ireland football team, by some alchemy, will not the residents of Ireland solve this problem? We ought to recognise that there is nothing we can do from this side of the water.

Mr. King: It would take more than a supplementary answer to respond to the hon. Member and to the many points that he has raised. I simply believe that the inferences behind his question are quite unacceptable.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): Will my right hon. Friend agree that, much as the Parliament of the United Kingdom remains committed to the Union so long as the majority in Northern Ireland so wish, it has to be said that those who wrap themselves in the flag of the Union to frustrate the Parliament of the Union and who destroy the consent upon which the Union is based put the Union at risk and no one else?

Mr. King: I have made absolutely clear, and I do so again, my belief in and my commitment to the Union of Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom. All I would say is that some of the events of yesterday, and other events as well — as when other people try occasionally to hit me over the head with a Union Jack wrapped in an iron bar—put some strain on that loyalty.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): The Secretary of State has called attention to the fact that a number of hon. Members were making common cause yesterday with men at the barricades. If he is alleging that those hon. Members were in some way responsible directly for the violence in which they were participating, will he say who they were — because that role is not conformable with membership of this House — and ensure that they do not participate in the wider discussions that he must have with the Unionist community to ensure that their continuing anxieties are met?

Mr. King: The hon. Member may or may not have seen some of the television coverage of yesterday's events. He will have seen a number of people in paramilitary dress. I referred to the fact that Members of this House were making common cause. I noted the distinction that was made by the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) in his by-election when a group of people in paramilitary dress arrived. My understanding is that the right hon. Gentleman very properly said that he would have nothing to do with them and they were invited immediately to leave that by-election rally. I wish that I had seen some of that same approach yesterday.

Mr. K. Harvey Proctor (Billericay): Is it not most unfair to blame my right hon. Friend the Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux) for the current position in Ulster when in August of last year he warned that the denial of equal British rights to Ulster would seriously destabilise the Province, especially in the light of the comments yesterday of Mr. T. E. Utley in the *Daily Telegraph*, who described the Hillsborough agreement as not being about equality and said that
"it is a frigid lie to pretend that it is."?

Mr. King: I totally reject the fact that any citizen of Northern Ireland does not have equal rights with others in the United Kingdom. One of the rights that people enjoy in the United Kingdom is representation in this House. I just happen to notice that that right is being denied to them at the present time by no will of the Government.

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): Will the Secretary of State confirm that if there is such a phrase as "no surrender" it relates to the attitude of this House and that the Anglo-Irish agreement still stands and will be acted upon? If there is a phrase in common parlance—"not an inch"—it is a phrase to be adopted by this House: that the gains of the Anglo-Irish agreement both to the Unionist and to the nationalist community will not be surrendered, not by an inch and not by an iota. Will the Secretary of State confirm that last week's offer of round table talks is still on the table?

Mr. King: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I confirm that intimidation or threats are no way to approach this House of Commons or this Government. That is a very

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counter-productive approach. Nor would there be any case to use it if it were suggested that there is no other approach, because the offer of talks and the agreement that we should meet again to review the suggestions that we made stands. Even more after yesterday, I very much hope that people will realise that that is the sensible way to proceed. For elected Members in the United Kingdom, wherever they come from, faced with serious issues in their constituencies, to refuse to meet and talk with Ministers and with the Prime Minister and discuss these issues is a deplorable lack of responsibility at a very important time.

Later—

Mr. Gow: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, in answer to a question which followed his statement, unwittingly misled the House. Can you give him an opportunity to correct the wrong impression which he gave? My right hon. Friend said that the rights of the Queen's subjects who live in Northern Ireland are the same as the rights of the Queen's subjects who live in Great Britain. My right hon. Friend will acknowledge that the passing of legislation for Northern Ireland is done by Order in Council, whereas for the rest of the kingdom it is done by ordinary Bills. Secondly, there is no——

Mr. Speaker: Order. That seems to be a continuation of the statement. I have already said that we have a very heavy day in front of us. We cannot continue the debate in that way.

Immigration Rules

4.19 pm

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I wish to raise with you a point of order concerning the behaviour of the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Mrs. Rumbold), of which I have given you notice. Indeed, I have given notice of it to the hon. Member.

I ask you whether it is in order for an hon. Member to write a letter on a matter relating to the immigration rules that libels another hon. Member. I refer to a letter which was sent in February by the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden to a firm of solicitors, in which she enclosed a copy of a letter which the Minister of State, Home Office, the hon. and learned Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Waddington) sent to me. In that letter she appears to say that new regulations are being prepared, of which the House has no knowledge, by the Minister of State, Home Office.

The hon. Lady said in her letter:

"I wonder if you are aware that"

the Minister of State

"is working towards the introduction of new regulations which will prevent MPs such as"

myself

"exercising an open market in allowing people, such as"

Mr. X

"from coming into this country with illegal passports."

The hon. Lady claimed that

"about 20 Labour MPs . . . operated a system over the Christmas holiday period of inviting people to come to them on the completely wrong information that their own Member of Parliament is not available."

The hon. Lady explained how she spent two days during the Christmas period not answering the phone—

Mr. Speaker: Order. If the hon. Gentleman is putting a point of order to me, he must not recite from letters.

Mr. Corbyn: I am sure you will agree, Mr. Speaker, that it is important that I explain why I am putting the point. I shall be brief.

The final point in the hon. Lady's letter is:

"I am sure you will appreciate that this does not endear the system to people, like myself, who work exceedingly hard on behalf of genuine cases, many of whom are resident and very supportive of the Conservative Party."

First, Mr. Speaker, is it in order for an hon. Member to write libellous comments about another hon. Member and, indeed, about a group of hon. Members? Secondly, as the Member concerned is a Minister in the Government, she appears to have information, which is not available to the House, about the true purpose of the draft regulations which the Minister of State, Home Office has raised. I ask you, Mr. Speaker, whether it would be in order for both the hon. Lady and the Minister of State to come to the House and make statements about the true nature of the regulations which the Home Office is trying to introduce.

Mr. Speaker: I cannot be asked to adjudicate on letters which pass between hon. Members and their constituents. This is a matter between the hon. Lady and her constituent. If the hon. Gentleman is alleging that it is a breach of privilege, that is a different matter and he should write to me about it.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. My hon. Friend has given me a copy of the letter. It goes a good deal wider

than the hon. Lady's disgraceful personal allegations against my hon. Friend. There are two points. First, there are allegations against a group of hon. Members. The hon. Lady said in her letter:

"It may well be that you"—

that is, her correspondent—

"are not aware that there are about 20 Labour MPs who operated a system over the Christmas holiday period of inviting people to come to them on the completely wrong information that their own Member of Parliament is not available."

That is a serious allegation against a group of hon. Members.

Secondly, the hon. Lady is a member of the Government and she refers in the letter to what she calls the Minister of State

"working towards the introduction of new regulations which will prevent MPs . . . allowing people . . . into this country with illegal passports."

The House knows of draft guidance, which the Government have communicated to a number of hon. Members, but the House knows nothing of new regulations. If the Government are contemplating new regulations — the hon. Lady is a member of the Government — it is essential that, apart from the hon. Lady coming and explaining herself to the House, the Minister of State or the Home Secretary comes here and says whether, behind the back of Parliament, they are working on new restrictive regulations.

Mr. Speaker: What the right hon. Member has said may be true, but it is not a matter of order. He must pursue it by other means. If he is alleging that contempt has taken place, he knows the action he should take. He should write to me about it.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Further to the point of order, Mr. Speaker. I think you should consider the matter, for the very good reason that several weeks ago, when it was first raised, the discussion was on whether the responsible Minister should at that time have made a personal statement about the attack on 23 Labour Members of Parliament. Because of his failure to do that, other Ministers are using those references in letters. The least that should take place now is that the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Mrs. Rumbold) should come to the Dispatch Box and explain her conduct regarding not only the proposed new regulations but why the Government and their Ministers are carrying on the argument about those 20-odd Labour Members in the absence of an apology at the beginning from the responsible Minister.

Mr. Speaker: Again that may be so, but it is not a matter of order. There are many parliamentary ways in which the matter can be raised.

Royal Ulster Constabulary

4.26 pm

Sir Eldon Griffiths (Bury St. Edmunds): I apologise, Mr. Speaker, for not having given you written notice of my intention to seek your leave to move the Adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 10, but the matter has arisen out of the statement made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. With your leave, beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House to discuss a matter of specific, urgent importance, namely,

"the allegation made by hon. Members of the House, and inferentially supported by the Secretary of State, that members of the Royal Ulster Constabulary have failed in their duty to maintain the law as Parliament makes it and to maintain their oath of office to the Queen and to the House."

It is a specific matter because, if the allegation is correct, members of the RUC are guilty of the most serious crime. It is important because, if the police service cannot be relied upon to maintain the law of the land, no Government and no law are possible. It is urgent because we can see with our own eyes the chaos which is in prospect in Northern Ireland.

As one who supports the agreement and who supports the Secretary of State, I wish, by moving the Adjournment of the House, to give my right hon. Friend an opportunity to take back the suggestion to which he lent his authority today, that the police service of Northern Ireland did less than its duty yesterday in the face of the rebellion against the law.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has asked leave to move the Adjournment——

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Tom King): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I cannot deal with a point of order in the middle of a Standing Order No. 10 application.

The hon. Gentleman has asked leave to move the Adjournment of the House for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that he believes should have urgent consideration, namely,

"allegations made by hon. Members of the House, and supported by the Secretary of State, that members of the Royal Ulster Constabulary have failed to maintain the law and to follow their oath of allegiance."

I have listened to the hon. Gentleman, but I regret that I do not consider that the matter that he has raised is appropriate for discussion under Standing Order No. 10. I cannot therefore submit his application to the House.

Mr. Tom King: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I was aware that I could not interrupt my hon. Friend in his Standing Order No. 10 application. I very much regret that he chose to raise the matter in that way. In no sense did I inferentially imply a lack of confidence in the RUC. What I said clearly—[HON. MEMBERS: "That is not a point of order."]—is that there have been a number of complaints alleging that the police did not take action. It is——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I fully understand the strong feeling of the Secretary of State on the matter, but I must apply the same rules to the Front Bench as I apply to the Back Benches.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Ordered,

That the draft Parliamentary Constituencies (England) (Miscellaneous Changes) Order 1986 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c. — *[Mr. Archie Hamilton.]*

Scotland

4.29 pm

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to establish an elected Scottish Legislative Assembly for the purpose of improving, modernising and amending Scottish legislation and for the purpose of controlling and scrutinising the administration of Scottish affairs within the United Kingdom; and for connected purposes.

The people of Scotland voted almost exactly seven years ago, on 1 March 1979, by a majority of 77,435, which included, I believe, the Secretary of State for Scotland, to establish a Scottish Assembly. That decision has been treated with contempt by the Government. Instead of having an Assembly to deal with Scottish affairs within the United Kingdom, we have had the exact opposite. We have had a minority Government who have gone to great lengths to centralise more and more power in Whitehall.

The consequences of the refusal to carry out the wishes of the Scottish electorate have been serious. The machinery of government in Scotland is falling into disrepute. The catalogue of failure of the present administration in the Scottish Office is almost endless. The most recent and dramatic example yet of the incompetence of the Scottish Office is the betrayal of the work force at Gartcosh. We have also had the long-drawn-out tragedy of the teachers' dispute.

I am anxious to achieve the widest possible support for the principle of Scottish devolution. Accordingly, I have selected the wording of the long title extremely carefully. In fact, I did not choose the words. I borrowed them from an excellent speech which was delivered by the right hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh, Pentlands (Mr. Rifkind) on 16 December 1976. The right hon. and learned Gentleman is now, of course, the Secretary of State for Scotland. He said:

"'Nothing is so powerful as an idea whose time has come.' The time has come for devolution for Scotland, and this House must take account of it."

The House took account of that and the right hon. and learned Gentleman went on to perform some amazing political acrobatics in the ensuing years. In column 1832 he said:

"Scotland is the only territory on the face of the earth which has a legal system without a legislature to improve, modernise and amend it. This is a crazy anomaly."

The right hon. and learned Gentleman was no Johnny-come-lately to the cause of a Scottish Assembly. He declared in column 1837 that he had

"for 10 years argued the need for a directly elected Assembly".

What a splendid fellow. He conceded in column 1833 that there should be no substantial industrial or taxation powers devolved. However, he clearly did not rule out some devolved industrial and taxation powers. He summed up his position as follows:

"There has been a qualitive change in the call for devolution. In the early twentieth century the demand for a separate Scottish Legislature was the result of national sentiment. That national sentiment still exists, but added to it is the need for good government, good administration and a better deal for the Scottish people within the United Kingdom."

Amen to that.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman's comments on the Scottish Office are especially relevant in view of his present position. In column 1833 he said:

"Clearly I welcome the establishment of a directly-elected Assembly, and I welcome the fact that its functions are broadly those of the Scottish Office. The very fact that these functions are with the Scottish Office already is a recognition by previous Governments that distinctive Scottish treatment of these problems is necessary."

In column 1832 he said:

"We have now a Secretary of State for Scotland who is for all practical purposes a Scottish Prime Minister. He covers a Department the equivalent of which in England and Wales is served by eight or nine Ministries. He has one Department, and Scottish Members are expected to scrutinise his actions. The Scottish Office has more civil servants than the European Commission."

If that was the position in 1976, it must surely be as strong now, when the right hon. and learned Gentleman is Secretary of State for Scotland. I have drafted the long title in accordance with his clearly stated objectives and I repeat the invitation which I offered to him during Scottish Question Time last week. I ask him to sponsor my Bill in the interests of consistency if not in the interests of expediency.

In column 1836, the right hon. and learned Gentleman said of the concept of Scottish devolution:

"It would not satisfy the extreme nationalists, nor would it meet the fears of the diehard Unionists, but those two do not represent more than a minority of the Scottish population."—[*Official Report*, 16 December 1976; Vol. 922, cc. 1831-37.]

Since then the right hon. and learned Gentleman has seen fit to join that diehard unionist minority, a minority which consists now of only about 15 per cent. of the Scottish electorate according to recent polls. Indeed, the right hon. and learned Gentleman had the neck actively to support the repeal of the Scotland Act on 20 June 1979 on the ground that the clear referendum majority for devolution was not large enough, despite the fact that he had campaigned actively for a yes vote.

An absolute majority of those who voted in the referendum voted yes. Indeed, 32·9 per cent. of the electorate voted yes, which was a stronger mandate than the 30·83 per cent. of the British electorate who voted for a Tory Government in the 1983 general election. As for the Secretary of State himself, he had the support of only 20·61 per cent. of his constituency's electorate in the 1983 election. However, he seems still to think that he has a strong enough mandate to carry out the actions that he is now taking. We understand from recent local by-elections that the Scottish Tories are now running in fifth place in Scotland, behind the Labour party, the Nationalists, the Liberals and even the Communists.

I welcome this opportunity to draw attention to the ludicrous and spectacularly inconsistent position of the Secretary of State for Scotland on this crucial issue. After having taken the courageous decision to resign from his Opposition Front Bench position in 1976 so that he could fight for devolution, he has now become Scotland's answer to Jim Hacker. Yes, Secretary of State, seems to be the order of the day.

It is important to reassert the firm commitment of the Labour party and the majority of the people of Scotland to establish an elected Scottish Assembly to assume control of the powers which have been devolved to the Scottish Office over the years. Obviously that commitment is consistent entirely with our recognition of the position of our friends and neighbours in other parts of the United Kingdom, especially in the aftermath of the destruction of the democratic institutions of England's metropolitan areas. Scottish Labour Members can promise wholehearted support to our friends in the north of England in their just demand for the decentralisation of power and the provision of an effective agency for economic development.

The overriding objective must be the defeat of this pernicious Tory Government. However, we should all recognise that the establishment of a better Britain and a better Scotland must be consolidated as soon as possible by constitutional reform, including, as an urgent priority, the establishment of an Assembly. It is in that spirit that I introduce my Bill.

4.38 pm

Mr. Don Dixon (Jarrow) *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Is the hon. Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon) seeking to oppose the Bill?

Mr. Dixon: It gives me no joy to speak against a ten-minute Bill that has been introduced by one of my hon. Friends. I feel rather like Daniel today. My hon. Friend the Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) has made my task far easier by explaining that the wording of the Bill is based on the words of the right hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh Pentlands (Mr. Rifkind), who is now the Secretary of State for Scotland.

I have a strong affinity with my friend the hon. Member for East Lothian. I have a holiday in Scotland every year with my family and I believe that the coastline on the west of Scotland is second only to the Northumberland and Durham coastline. The scenery in the west of Scotland is second only to that of Durham, Northumberland and Cumbria.

As one who represents a constituency in northern England with the highest unemployment in mainland Britain and with as many, if not more, social problems as are to be found in the part of the United Kingdom that is represented by my hon. Friend, I oppose the Bill for two reasons. We have already lost a tier of local government. The Tyne and Wear county council provided quite a strong agency for creating employment in the area I represent.

The motion does not ask that leave be given to introduce a Bill to establish an elected Assembly in Scotland in two years' time, or after we have a northern development agency or after a regional system of government which benefits the region has been established. It speaks of establishing an elected Assembly now.

My first reason for opposing the motion springs from naked envy. I envy my Scottish colleagues, who have a Secretary of State with Cabinet rank. I envy their being able to come here every month and ask questions of their Secretary of State. I am envious of their Select Committee. I am envious of their Grand Committee. I am envious of Scotland's development agency.

My second reason for opposing the motion involves a warning to a future Labour leadership. When we get a Labour Government in 12 months' or two years' time, we shall inherit an unemployment level of more than 4 million. We shall inherit a National Health Service which will be a shambles. We shall inherit a welfare state which the Government have disassembled. We shall inherit an industrial base which is in tatters. My warning as an individual Member of Parliament who will in all probability be re-elected at the next election is that I shall not spend time, as did the Labour Government between

[Mr. Dixon]

1974 and 1979, dealing with constitutional issues in the House when there is so much in the country to be put right. That is why I oppose the motion.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. John Home Robertson, Mr. John Maxton, Mr. Dick Douglas, Mr. Dennis Canavan, Mr. George Foulkes, Dr. Norman A. Godman, Mr. Tom Clarke, Mr. Allen Adams, Mr. William McKelvey, Mr. David Lambie, Mr. David Marshall and Mr. Bob McTaggart.

Mr. Home Robertson: And there is room for the Secretary of State for Scotland if he wants.

SCOTLAND

Mr. John Home Robertson accordingly presented a Bill to establish an elected Scottish Legislative Assembly for the purpose of improving, modernising and amending Scottish legislation and for the purpose of controlling and scrutinising the administration of Scottish affairs within the United Kingdom; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 7 March and to be printed. [Bill 100.]

Orders of the Day

Housing (Scotland) Bill

As amended (in the Standing Committee), further considered.

New Clause 2

DUTY TO ENSURE AVAILABILITY OF SHELTERED HOUSING

It shall be the responsibility of each district council in Scotland to ensure that there is sheltered Housing available for 5% of its resident population over the age of 65 years."—*[Mr. Maxton.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

4.45 pm

Mr. John Maxton (Glasgow, Cathcart): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

In the midst of the general housing crisis in Scotland, much of which the Government have caused, is a housing problem for the aged. An increasing proportion of the population are aged over 65, and an increasing proportion of them require housing that enables them to remain in society although they cannot entirely look after themselves.

In an excellent document, Age Concern recognises that the need is simply not being met. Very few local authorities in Scotland have anything like enough sheltered housing for people aged over 65. I represent an area in which 41 per cent. of the population live in council houses. Week in, week out, constituents come to my surgeries seeking special needs housing or sheltered housing supplied by the local authorities. Many of them are nearly housebound, or have partners who are nearly housebound. Many have to negotiate stairs, which makes mobility even more difficult. They require homes on the ground floor with some form of alarm system linked to a warden who can provide immediate help. Too many elderly people live without such support.

I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) wants to speak about this subject. Due to his past connections with Age Concern, he will no doubt be able to give more details.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): One is taken by surprise in this place from time to time and this afternoon has been no exception. It gives me great pleasure to speak in support of new clause 2.

Although I hope for a sympathetic response, I know that we shall get a response from a Minister who understands what I shall talk about, as the Minister and I have had some discussions on the matter before. As my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) said, I was involved with the needs of the elderly as a director of Age Concern Scotland. I shall quote from an excellent document which it produced and which, I believe, was sent to all Members of Parliament—it was certainly sent to the Minister—entitled "Housing Facts and Figures". The introduction says:

"Age Concern Scotland believes that every pensioner has the right to a decent home. A decent home should be warm, adapted to the pensioner's real needs and at a price the pensioner can afford."

We have all been worried about warmth during the past few weeks. We know that old people often live in houses that are difficult to heat. Those who are lucky enough to live in sheltered housing are relatively well off. During the past few weeks, we have been worried about pensioners freezing to death in inadequate housing. Those of us who campaign for extreme weather payments should not sit back and think that we have achieved anything very substantial, because the payments are limited to relatively very few pensioners. Many others who need help will not benefit. If the Government have their way with the Social Security Bill, matters will deteriorate rather than improve.

One of the best ways in which to ensure that pensioners are kept relatively warm in winter is to ensure that they have a decent house which is well insulated and easy to heat rather than draughty, large and prone to substantial heat loss. During the past couple of decades, sheltered housing has therefore been advanced as one of the best means of housing old people.

It was my predecessor at Age Concern, which was then called the Scottish Old People's Welfare Council, the late Marjorie Salmon, who launched the idea of sheltered housing in Scotland at a conference in Aberdeen. The principle of sheltered housing was not then fully accepted, and people had not thought through the possibilities. A lot of tribute is due to those pioneers of some decades ago.

As to the need for sheltered housing for the elderly, the recommended rate — at least, it used to be the recommended rate—is 50 per 1,000 of the population, although I think that the Government are shying away from the fact that it is a recommended rate because increasingly they are unable to get anywhere near that rate, as I shall demonstrate.

The need for sheltered housing is increasing, not just because of the present severe winter but because the population is living to a greater age. Demographic changes are brought about by improvements in medical services so that people are living longer, for which one is thankful, and the percentage of old people in the community is increasing. It can be seen from the report to which I have referred that the figure is moving up to 17 per cent., and will be up to 20 per cent. by next century.

If one considers the type of housing in which old people live it is regrettably the case they are much more likely to lack a bath than is the case in the population generally. Old people are more likely to share a bathroom than the rest of the population, yet when one is old and retired, with the possibility of coping with incontinence and other difficulties, baths and facilities such as hot and cold running water are even more necessary than they are for the population generally.

Old people spend a much larger percentage of their income on the provision of housing. It is therefore very important that they get good value for the money they spend on housing. As I [illegible] in the debate that was truncated last Thursday, unfortunately public expenditure on housing has been halved in the lifetime of the present Government. The Minister tried all manner of twists and turns to deny this, but the facts speak for themselves. When the Government took office, over £1 billion a year was being spent on housing; the amount now is only £556 million, which, by anybody's arithmetic, is about half; and this at a time when needs are greater, the number of old people is increasing, and they are living in substandard accommodation. As a result, fewer new houses are being built.

Since 1979, 45,000 jobs in the Scottish construction industry have been lost. There is, on the one hand, this increasing number of old people in substandard accommodation desperately anxious to get into sheltered housing and on the other hand many construction workers who are unemployed. This is a ridiculous situation. It is time that the Government recognised the need and took the opportunity to put men—and, may I add, some women, as I note the presence of my right hon. Friend the Member for Clydesdale (Dame J. Hart) — in the construction industry back to work.

If one examines the need, the recommended level of 50 per 1,000 of the retired population is not over-generous. There is a need for 36,000 sheltered housing units, identified in the Age Concern document, and confirmed by Government, yet fewer than 16,000 sheltered housing units currently exist. The shortfall is still well over 20,000 units. That is needed to provide the right facilities for old people.

Amenity housing, as the Minister knows, although one stage down in some ways, remains an important provision for old people. Again, on Government figures, the need is estimated to be over 72,000, yet in Scotland only about 4,500 amenity houses exist. The shortfall is over 67,000. One has to bear in mind the huge shortfall identified in the Age Concern document and the opportunities for unemployed workers to provide this housing.

I discussed this matter earlier today with my right hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Rutherglen (Mr. MacKenzie) and, although the need is as important as the quick revision of sheltered housing to meet that need, there are a couple of other things which ought to be borne in mind. I am sure that the Minister will agree, as my right hon. Friend reminded me, that when discussions are taking place between the local authority and the housing association which may be providing the accommodation for the local authority, careful consideration must be given to the appropriate location of sheltered housing units. It is important not to build units on outlying sites at a distance from the centre of the town. Housing for old people should be provided in the community so that they can participate in, and see what is happening in, the community, and be within easy reach of shops, post offices and other facilities. Full account should be also taken of the fact that old people can be annoyed by excessive interruptions from young people or by traffic.

There is a tendency, not too prevalent, for some authorities and organisations, in their enthusiasm to provide more sheltered housing units, to skimp on the provision, so that instead of providing two-apartment houses they provide studio apartments. That is not the sort of accommodation we should offer old people in retirement. It would be intolerable to see a return to the single-end type of accommodation which some elderly people had to live in at the start of their lives.

I have indicated the substantial need for sheltered housing that exists. We accept that the amendment is fairly rigid in its targets. The aim is to give the Government an opportunity to respond and to recognise how far short of what is required the present provision is.

The elderly feel under attack from the Government. Indeed, they have been concerned about the lack of provision for heating, given that pension increases recently announced amount to pennies instead of pounds—40p for a single pensioner which, as my hon. Friend the member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett) said, is

[Mr. George Foulkes]

enough to buy four eggs. The last Labour Government devised the formula that pensions should go up with increases in earnings or prices, whichever was the larger. If that formula were applied, a single pensioner would be better off by £4 a week and a married couple by £6·50. We know that in all those areas the pensioner is under attack.

I hope that we shall not see a negative attitude to this new clause from the Government. I hope that they will give some sign, even if the new clause is not acceptable, that pensioners have some hope of living in a decent house which is easy to keep warm and clean and in which they can continue to live during their retirement, in comfort and happiness. I hope that we shall get such a commitment from the Government but, if I am honest, having seen the Government's record, I have my doubts.

5 pm

Mr. Willie W. Hamilton (Fife, Central): In 1980, a report sponsored by the Scottish Home and Health Department and the Scottish Education Department, entitled "Changing Patterns of Care. Report on Services for the Elderly in Scotland", was published. It was the report of a programme planning group set up by the Advisory Council on Social Work and the Scottish Health Service Planning Council.

Chapter 4 of the report dealt fully with housing for the elderly and what was required to deal with probably the biggest housing challenge facing Scotland today, which, as my hon. Friend the Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) said, is the need to provide good, comfortable housing for a steadily increasing elderly population.

The report worked on the proposition that probably 50 sheltered housing places per thousand people over 65 would be about right. That is not a scientific figure, but it is the kind of figure on which the report was working. On that basis, it was estimated that in 1977, 34,900 such places would be required. The report went on to deal with amenity housing.

The report compared the requirement with what was happening. In 1978 the total number of places completed, under construction, or approved, awaiting a start, was 12,597 for sheltered housing and 6,209 for amenity housing. The report went on to say that adequate resources should be allocated to the sheltered housing programme.

The position has worsened since that time. The report estimated that the capital costs for the sheltered housing programme that was put forward would be £317 million. I have no doubt that the Minister will say that the Government cannot afford that expenditure. Let me remind him, as I have reminded the House on many occasions, that that £317 million is just about the amount — my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) will be able to correct me if I am wrong—that we are spending on 1,200 folk 8,000 miles away in the Falkland Islands. If we can afford that in the Falkland Islands, we can afford it for the old folk of Scotland.

It is now five or six years since that report was produced, and the number of elderly people is increasing. The problem is becoming more acute month by month. The number of people aged 65 and over in mid-1984 in Scotland, was 724,800. On the basis of 100 beds per thousand of the over-65s, that would give us a figure of 72,460. The Age Concern document to which my hon. Friend referred was much more conservative. It gave a figure of 36,230. If one looks at the sheltered housing provision then existing, one sees that the total was 15,948 —considerably less than half what the total provision should have been. There was a shortfall of more than 20,000.

It is a well known fact, with which the Minister would not argue, that every responsible body in Scotland, of all political persuasions and of none—housing associations, local authorities, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, trade unions, architects, builders, churches, the National Economic Development Council, the Labour, Liberal and Social Democratic parties, and even members of the royal family — is coming to realise the great dangers of inadequate housing, whether for the young or the old, but particularly for the old. All those organisations, and I suspect many Conservative Members — although only two Back-Bench Tory Scottish Members are here, because they do not care very much about the problem — would assert the need for far greater investment in public housing, not least for our old folk.

Britain's construction record, by international standards, is appalling. As a percentage of gross domestic product spent on construction, our figures are disgraceful. The United Nations figures for 1982 show that Switzerland was spending 16·2 per cent. of its gross domestic product on construction, Canada 14·6 per cent., Finland 13·6 per cent., Ireland 13·2 per cent. — one of the poorest countries in Europe — West Germany 12·7 per cent., France 11·6 per cent., Italy 11·3 per cent., and Sweden 10·7 per cent. The United Kingdom was bottom of the league, at 7·5 per cent., and it is getting worse all the time. That is a disgraceful record. It is an evil record. Like my hon. Friend I despair of the Government doing anything about it, because they just do not care.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): First, what is the Scottish Office's best assessment of the global need in the next two decades for sheltered housing? There must be some figures. If the Minister does not have them, perhaps his Parliamentary Private Secretary will be able to provide them before the Minister replies.

Secondly, there is a problem that I do not think is special pleading for the Linlithgow constituency because other places are in a similar position. Take, for example, Blackburn. Blackburn blossomed forth quickly a quarter of a century ago. It was expanded for the purposes of the then British Motor Corporation and British Leyland. When I first became the Member of Parliament for Linlithgow —West Lothian as it was then—many families in their late twenties and early and middle thirties moved in to expanded Blackburn, expanded Whitburn and expanded Armadale. But it does not need any genius to now that they are mostly aging at the same time. They are communities with special needs because people are suddenly reaching ages between 60 and 70 at the same time, yet there is inadequate sheltered accommodation and accommodation suitable for elderly couples.

That problem could be repeated in many parts of Scotland, although in few areas in such an extreme form as in Blackburn. What is the Scottish Office thinking on areas of special need because of the history of the late 1950s and early 1960s.

Thirdly, I am appalled by the figures given to me by the excellent director of housing in West Lothian, Mr.

John Spraggon, concerning the present demands from one-parent families compared to three or four years ago. What is Scottish Office thinking on one-parent family accommodation? The break-up of marriage involves a single person and sheltered housing—or at least single housing, may be the best answer to the problem.

Fourthly, what thought has been give to the provision of simple, even mundane, medical treatment within sheltered housing — for example, chiropody? The Minister will be aware that there is a shortage of chiropodists and that the queues for treatment are getting longer and longer. Something could be done about that and, in terms of the old proverb "A stitch in time saves nine", it could save endless trouble. Will simple medical facilities—it need not be more than a room—be made available in new sheltered accommodation or in areas of clustered sheltered housing?

The legacy of Coal Board housing is a problem facing the mining areas, if not West Lothian in particular. The condition of such housing varies considerably. My hon. Friend the Member for Fife, Central (Mr. Hamilton) can confirm that some are in such appalling condition that they must be demolished. In other areas the Coal Board housing is of an extremely high quality and well built—often at the turn of the century. The same can be said of the old Scottish Oils Ltd. housing.

Will the Government have discussions with the Coal Board on the future of this housing in areas where there are no longer, rightly or wrongly, any pits? I am talking specifically about the position in Stoneyburn and the area of Wilson terrace. These areas used to serve the Polkemmet pit, which has been closed, and other pits. The Coal Board has said that housing management is not its forte. The West Lothian council has said that although it could purchase the houses at market price there is no question of improving them out of existing financial resources. I discussed this matter with the chairman of the West Lothian housing committee, Mr. Robert Lee, a serious councillor who told me that the council cannot afford to do the improvements which the long-term tenants understandably ask for.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. I am finding it difficult to relate what the hon. Gentleman is saying to sheltered housing for the over-65s. I am sure that he can relate his remarks to the new clause.

Mr. Dalyell: I do not want to go on and I shall cut my remarks short.

I echo the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) on the needs of the construction industry. The industry could play an important part in the matter of sheltered housing and with regard to unemployed building workers and under-employed resources. It may not cost anything like what the Government anticipate, especially when one takes into account the extra taxes that firms would pay, the reduction in uneployment benefit paid out, adjustments to housing benefit, national insurance and the whole social calculus.

Last month I was asked to address the Institution of Civil Engineers and at its request I am preparing to speak to the Forth Valley building employers. When I do this I see how necessary it is for the construction industry to get something of a fillip. Have the costs of creating sheltered housing been taken into account in terms of the social calculus?

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): I support the amendment. I am sure that most hon. Members would welcome more sheltered housing for their constituents. I know that some local authorities, especially my own—Falkirk district council—are doing their best to meet the housing need. Recently my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) opened a new sheltered housing complex at Tygetshaugh at Denny in my constituency. My hon. Friend and I spoke to virtually all the residents immediately after the official opening and most were undoubtedly delighted with the new accommodation. However, I am sure that there must have been many more old people who were disappointed because, although the council is doing its best, the Government are not doing enough. The Government are not giving local authorities sufficient funds to meet the housing needs.

The new clause proposes that we should lay down national targets so that each district council would try to ensure that there is sheltered housing for at least 5 per cent. of those people over the age of 65. That would certainly go some way towards meeting the need, provided that the Government have the political will to give sufficient resources to the local authorities.

5.15 pm

A few weeks ago we had a debate on housing support grant and housing capital allocation. The truth of the matter is that many councils are getting nothing by way of housing support grant—that includes Falkirk district council—and councils receive little in terms of housing capital allocation compared with their needs. The Government are not playing the game. I do not wish to see another statutory obligation placed on local authorities unless sufficient support is given by the Government to meet such obligations.

My hon. Friend the Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) spoke about the Age Concern document which stated that in the case of old people the proportion of their income which goes towards heating their homes is higher than in the population in general. Similarly, the proportion of their income which goes towards housing is higher than the average for the population. When discussing housing and the needs of the elderly it is no use giving them a roof over their heads — they need adequate heating, especially in this weather; otherwise, there may be a health risk, and certainly at this time of the year it could be a matter of life or death. When the transition was made from the old system of rent rebates to the new housing benefit, many old people, including those in sheltered housing, lost out. The Prime Minister did not mention that this afternoon when she was quizzed by my right hon. Friend the Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock) about heating assistance for old people and indeed others on low incomes.

I hope the Minister will adopt a more generous attitude tonight. It is important not just to help the local authorities to meet housing needs, but it is also important to help people to meet their heating requirements. I support the new clause and I hope that if the Government accept the new clause it will be strengthened by more commitment on their part. I am sure such a commitment would be welcomed by old people in sheltered housing and those old people who are literally queueing up for a place in sheltered housing.

Mr. Michael Martin (Glasgow, Springburn): On Saturday, a constituent came to see me at my surgery. He is an elderly gentleman of nearly 80, and he told me that his wife was a stroke victim in the district hospital, which is quite a distance from the constituency. If he misses the bus to get there, he has to get a taxi because there is no other means of transport. The doctor at the hospital had written to say that if my constituent's wife could go into sheltered housing, which would mean that she would be near her daughter in the Bridgeton district of Glasgow, she could be released into the community and a precious place could be made available at the hospital.

My constituent was ashamed at having to ask for help and at having to give details of himself and his family to people like me. He felt as though in some way he was asking for favours. I tried to tell him that the fault did not lie with him. He should not have had to come to us. He should have such accommodation as of right. He was doing the community a service, because at his age he and his daughter were prepared to look after his wife. It was shameful that his wife had to be in hospital because we could not provide sheltered accommodation.

The new clause lets the Government off the hook. More than 5 per cent. of sheltered housing should be available in the council stock. It is a scandal that, in this day and age, elderly people are either confined to hospital or sometimes to their homes without proper back-up, when all that the Government need to do is to give a little more and provide sheltered accommodation. It should not be difficult for the Government to build new sheltered accommodation, or instruct a Government agency such as the Scottish Special Housing Association, and the community-based housing associations, to do so. They could even adapt some of the council housing stock for sheltered housing.

It is time that the Government stopped telling people that everything is all right in sheltered housing, when they know very well that we are in a desperate situation. The Minister knows that a great deal of our housing stock is allocated to people who are under-occupying four or five-bedroomed houses. They were young people when they went into the house and were bringing up young children in the 1950s, or in some cases in the 1940s. Those houses are not being released for families, because we do not have the proper housing stock. It is shameful that some of our elderly tenants get only the support of a home help, sometimes for an hour a day, and in some cases every second day. It is time that the Government did something to alleviate the problems. We are being modest in asking for this small amount of sheltered accommodation.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Cromarty and Skye): I support the new clause. I echo the comments made by other hon. Members in urging the Government to try to achieve a percentage target for sheltered housing in each local authority in Scotland. That must be underpinned by the requisite finance from the Scottish Office, so that the authorities can meet the target. It would be ludicrous for us to put forward such a proposal without some clear sign from the Scottish Office that it is willing to loosen the purse strings for new build and new start.

I know that the Minister will have heard in Committee from my hon. Friend the Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston) about the highlands and islands. The Minister will be aware of the correspondence from and exchanges with my hon. Friend and myself over some of the tremendous problems in housing generally being experienced in those areas.

Encouraging a percentage target for sheltered housing in the highlands and islands will accentuate the difficulties experienced elsewhere, because of the increased cost of new build. On the west coast, places such as Fort William and Mallaig, in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber, and some in my constituency, have persistent housing problems. In places such as Ullapool, Kyle of Lochalsh, Gairloch and Aultbea, the local council, even if it had a percentage target at which to aim, would be hampered more than most local authorities in introducing a programme for increased sheltered housing, because the number of houses that it would be able to complete, with the finance available, would be smaller than the number in areas that are nearer the markets and do not have the problems of haulage and so on. I hope that the Minister will bear that in mind.

We all want more sheltered housing. It is important to set in context the problems that may be emerging in the Highlands regional council at the moment. In the sheltered housing scheme in Achiltibuie, which is about the most remote corner of the north-west of my constituency, because of cuts in other aspects of Government provision to the regional authority, there is a question mark over the provision of a warden for the sheltered housing. This is part of the broader picture. The new clause, which is commendable and has the support of my hon. Friend the Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber and myself, must evoke a response from the Minister that is considerably more sympathetic than other responses. It must recognise the realities of providing sheltered housing, particularly for the elderly, in the highlands and islands.

In the north of Scotland we have a higher average proportion of elderly people, and that is a persistent historical fact. Although not so much in the past few weeks, strangely enough, we also have fairly severe weather conditions in comparison to the rest of Scotland. The weather in other parts of Scotland has been exceptional recently. These factors contribute to the costs that old people must sustain and to the difficulties that have to be met. I hope that the new clause will evoke a positive and supportive response from the Minister.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Michael Ancram): I understand the concern and interest of Opposition Members and the reasons why the new clause has been tabled. Although the amendment was tabled by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton), the name of the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) also appears on the Amendment Paper. We appreciate the previous incarnation of the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley and the interest that he has in the subject. However, I am surprised the the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends who have supported the new clause wish to impose a new duty on local authorities which removes discretion—although I am sure that that was not the intention—and sets a rigid target. That may well not have been the intention of Opposition Members.

Mr. Maxton: The Minister is nit-picking.

5.30 pm

Mr. Ancram: The hon. Member for Cathcart accuses me of nit-picking, but I can make more of my point. I am trying to help the hon. Gentleman to see the error of his drafting ways. I am sure that the hon. Member for Cathcart understands, even if his hon. Friend the Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley does not.

Mr. Maxton *rose*——

Mr. Ancram: I would like to finish my point and then I will certainly give way.

As the hon. Member for Cathcart will remember, I suggested in Committee that the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities may not always be aware of what Opposition Members wish it to do. In terms of the new clause, I have a shrewd suspicion that that is the case and that, were COSLA consulted as to whether it wanted a rigid new clause of this type, it might not be quite so supportive of Opposition Members as it frequently is.

Mr. Maxton: I am delighted to know that COSLA supports me in most of my actions. If the Minister is prepared to give a commitment now that he will move a new clause in another place which states

"not less than 5 per cent.",

as he is so concerned about us laying down such a rigid target, I would be perfectly happy, as would my hon. Friend the Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley, to withdraw the new clause.

Mr. Ancram: The hon. Gentleman is trying to fish his way out of trouble. He has not answered the real criticism of the new clause—that it imposes a rigid target on authorities. The hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley appreciates that.

I would like to put the matter into perspective. It is important because all hon. Members are concerned about the elderly and the housing available for them. I have referred to the need to provide more support housing for the elderly. It is important that hon. Members realise that that housing need not necessarily be sheltered. We should not talk about sheltered housing to the exclusion of other forms of housing, which may be as important and as valuable to elderly people.

The new clause relates to sheltered housing. I am always apprehensive when I see Opposition Members getting up, especially the hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. Hamilton) who seems to look at life through glasses that are tinted with something that I cannot understand.

Mr. Willie W. Hamilton: They are red-tinted.

Mr. Ancram: The hon. Gentleman says that his glasses are red-tinted but whatever colour they are they tend to distort what he actually sees.

The hon. Member for Fife, Central said that the situation is getting worse in relation to sheltered housing. I would like to give the House one or two figures to help hon. Members appreciate the true position.

In Scotland in 1979, there were 6,877 sheltered houses. By 1985, the last year for which I have figures, there were 17,854. That is very nearly a threefold increase. The total housing for the elderly and disabled in Scotland in 1979 was 12,570. In 1985 it was 34,438. Again, that is nearly a threefold increase.

It is important that, if hon. Members wish to make speeches, they do so with a full knowledge of the facts. Local authorities are already under a duty to consider the housing conditions in their districts and the needs of the district with respect to the provision of further housing accommodation. That gives the authorities both discretion and duty in provision. The new clause takes away that discretion and replaces it with a requirement to provide bed spaces for 5 per cent. of the population over 65 years of age.

Dame Judith Hart (Clydesdale): Will the Minister relate the figures for sheltered housing to the increasing ratio of the elderly in the population? Without that comparison the figures are meaningless.

Mr. Ancram: I intend to do that. I shall give the detailed figures that will answer the right hon. Member's question.

The recommended rate, as the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley said, is of 50 bed spaces per thousand people aged over 65. I believe that the hon. Gentleman was slightly confused about the figures that he gave, as he mixed bed spaces and units. The recommendation endorsed by COSLA and subsequently endorsed by the Government, is 50 bed spaces per thousand of the elderly over 65.

Mr. Foulkes: Old couples do share beds.

Mr. Ancram: Couples sometimes share units as well, and the hon. Gentleman must be aware of that.

The average provision in the whole of Scotland at present is 47 bed spaces per thousand population over 65. That is 4·7 per cent. and is not far off the 5 per cent. that the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley requires.

I have already referred to some of the increases since 1979. Those increases have allowed us to reach a position which, while it is not quite at the target of the recommended level, is close to it. There have been percentage increases in the various forms of housing for the elderly as follows. In sheltered housing there has been a 65 per cent. increase between 1979 and 1985. In sheltered wheelchair housing there has been an increase of 295 per cent. over the same period. In amenity housing there has been an increase of 115 per cent. over that period and there has been a total increase of 154 per cent. over that period. The growth in population aged 65 and over was 1 per cent. to the mid-point of 1984. There has been a considerable advance in that time in terms of actual provision.

Areas such as West Lothian, referred to by the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) and Midlothian, in which Opposition Members have an interest, provide only six and four bed spaces respectively per thousand of population over 65. That reveals that elsewhere in Scotland provision is well in excess of the guide figures that have been proposed.

In view of the accusations and allegations, particularly from the hon. Member for Fife, Central, I would like to give more figures. The number of persons in Scotland over the age of 65 is 724,624. At present there are 32,810 sheltered bed spaces in Scotland and 1,348 wheelchair sheltered bed spaces. These figures amount to 47 bed spaces per thousand persons over the age of 65. There are, however, variations within those figures. The hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye (Mr. Kennedy) spoke about the islands and the remoter areas. Authorities such as Shetland have 173 bed spaces per thousand of the

[Mr. Ancram]

population over 65. Badenoch and Strathspey, which are rather closer to the hon. Gentleman, have 123 bed spaces per thousand of the population. Ross and Cromarty have 51 bed spaces and are therefore up to target.

Mr. Foulkes *rose*——

Mr. Ancram: I will give way in a moment.

Skye and Lochalsh have 50. They are up to target.

Mr. Foulkes *rose*——

Mr. Ancram: The hon. Member must allow me to finish this point. He deployed some figures the other day and I want to deploy my figures now.

There are authorities, including city authorities such as Dundee, which provide 184 bed spaces per thousand of the population over 65.

It is important to recognise that while there are areas where bed space provision in terms of sheltered housing is much lower than it should be—these areas must be working to meet the targets—there are other areas that have provision well above the recommended level. The overall figures in Scotland are nearly up to the recommended level endorsed by the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley.

Mr. Foulkes: This is the most central point in comparing figures. My understanding of the recommendation included in the circular—I admit that that was a Labour Government circular which may have been abandoned or changed by the present Government—was that the recommended level was 50 units per thousand. The Minister seems to have transposed that to bed spaces. I would be grateful if the Minister could tell us when that change took place. It is clear from the document issued by Age Concern, which analyses the statistics, that the understanding is that it should be units per thousand. I have been working on that basis and my hon. and right hon. Friends understand that the base is 50 units per thousand. When did this sleight of hand by the Government take place? When did they change the sheltered housing units to bed spaces?

Mr. Ancram: It is my understanding that the measure has always been bed spaces. The figure of 50 per thousand arises from a survey carried out for the whole of Britain in 1962, and was incorporated in the Scottish housing handbook as helpful guidance to local authorities when the Labour Government were in office. I am being handed a piece of paper which confirms that. The number of people requiring this sort of accommodation is best assessed on the basis of bed spaces which they will take up. I know from having opened some sheltered accommodation units that some are for single people and others for married couples. Therefore, that is the correct way to deal with the matter.

It is important that hon. Members recognise that the ratio is on a national basis. Local authorities should have the discretion, which the new clause would remove from them, to decide how far they meet or exceed the ratio, depending on the circumstances in their localities. Equally, it must be right that local authorities judge their overall housing needs and priorities. In that way the needs for sheltered housing can be assessed against the requirement for other accommodation within the bounds of what the authority, and ultimately the country, can afford.

At present sheltered housing is provided in many ways, not just by local authorities. The housing associations with public resources provide some of the accommodation contained in the figures that I mentioned. There is private investment in sheltered housing. A local housing authority would take account of all those matters in considering the needs of its area, especially its need to provide sheltered housing.

Mr. Kennedy: The Minister probably made the point clear when he quoted the ratio figures earlier, but am I correct in thinking that those figures referred only to local authority provision, and did not take other forms of sheltered housing provision into account?

Mr. Ancram: Even the new clause is not clear on that. It states that the responsibility of each district council in Scotland will be

"to ensure that there is sheltered Housing available for 5 per cent. of its resident population over the age of 65 years."

As nothing was said to the contrary, I assumed that that included sheltered housing provided by housing associations. They continue to contribute to the level of sheltered housing and bed spaces within sheltered houses for the community. It is important to realise that both local authorities and other agencies have an important role to play, and have been playing it.

Mr. Kennedy: Our emphasis has been on local authorities. There is a hint in the Minister's reply that the figures that he gave did not refer only to local authority provision, but included all the other forms of provision. Will the Minister clarify that?

Mr. Ancram: It is generaly accepted that local authorities are not expected to provide for all housing needs. They must form a strategic overview for their areas, and marshall resources to meet local needs, working in co-operation with other agencies, such as housing associations, the Scottish Special Housing Association, new town development corporations and the private sector. That is part of a housing authority's general strategy, and does not apply only to sheltered housing. Private developers are now making a significant contribution to the special needs housing sector which until now has been provided by the public sector. The fact that provision is coming from the private sector does not diminish the value of the accommodation.

Mr. Kennedy: What about the figures?

Mr. Ancram: My figures cover all the ways in which sheltered housing has been provided. Much of the total is made up by housing association provision.

Mr. Maxton: Will the Minister confirm that all his figures have been for bed spaces, not sheltered housing? There is a difference.

Mr. Ancram: If the hon. Gentleman had listened to me, he would know that I gave the original figures separately from the bed space figures. The original figures for the increase in shelterd houses were 6,877 in 1979 rising to 17,854 in 1985. Within those houses there are varying numbers of bed spaces. I said that the hon. Member for Cathcart appeared to be confused about bed spaces and houses. We are talking about providing accommodation for a recommended number of elderly

people, that is 50 per thousand of the population. The number of sheltered houses that have been built has increased threefold since 1979. None of us is complacent, and I hope that the hon. Gentleman will accept that the figure in the new clause is almost met at present.

5.45 pm

I would be the first to admit that more work needs to be done for the elderly. I have recognised the needs of local authorities by increasing their capital allocations over two years by 43 per cent. The hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) continues to consider that increase a reduction, but authorities which have seen substantial increases in their capital allocations realise that they have more resources available to do what they want, and that is right.

The new clause, as it stands, would make poor law and would not be welcomed by local authorities. On further consideration I am sure that the hon. Member for Cathcart will consider that it should be withdrawn. If he does not, I must invite the House to reject it.

Mr. Maxton: Once again we have an example of how the Government and the Minister cannot make up their minds whether they are in favour of extra public expenditure on housing, or whether their economic philosophy leads them to reject that. The Minister keeps trying to prove that he is a generous, liberal man when it comes to housing matters, but all of us, including our constituents and his, know that that is not the case. We know that overall the Government have cut housing expenditure by 50 per cent. since they came to office, and that sheltered housing——

Mr. Ancram: What did the Labour Government do?

Mr. Maxton: We are talking about the Tory Government. They have been in power for nearly seven years, yet their only answer to any case that is made is, "What did you do about it?" They know that the Scottish people reject them and have no interest in their policies, so they can only drag in what is becoming increasingly ancient history.

Mr. Ancram: The hon Gentleman has got back on his old high horse about cuts in capital expenditure on housing in Scotland. He knows that that is incorrect, so I shall not refer to it. He also knows that last week his hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) announced that a Labour Government would increase expenditure on housing by between £4 billion and £5 billion. The hon. Member for Garscadden shakes his head, but if he reads *The Scotsman* of Friday 28 February he will find himself quoted there in connection with a major policy document. Perhaps he would like to explain to the House from where the extra money will come, and why, having seen a cut of 37 per cent. in housing under the Labour Government, anyone should believe that a future Labour Government would increase spending.

Mr. Bruce Millan (Glasgow, Govan): That was a waste of time.

Mr. Maxton: I agree with my right hon. Friend that, as usual, the Minister is trying every last possible way to divert attention from the effects of his housing policy. He is trying to curry favour with his Back Benchers, who have a great deal of interest in the condition of housing in Scotland.

When the Minister tried to say how well the Government had done in Scotland in providing sheltered housing, he made no effort to set the increase in sheltered housing against the increase in the numbers of elderly. He than switched the attack from sheltered housing to bed spaces for the elderly, and he used every diversionary tactic to get away from the basic argument that the Government are failing the elderly in our society. He does not even have any of his hon. Friends present on the Government Benches to say, "Hear, hear," when he does make a few comments. The Minister even went back to 1962 to dig up that argument.

All the organisations which are concerned with this issue are worried, not about bed space, but about sheltered housing for those who are in need in our society. There has been a change in thinking and in the way in which society approaches the elderly, particularly those who are not as capable of looking after themselves as they once were. In the past we provided homes for the elderly to go into. Increasingly, and rightly, the aim is to allow the elderly to stay in society and live among their friends for as long as is humanly possible. Therefore, since 1962 there has been a shift in the way in which we look at the problem.

The problem is not just the lack of sheltered housing, but the way in which the Government have slashed the services for the elderly in a variety of other ways. In my constituency we talk about amenity housing. In my constituency houses are provided for the elderly in Dougrie place. An alarm system has been in place from those houses to an old folks home, Glenwood Lodge, for the past six years, but the system came into operation only last month because the Strathclyde region did not have the resources to be able to afford the extra staff in the old folks home to allow it to become operative. It is not just a matter of sheltered housing. There has been an overall decline in the way in which the Government treat the elderly.

I do not accept the answers that the Minister has given, but I accept tht there may be defects in the way in which the new clause is drafted. That is always possible when the Opposition draft amendments without the help of the advisers that the Ministers have, and without the help of the parliamentary draftsmen. The Minister claims that the clause is an inflexible and rigid imposition upon local authorities and that they ought to be allowed to decide their future in such matters. The Government insist on the right to buy, they insist that every local authority should sell its council houses, and they insist that the money local authorities may borrow for building must be limited by the Government, but whenever it suits the Government's purpose they use the shoddy argument that local authorities must have the right to decide. That is a shoddy argument coming from the Minister, who has made every effort to tighten and centralise control over local authorities. It is a spurious argument coming from his lips.

I accept that the wording of the new clause may be defective. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New Clause 5

HOUSING FOR THE MENTALLY HANDICAPPED

"In subsection 11 of section 1 of the Tenants' Rights, Etc. (Scotland) Act 1980 after paragraph *(c)* there shall be inserted the following paragraph—

"*(d)* where a dwelling house is one of a group all or a significant proportion of which have been provided for letting to mentally-handicapped persons ".—*[Mr Millan.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Millan: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take the following: amendment No. 3, in clause 1, page 1, line 9 at end insert,

'except that section 1(1) of the 1980 Act shall not apply to property owned by the housing associations in paragraph *(e)* which have been provided to meet special needs.'.

Government amendments No. 13, 15 and 16.

Mr. Millan: The effect of the new clause would be to exclude from the right-to-buy provisions of the Tenants' Rights, Etc. (Scotland) Act 1980 housing specifically provided for the mentally handicapped. I tabled the new clause before the Government had tabled their amendments Nos. 13, 15 and 16. On the matter of the mentally handicapped my new clause goes wider than the Government amendments.

The problem of housing for the mentally handicapped has been drawn to my attention and, I am sure, to the attention of other hon. Members, by the Key housing association which happens to have an extremely fine development, partly hostel and partly ordinary dwelling-house accommodation, in my constituency. Therefore, I know its work and I admire the work that it has done and continues to do. It has been concerned, as are other housing associations, at the effects of the Bill which, as originally drafted, would have imposed the right-to-buy provisions on housing associations as a whole, without qualification. I need not go into the argument for that, except to say that the Opposition are opposed to the extension to the housing associations of the right-to-buy provisions. There was a perfectly adequate voluntary code operating before the Bill was introduced.

I do not want to go into the more general arguments, I want to deal specifically with housing for the mentally handicapped, which, without special provision in the Bill, would not be excluded under the normal provisions of the Tenants' Rights, Etc. (Scotland) Act 1980. As I understand it, the provision in section 1(11)*(c)* deals with housing which has special facilities designed or adapted for the needs of elderly or disabled persons.

The Key housing association, in relation to its provision for the mentally handicapped, says that its objective is to provide such people with care and support appropriate to their needs to enable them to live in the community in a home which is as normal as possible without any specially designed features such as warden call systems or other adaptations. In a sense, it is quite different from providing normal sheltered accommodation for, for example, very elderly where there are usually adaptations, or at least the provision of warden accommodation. Such adaptations are not necessary in some cases when one is providing housing for the mentally handicapped. It is part of the policy of the Key housing association not to provide special facilities but to try to make the accommodation as normal as possible, although it might be part of a complex which also includes hostel accommodation. As the Bill was originally drafted such accommodation would not have been excluded from the right to buy.

I am aware that since I tabled my new clause the Government have tabled their own amendments, Nos. 13, 15 and 16. Although we naturally welcome any concessions by the Government in respect of housing associations, the amendments do not fully reach the point which is dealt with in my new clause. The substantive Government amendment is No. 16 and, as far as I can see —I hope that the Minister will explain it clearly— the amendment deals with two separate issues. I am not fortunate enough to have been a member of the Committee and I must confess that I have not read the appropriate pieces on the matter, but I know that Government amendment No. 16 is in response to criticism made by the housing associations and by my hon. Friends and others in Committee.

As far as I can see, the first part of amendment No. 16, which adds a paragraph *(f)* to section 1(11) of the Tenants' Rights, Etc. (Scotland) Act 1980, deals with the definition of charities and charitable housing associations. Although I would welcome an additional provision covering housing associations, I think that this measure is expressed in unnecessarily restrictive terms. Paragraph *(f)*(i) of Government amendment No. 16 refers to claims for exemption from tax

"in respect of all periods from 3 October 1980".

I believe that this means that no new charitable association will be able to operate under these terms. That is ludicrous, grossly unfair and unjust. The Government have conceded a point with respect to charity-based housing associations. I see no earthly reason why the provision should be restricted in that way. I hope that that restriction will be removed before the Bill reaches the statute book.

6 pm

Paragraph *(g)* of Government amendment No. 16 deals specifically with those suffering mental handicap. Will the Under-Secretary of State confirm that the reference to "mental disorder" includes mental handicap as well as mental illness? I assume that it does. Paragraph *(g)* completely unnecessarily links the concession, which deals not only with mental disorder but ex-prisoners and certain other categories, to housing association landlords. I understand that the words

"a common landlord, being a landlord so mentioned"—

in the previous paragraphs — link paragraph *(g)* to charity-based housing associations. That is ludicrous.

If there is a case, as the Government have acknowledged there is, for saying that certain categories —in which at least half the houses are let to persons suffering mental disorder, mental handicap or mental illness, to persons released from prison or to young persons who have left the care of a local authority— should be excluded from the right-to-buy provisions of the Tenants' Rights, Etc. (Scotland) Act 1980, it matters not one bit whether the houses concerned are provided by a charity-based housing association, another housing association or a local authority. It is the nature of the housing provision that is important. It is therefore unnecessary and wrong for paragraph *(g)* as I read it—I should be delighted to be told that I am misreading it— to be linked with paragraph *(f)*, which deals with a small category of charity-based housing associations.

We have agreed on the principle that housing for the mentally handicapped should be excluded from the right-to-buy provisions. That exclusion should apply across the board to local authorities that decide to build houses of this type. To be fair, I am not aware that local authorities have provided such housing, but that is a deficiency. It is not an argument for not providing proper provisions in the Bill.

The same principle must apply to the other categories covered in paragraph *(g)*, which includes

"persons who have been released from prison"

and

"young persons who have left the care of a local authority".

Why should not a local authority provide for those categories? If it does, the argument for excluding those dwelling houses from the right-to-buy provisions is as valid as it is with respect to housing associations.

Paragraph *(g)* imposes another restriction. It states that the group of dwelling houses is not to exceed 14. I am not sure where the figure of 14 originated, unless it was to provide for existing developments known to the Government. I see no reason why that restriction should be included in the amendment.

The Government have acknowledged that the Bill is defective as originally drafted. They have acknowledged that there is a strong case for making further exemptions in the right-to-buy provisions. New clause 5 provides that in the case of mental handicap the exemption should be wider than that provided by the Government in Government amendment No. 16. Although new clause 5 does not mention the other categories, I believe that the argument is as valid for the other categories of discharged prisoners and young persons leaving the care of a local authority. I believe that, if the Under-Secretary of State will accept the principle of new clause 5, the Bill will have to be further amended to take account of these other categories.

Mr. Ancram: It might be helpful if I speak at this stage because most of the amendments linked with new clause 5 are Government amendments. I think it is clear from the speech of the right hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Millan) that it would be helpful if I were to explain the meaning of the rather legal terminology in the amendments.

New clause 5 seeks to exempt from the right-to-buy provisions certain houses provided to meet special needs. As the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) will recall, we discussed this matter at some length in Committee. We have brought forward our own proposals in Government amendment No. 16. New clause 5 is more limited—I think that the right hon. Member for Govan appreciated this point—in scope than the amendments we have tabled because it relates only to people suffering from mental handicap. Other categories are included in the Government amendments.

I can confirm that the term "mental disorder" covers mental handicap. Section 1(2) of the Mental Health (Scotland) Act 1984 defines mental disorder as meaning

"mental illness or mental handicap however caused or manifested."

It is clear from our consultation with housing associations that there are other types of special needs which are provided for in integrated schemes. They include persons suffering from addiction to alcohol or other drugs, persons who have been recently released from prison and young persons who are leaving care.

In another sense—this touches on something that the right hon. Member for Govan said—new clause 5 goes wider than the Government believe necessary or appropriate. It would, as the right hon. Gentleman said, apply to all landlords, not just housing associations.

Mr. Maxton: Why?

Mr. Ancram: I shall explain that. The right hon. Member for Govan implied that the landlord referred to in the amendment was just a charitable housing association under the new definition. I am informed that the provision covers housing associations in general.

Mr. Millan: It is not clear in paragraph *(g)* what "a landlord so mentioned" is. There are references to a landlord in paragraph *(f)*, but I am not clear whether it is always the same landlord. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman would clarify that point.

Mr. Ancram: It was my understanding on my reading of the amendments when they were drafted and according to my instructions that the amendments covered housing associations generally.

Dame Judith Hart: And local authorities?

Mr. Ancram: Not local authorities. That is the point I have just made. The amendments cover housing associations. I shall check that, because it is important that the drafting should be technically correct. That is certainly my understanding. I realise that other landlords are involved in the original legislation but I am not aware that other landlords have integrated schemes of the type which we are trying to preserve. It is true that social work authorities let houses to the mentally handicapped. I understand that in general such houses tend to be leased from the relevant district council. Because the regional council is not the proprietor, the tenants do not have a right to buy. A further objection is that new clause 5 seeks to exempt all houses let to the mentally handicapped, irrespective of whether any social work service is provided in connection with them.

Amendment No. 3 seeks to provide that the right to buy shall not apply to property owned by housing associations which has been provided to meet special needs. Again I have to say that this amendment is much wider than is necessary or acceptable. A practical drawback is that the phrase "special need" is not defined. We have to ask who is to decide that a house has been provided to meet special needs. Is it to be the landlord? If that were the case, would not this give housing associations a very wide scope to deny to tenants the right to buy their homes?

As I explained in Committee, I believe that the existing provisions of the Tenants' Rights, Etc. (Scotland) Act 1980 do all that is necessary and justified to safeguard special needs houses for the elderly and the disabled. In my view, these provisions have worked well for local authorities where they have been applied since 1980, and they will be extended to housing associations when, by this legislation, their tenants are given the right to buy.

I did accept, however, that there was one type of scheme which was not covered by the present provisions and which merited further consideration. These are integrated schemes, where mainstream housing is linked with appropriate support services, with the aim of providing care and support in the community for groups such as ex-offenders and the mentally handicapped. The idea is that selected tenants, who act as what are called

[Mr. Ancram]

"caring neighbours", should be allocated ordinary general needs houses, but in close proximity to tenants who require special support.

In these circumstances, the houses clearly are not physically different from ordinary houses and the tenants would ordinarily have the right to buy. We are therefore bringing forward an amendment — it is the first sub-paragraph (g) of amendment No. 16—for such schemes to be exempted from the right to buy. The amendment has been drafted following consultation with a number of housing associations which have schemes of this type. In order to prevent abuse by going too wide, we are placing a ceiling of 14 houses as the maximum number which may be included in any one scheme, and we are providing that at least half must be let to people who fall into the special needs categories that we have listed.

These criteria are common to the vast majority of schemes which we have discussed. We are limiting the exemption to the categories of special need that we know are presently catered for in such schemes. However, we are taking a power—the new subsection (11A) that is provided for later in the same amendment — to add further categories to the list by order. This recognises that such schemes may develop into new areas of provision which we cannot foresee at present, and it will permit us to take account of such developments, as seems necessary and appropriate.

I hope that the House will accept that this is a significant concession designed to meet the concerns felt in Committee and the views expressed to us by housing associations and other interested bodies. The amendment recognises a type of development which is unique to housing associations and which is also, I understand, peculiarly Scottish.

Charitable housing associations are also dealt with in the amendments. The Bill as currently drafted provides exemption from the right to buy for those housing associations which are registered with the Charity Commissioners under the Charities Act 1960. There are perhaps three or four English associations that are registered under that Act which also operate in Scotland. These associations already enjoy exemption from the right to buy in England and it was clearly necessary to afford them the same exemption in Scotland.

6.15 pm

The question of charitable status for housing associations registered in Scotland is a rather different issue, since the Charities Act does not extend to Scotland. In appropriate circumstances, Scottish associations are able to adopt charitable rules and to apply to the Inland Revenue for charitable status for tax purposes under section 360 of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1970.

The question of exemption from the right to buy for Scottish associations with charitable status for tax purposes was raised at Second Reading and was debated at length in Committee. Representations were made to me that if these associations sold houses at a discount they would lose their charitable status, with potentially serious consequences for their viability. I agreed in Committee to take the question away and look at it again. In particular, I recognised that there were a number of associations which had enjoyed such status from an early date and which had developed their everyday functions in ways that properly utilised the tax benefits to support particular types of activity. On the other hand, an overall exemption for Scottish associations with charitable tax status would effectively have denied to a substantial number of tenants of general needs housing the right to buy the houses in which they live.

I was not persuaded that the preservation of an association's tax status should automatically take precedence over the rights of its tenants to buy their homes. This gave rise to the problem of identifying a definition which struck the correct balance between the rights of the individual tenant and those of the association as a whole. I believe that the proposals that I am now placing before the House strike an appropriate balance between these two competing objectives.

Under amendment No. 16, the new sub-paragraph (f), to be inserted in section 1(11) of the Tenants' Rights, Etc. (Scotland) Act 1980, would provide exemption from the right to buy for those Scottish housing associations which were registered with the housing corporation, under charitable rules, from the outset and which have had charitable status for tax purposes continuously since October 1980. It therefore affords exemption from the right to buy and thus protection for their charitable tax status to those associations which were set up initially on a charitable basis prior to the introduction of the right to buy for public sector tenants in Scotland and for housing association tenants in England and Wales and, indeed, the introduction of the voluntary code.

The tax status of an individual housing association based in Scotland is not at present a matter of public record, unlike charitable status in England. I cannot therefore be precise about the position of individual associations in relation to the new definition. It seems likely, however, that the extended definition will lead to about 30 to 35 individual associations with a total stock in the region of 12,000 houses being excluded entirely from the right to buy. In terms of housing stock, this represents a not insignificant proportion of the Scottish total of about 39,000 units.

Because of the uncertainty concerning tax status I do not wish to quote individual associations, but we believe that the definition now proposed will cover the major special needs associations and many of those with a mixture of special needs and general needs stock. These, we believe, include the major recipients—this point was raised in Committee — of the pre-1974 Shelter funds which was a matter of importance not only to Opposition Members but also to me, given my interest in Shelter at that time.

Mr. Maxton: I should be grateful if the Minister would say why pre-October 1980 is so important.

Mr. Ancram: I thought that I had made it clear that the Tenants' Rights, Etc. (Scotland) Act 1980 became operative on 3 October 1980. That was the date when the statutory right to buy was created. I understand, although I would not be categoric about it, that it was about that time also that the voluntary code was agreed with the housing associations. I am dating it back to the time when the right to buy became available not only for public sector tenants in Scotland but also for housing association tenants south of the border.

There are a number of other parts of the amendment which will insert three new provisions into section 1 of the

Tenants' Rights, Etc., (Scotland) Act, two of which are directly concerned with the operation of a new exemption for Scottish associations with charitable tax status. The new subsection (11B) will permit the Inland Revenue to disclose necessary taxation information to my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and to the housing corporation in order to determine the status of an individual association in relation to the exemption from the right to buy. The new subsection (11C) requires the housing corporation to record on the register of housing associations the identity of those associations which are exempt from the right to buy under these provisions and, to amend the entries subsequently if the position of an association changes. These two powers are required to ensure that the position of any individual association is properly determined and that, where appropriate, a record of its exemption from the right to buy is publicly available.

The other amendments relating to charitable status are more straightforward and I do not need to deal with them, unless hon. Members wish me to do so. With this group of amendments I have gone a significant way towards meeting the concern of the traditionally charitable Scottish housing associations while maintaining a proper balance between the rights of individual tenants and those of the associations. We have also honoured our commitment to look again at the position of certain special needs schemes.

In the light of this explanation I hope that the right hon. Member for Govan will withdraw his new clause and amendment No. 3.

I commend amendments Nos. 12, 15 and 16 to the House when they are called.

Sir Russell Johnston (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber): I support the amendment moved by the right hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Millan). He spoke clearly and concisely, so it is not necessary for me to say much about it. No doubt he accepts that the wording is not as legally precise as the parliamentary draftsmen would demand, and would be happy if the intent of his amendment were accepted by the Government. I go along with that.

The Government have been extraordinarily slapdash and cavalier from the outset about the general problem of charities and about the difficulty of the difference between England and Scotland. The Minister looks dumbfounded, but I should have thought it reasonable to expect the Government to be better prepared before introducing legislation.

I have here a letter from the Minister dated 20 December 1985, in response to a letter from me complaining that on Second Reading he could not answer questions about charitable status put to him by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar), myself and others. I shall leave out the "injured innocence" start to the letter and quote simply one paragraph:

"Although the powers of the Charity Commissioners do not extend to Scotland, I am aware that a few English registered Charities Act housing associations are operating here on a limited scale".

The Minister this evening was not sure whether there are three or four; I point out for his benefit that there are four. They are not all that limited. I do not think the British Legion could be regarded as operating on a limited scale. The letter continued:

"Because compulsory sales at a discount would be in conflict with Charities Act registration, tenants of these associations have been excluded from the Right to Buy. Tenants of such associations are already excluded in England and Wales, although otherwise eligible tenants have been given a right to equivalent assistance with the purchase of a different house on the open market. The Bill provides for the power to introduce a similar scheme in Scotland should it be required. In framing the legislation, I considered carefully the question of whether tenants of Scottish housing associations which are accepted by the Inland Revenue as being 'charitable for tax purposes' should also be exluded from the 'Right to buy'. On balance I decided they should not."

The original intention of the Government was to exclude Scottish-based charities. The Government amendment changes that drastically. I accept what the Minister said. It represents a significant retreat because of the justifiable pressure that was put on him. However, the amendment includes only Scottish-based charities registered by the income tax authorities before 1980. What does that mean? It means that no new Scottish-based charity will be possible in housing, even in the very narrow area of the mentally handicapped that was quoted by the right hon. Member for Govan. Such charities cannot get charitable status, as I read the amendment. That is inconsistent and unfair. I do not think that that is a good basis on which the Government should proceed.

What happened to the proposal for equivalent assistance? The letter said:

"The Bill provides for the power to introduce a similar scheme in Scotland".

Perhaps we will get that in another place.

Mr. Ancram: That power is already in the Bill. I did not go into detail on all the elements of the amendments but the hon. Gentleman will find that some of the amendments in the group being discussed relate to it.

Sir Russell Johnston: Is the Minister saying that that power will be exercised?

Mr. Ancram: I remind the hon. Gentleman of what I said in Committee. Obviously we shall wish to set up a scheme. At this stage it is our intention to consider the English scheme as a basis but we will want to consider what scheme would be best. The power to do so is in the Bill and the intention to provide something along those lines has been stated.

Sir Russell Johnston: I am grateful for that. The Minister has made a significant retreat. I think he said that approximately 12,000 houses will be covered. That is welcome, lest the Minister says that I am being ungenerous.

I do not understand how the Minister could have the gall to declare at the Dispatch Box that a fair balance—I think that was the expression he used—is equivalent to an inconsistent proposal. The proposal is inconsistent. Legislation should be consistent as far as possible and should not create new instances of unfairness at the same time as it removes others.

Dame Judith Hart: I echo what has just been said. I was not on the Committee but because of representations from Age Concern and Shelter and because of my interest in one housing association I have read the considerable proceedings in Committee. If I were in the Minister's position, as I once was, I would be ashamed if I had introduced a Bill simply on the proposition of the right to buy without understanding the problems that would arise when the principle was examined in relation to housing associations. I would be ashamed if I had to make such a retreat, although it is very welcome.

The Minister should have foreseen what would happen. Any Minister responsible for such a Bill should have asked

[Dame Judith Hart]

the officials who helped to draft it, "What is the snag about this clause?", and, "What is the problem about that clause?" He should not have had to concede now, although I welcome the concession.

I welcome subsection (11A) in amendment No. 16, which will give the Minister power to amend by order and to add to the list of classes of special need. That is wise and sensible. The Bill is limited to people who are mentally handicapped, people released from prison or other institutions and young persons who have been in the care of a local authority. Those three limited groups have been brought to the Minister's attention during the consideration of the Bill. In the course of time he may want to extend the provision to other groups which may come to his attention.

On the first part of amendment No. 16 about charities, as the Minister knows, I had tabled an amendment about the New Lanark association. I understand that that amendment could not be called. The Minister has visited New Lanark and is aware of the background to the problem, but for the benefit of those who have not visited it recently, may I explain that New Lanark is a special case in a category of its own? It was founded in the early sixties to conserve and restore the old Robert Owen village which is the best example of industrial architecture of its period anywhere in Britain. A remarkable job has been done so far. Therefore, one is worried. The New Lanark association has been in correspondence with the Minister, as have I. I hope that amendment No. 16 covers the case but I cannot be sure. Perhaps the Minister can help me.

6.30 pm

Tax relief is not the only consideration. New Lanark has houses that are owner-occupied and others that are rented and if it is to be able to undertake a conservation and modernisation exercise it must be able to retain planning control that takes into account a balance between owner-occupation and renting. That is essential for planning purposes as well as for finance.

The Minister will appreciate that it would be absurd if any problems were put in the way of New Lanark's redevelopment. He will be aware that money has been provided to New Lanark through the Historic Buildings Council for Scotland, the Ancient Monuments Society, the Scottish Tourist Board, the Countryside Commission, the Scottish Development Agency and the Manpower Services Commission. Many forms of help have come from central Government as well as from local government. It would be extremely unwise to place any barriers in the way of the remaining development of New Lanark and I am sure that the Minister would not wish to do so.

Paragraph (*f*)(ii) reads:

"registered under the Industrial and Provident Societies Act 1985".

The new New Lanark association was set up on 6 December 1963—I understand that the documents bear my own signature—under the Industrial and Provident Societies Act 1893. Model H7 1962 provides charitable status. I must confess that since the Government's amendments were tabled — we have had a weekend between their appearance and this debate—I have not had time to read the 1965 Act to ascertain the extent to which it consolidates the 1893 Act and whether there is any relevant difference between the two measures. I need to know — this is crucial, and if the Minister finds himself in any difficulty I hope that he will table a small amendment in another place—that the reference to the Industrial and Provident Societies Act 1965 will include provision under the 1893 Act. That is something which the New Lanark association needs to know as well.

Everything may be all right and the 1965 Act may have wrapped up everything in the 1893 Act, but we need to know whether that is the position. The Minister will appreciate that it is a considerable exercise to read through consolidation Acts, and even if one does it is not always possible to be sure that one's understanding of their effect is correct. I feel that the Minister has better facilities at his disposal to undertake that exercise than I do, or even the Library.

If all is well, I shall be happy, and so will the New Lanark association. The association was set up as a charitable institution and it is a registered friendly society. We need to know whether the amendment would cover the way in which it was registered under the industrial and provident societies legislation and the moment when that took place. That having been said, I would welcome the Minister's reassurance. If he is in any doubt, I should welcome also an assurance that an amendment will be introduced in another place — for example, if it is necessary to amend the wording to cover the issue which I have raised.

Mr. Maxton: I agree very much with what my right hon. Friend the Member for Clydesdale (Dame J. Hart) has said. I have visited New Lanark recently with my right hon. Friend and I have great admiration for the work that has been done there. I used to take students to New Lanark in a previous incarnation for them to see the industrial village as part of a historical exercise. I am sure that the Minister, as a historian, would welcome the work that has been done in New Lanark. The Minister should at least respond to my right hon. Friend in writing after he has investigated the matter which she has brought to his attention. I think that the New Lanark association will be exempt from the right to buy.

Dame Judith Hart: We must be sure.

Mr. Maxton: I cannot give a guarantee to my right hon. Friend. I am not the Minister and it is for him to give guarantees.

I hope that my right hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Millan) will excuse me if I deal first with Government amendment No. 16. I am a generous-hearted man, and I, like Christ, will welcome one sinner who is converted, even though in this instance he had to be pushed extremely hard before conversion. However, I welcome the concessions that the Minister has made for charities and special-need housing in relation to housing associations. Perhaps the amendment goes further than the Minister conceded when he replied to a debate on these issues in Committee.

Government concessions are always to be welcomed, but, as the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston) and others have said, it should not have been necessary for the Government to introduce a major amendment at this stage to the most contentious part of the Bill that deals with the right to buy and housing associations. It has been proved beyond doubt that the Minister's argument that he consulted the housing associations was wrong and that the associations' contention that they were never consulted about the

Government's proposals was entirely right. If the Government had consulted the associations before introducing the Bill, they would not have found themselves in a mess and they would not have found it necessary to table such a major amendment.

The Scottish Federation of Housing Associations wrote to several hon. Members, including myself, to the effect, "At long last the Government have been prepared to consult us." It claimed that that was the first occasion that they had done so since the provisions in the Bill were proposed. We welcome that consultation and we welcome the Government's amendments.

The Opposition's view is that the Minister could have gone the whole way on charity status. Unfortunately, he has not removed all the anomalies. There are anomalies between charitable status and registration of housing associations in England and Wales and the equivalent status and registration in Scotland. Total exemption would not have solved the problems.

In England and Wales there are 480,000 houses owned by housing associations, of which 380,000 are exempt. The associations which own them are exempt from the right to buy because they are registered charities. Even if there were total exemption of housing associations in Scotland that have charitable status and work under the charity rules, the same proportion of houses in Scotland would not be exempt.

If a new housing association were established in England or Wales tomorrow and it registered as a charity and was accepted as such by the commission under its rules, all the tenants of the houses which it purchased, repaired, renovated or built would be excluded from the right to buy. That would not be the position in Scotland. If a new housing association were established tomorrow in Scotland and it applied to the Inland Revenue for charitable status and undertook exactly the same work as housing associations set up prior to 1980, it would not be exempt from the right-to-buy provisions. Exemption will not extend to several housing associations which have been set up since 1980 and now operate under the charity rules.

The Tenants' Rights, Etc. Act (Scotland) 1980, which came into force on 3 October of that year, specifically excluded housing associations from the right to buy, but that has no relevance to the argument for exemption. The generous and logical thing to do is to say that housing associations in Scotland that can prove to the Inland Revenue that they act as charities should enjoy the same privileges as charitable associations in England and Wales. Perhaps I am being ungenerous, but I believe that the reason for the Government amendments, as for the Bill, is the desire to preserve the hon. Member for Edinburgh, West Society. The Link housing association has only recently been given charitable recognition. If the Minister did the logical thing, tenants of the association would no longer have the right to buy. I see no other reason for the cut-off date.

Why has the Minister not incorporated the ability to amend in paragraph *(f)* of amendment No. 16, as he has in the rest of the Bill? He might like to say that the enactment of the Bill would be a more suitable date from which to recognise housing associations as charities. The 1980 date cannot be changed except by primary legislation. I hope that the Minister in another place will reconsider.

As for new clause 5, my right hon. Friend the Member for Govan is quite right. He always is. I had my arguments with him when he was Secretary of State and I had a different job. I see no reason why the Government's generosity to housing associations cannot be extended to local authorities, as they provide special needs housing which goes much further than homes for the physically handicapped and the elderly.

I am sure that my right hon. Friend would be prepared to withdraw his new clause if paragraph *(g)* could be operated by local authorities, the Housing Corporation and the Scottish Special Housing Association. That would demonstrate the Government's willingness to admit that there is a problem with special needs housing. If the Minister is not prepared to do that, I shall happily support my right hon. Friend's new clause.

Mr. Ancram: I am quite surprised by the attitude of some hon. Members, especially of the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston). He seems to consider it better for the Government to go through Committee stage without making any concessions than to listen to the arguments, assess their value and, if necessary, make concessions. I appreciate that Labour Members consider the former to be the correct behaviour, but I always thought that the Liberal party described itself as a thinking party, which likes to chew things over. I should have thought that the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber would at least have welcomed the process as a result of which the amendments have been presented. I suspect that his problem is that he is getting close to having to vote for a practical example of the right to buy, and possibly even in its favour. He has scrupulously avoided doing that so far.

Sir Russell Johnston: I was merely saying that I admire the fact that the Minister has redeemed himself but that he had not shown adequate repentance.

6.45 pm

Mr. Ancram: I have listened to the arguments and I believe that my response is sustainable and justifiable.

I explained earlier why we cannot extend the integrated scheme in principle to local authorities. I do not believe that it is required.

Mr. Maxton: If local authorities say that the right should be applied to them and can illustrate a need, will the Minister consider the matter?

Mr. Ancram: I have made my stance clear. I identified something that is peculiar to housing associations and peculiar to Scotland. The concession that has been made is useful and valuable.

The right hon. Member for Clydesdale (Dame J. Hart) referred to New Lanark. She will recall that I said that I did not want to deal with any individual association. To the best of our knowledge, New Lanark will benefit from the exemption, but uncertainty remains, for the reason that I gave earlier. Information on the tax status of housing associations is simply not available to the Government. Exemption depends on that to a large extent. I shall look into the right hon. Lady's other question.

Dame Judith Hart: I appreciate that the Minister did not want to refer to any specific housing association. I am not asking for an undertaking about New Lanark's tax

[Dame Judith Hart]

status, but if the 1965 Act does not consolidate the 1893 Act, will the Minister undertake to remedy that in another place?

Mr. Ancram: Contrary to what the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) said, I did not consider the issue in respect of individual associations. I have come to what I believe is a balanced view and I stand by the criteria that I have presented to the House.

Dame Judith Hart: I am sorry to press the Minister, but it would be no use if when he examines individual housing associations and wants to take account of the arguments concerning New Lanark, he found that he had precluded himself from covering New Lanark because the Bill was ill drafted. I am merely asking him to ensure that that does not happen.

Mr. Ancram: I appreciate the right hon. Lady's concern, but I have said what I have to say about the amendment. I shall look into the matter that she raised, and if I find anything that contradicts what I have led her to believe, I shall write to her.

The amendments are a sound basis because they meet the major problems which were raised in Committee and by the housing associations. I hope that the right hon. Member for Govan will feel on consideration, and in the light of the amendments which the Government have tabled, that his new clause is in one respect too narrow and in another too broad and that he can withdraw it. If he cannot, I shall have to ask my hon. Friends to reject it.

Mr. Millan I do not feel disposed to withdraw my new clause. I shall vote for the Government's amendments even though they are defective.

We seem to have got into a tangle on charities, first because the Government decided for purely dogmatic reasons to set aside the voluntary code for sales which they have negotiated with housing associations in an attempt to steamroller them into sales in which they do not which to engage. Secondly, we would not have got into this tangle, as the hon. Member for Inverness (Sir R. Johnson) said, if the Government had decided to make the same provisions in Scotland as apply in England and Wales. We have got ourselves into unnecessary tangles largely because of the way the Government have behaved and against the background of not having charities legislation in Scotland similar to that which applies in England and Wales.

That having been said, we have had no convincing argument from the Minister as to why there should be any restriction from 3 October 1980 or any other date. I very much hope that the other place will take this completely unnecessary and unfair restriction out of the Bill.

With regard to the drafting point, from my understanding of paragraph *(g)* and after what the Minister says it is intended to mean, I hope that he will look again at the drafting. Indeed, the drafting of the whole of section 1(11) of the Tenants' Rights, etc. (Scotland) Act 1980, after the amendments made to it and further amendments which will be made, is not clear. The landlords so mentioned are not just the landlords mentioned in paragraph *(d)*, which is housing associations. If the Minister will examine section 1(11) of the 1980 Act, he will note that it mentions all sorts of other landlords—the local authorities, the new towns, the housing co-operatives and the Scottish Special Housing Association—so the drafting is not adequate. Paragraph *(g)* could be very restrictive in applying only to charity-based housing associations or, taking the widest interpretation, it could include local authorities in any case because they are already mentioned in section 1(11) of the 1980 Act. If the Government want to include all housing associations, I hope that the Minister will make sure that that is what is done.

On the substantive point, the Minister gave no argument for excluding local authorities and, for that matter, new towns and the SSHA from the concession contained in paragraph *(g)*. I acknowledged in moving the new clause that I had tabled it before the Government amendments were tabled. It was specifically directed to the needs of the mentally handicapped, but the principle would apply to ex-prisoners, youngsters who have come out of care of local authorities and any other category which may subsequently be included in the Bill by the order-making powers provided for in amendment No. 16. There is no reason in principle why the concessions made for housing associations should not also apply to all these other bodies.

Therefore, I wish to press the new clause to a Division.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 172, Noes 235.

Division No. 90] **[6.54 pm**

AYES

Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*	Dalyell, Tam
Alton, David	Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Anderson, Donald	Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Archer, Rt Hon Peter	Deakins, Eric
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack	Dewar, Donald
Ashton, Joe	Dixon, Donald
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*	Dobson, Frank
Barnett, Guy	Dormand, Jack
Barron, Kevin	Douglas, Dick
Beckett, Mrs Margaret	Duffy, A. E. P.
Bell, Stuart	Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*	Eadie, Alex
Bermingham, Gerald	Eastham, Ken
Bidwell, Sydney	Edwards, Bob *(W'h'mpt'n SE)*
Blair, Anthony	Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Boyes, Roland	Fatchett, Derek
Bray, Dr Jeremy	Faulds, Andrew
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'rmline E)*	Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*	Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*	Fisher, Mark
Brown, Ron *(E'burgh, Leith)*	Flannery, Martin
Bruce, Malcolm	Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Buchan, Norman	Foster, Derek
Caborn, Richard	Foulkes, George
Callaghan, Rt Hon J.	Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*	Freud, Clement
Campbell-Savours, Dale	George, Bruce
Canavan, Dennis	Godman, Dr Norman
Carlile, Alexander *(Montg'y)*	Golding, John
Carter-Jones, Lewis	Gourlay, Harry
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*	Hamilton, W. W. *(Fife Central)*
Clarke, Thomas	Hardy, Peter
Clay, Robert	Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Clelland, David Gordon	Hart, Rt Hon Dame Judith
Clwyd, Mrs Ann	Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S)*	Haynes, Frank
Cohen, Harry	Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*	Home Robertson, John
Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*	Howells, Geraint
Corbett, Robin	Hoyle, Douglas
Corbyn, Jeremy	Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Craigen, J. M.	Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Crowther, Stan	Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Cunliffe, Lawrence	Jenkins, Rt Hon Roy *(Hillh'd)*

John, Brynmor
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kennedy, Charles
Kilroy-Silk, Robert
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ronald
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McGuire, Michael
McKelvey, William
MacKenzie, Rt Hon Gregor
Maclennan, Robert
McTaggart, Robert
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Maxton, John
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meacher, Michael
Meadowcroft, Michael
Michie, William
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Nellist, David
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pavitt, Laurie
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter
Radice, Giles
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, G. *(Coventry NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*
Ross, Stephen *(Isle of Wight)*
Rowlands, Ted
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon R
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Silkin, Rt Hon J.
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Stewart, Rt Hon D. *(W Isles)*
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Taylor, Rt Hon John David
Thomas, Dafydd *(Merioneth)*
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Tinn, James
Wainwright, R.
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Welsh, Michael
White, James
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Wilson, Gordon
Winnick, David
Woodall, Alec

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. James Hamilton and
Mr. Allen McKay.

NOES

Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Ancram, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bennett, Rt Hon Sir Frederic
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, John
Body, Sir Richard
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Bright, Graham
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Bruinvels, Peter
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon A.
Buck, Sir Antony
Butcher, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carlisle, Rt Hon M. *(W'ton S)*
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Colvin, Michael
Cope, John
Cormack, Patrick
Corrie, John
Couchman, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Dunn, Robert
Dykes, Hugh
Emery, Sir Peter
Evennett, David
Eyre, Sir Reginald
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Anthony
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Franks, Cecil
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Gardiner, George *(Reigate)*
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Grist, Ian
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John S
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Harvey, Robert
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, J.
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Hickmet, Richard
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hirst, Michael
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Stratf'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(G'ldford)*
Howell, Ralph *(Norfolk, N)*
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jackson, Robert
Jenkin, Rt Hon Patrick
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Robert *(Herts W)*
Kellett-Bowman, Mrs Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim
Lewis, Sir Kenneth *(Stamf'd)*
Lightbown, David
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
McCurley, Mrs Anna
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
McNair-Wilson, M. *(N'bury)*
Madel, David
Major, John
Malins, Humfrey
Malone, Gerald
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Antony
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mather, Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Miller, Hal *(B'grove)*
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M. *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Hon C. *(Devizes)*
Moynihan, Hon C.
Mudd, David
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Tony
Normanton, Tom
Onslow, Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patten, Christopher *(Bath)*
Pattie, Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Percival, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Porter, Barry
Portillo, Michael
Powley, John
Prentice, Rt Hon Reg
Price, Sir David
Proctor, K. Harvey
Raffan, Keith
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Robinson, Mark *(N'port W)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steen, Anthony
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Terlezki, Stefan
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Waddington, David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Wall, Sir Patrick
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watson, John
Watts, John
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Wheeler, John
Whitfield, John
Wiggin, Jerry

Winterton, Mrs Ann	Younger, Rt Hon George
Wolfson, Mark	
Wood, Timothy	Tellers for the Noes:
Woodcock, Michael	Mr. Tony Durant and
Yeo, Tim	Mr. Archie Hamilton.
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*	

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am sorry to have to raise this point of order, but a delegation of trade union members and workers from Leyland car plants throughout Britain has been to the House today and for the second time this week a green card which was filled in in the Lobby has taken an hour and 10 minutes to reach me while I have been in Committee. As a result, my constituents have not been able to see me and have returned to my constituency.

This is the second time this week that this has happened. I am also informed by hon. Friends that the same has happened to them on previous occasions. I wish to make it clear that I am in no way criticising any attendant but I have been informed by an attendant that a shortage of manpower is now leading to a delay in green cards being communicated to hon. Members.

Will you look into this, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as a matter of urgency because it is an embarrassment to Members and it makes it difficult for us to fulfil our public functions? Thank you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ernest Armstrong): I shall see to it that the matter is looked into right away.

New Clause 6

RESTRICTIONS ON SALE OF SPECIAL NEED HOUSES

'Regional authorities, or where appropriate joint boards, may appeal to the Secretary of State against the sale of a particular house on the grounds that it has to be retained in order to allow them to effectively fulfil their statutory functions.'. — *[Sir Russell Johnston.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Sir Russell Johnston: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take amendment No. 25, in page 28, line 20, Schedule 1, leave out sub-paragraph 9.

Sir Russell Johnston: This is a limited but important proposal. Hon. Members, particularly those who served on the Committee, will recall that, from the moment of the publication of the Bill, education authorities with areas of sparse population and joint fire authorities with similar difficulties have expressed great concern that the legislation could deprive them of the limited housing stock that they retain for the performance of their statutory functions.

In Committee on 16 January amendments were moved by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) who sought to make provision for regions and joint boards similar to that which was made for the island councils in 1984. The Minister rejected them but gave only three arguments for doing so. First, he said:

"I cannot accept . . . that the problems of finding alternative accommodation which can occur in the remote islands arise to the same degree on the mainland, even in the rural areas. Moreover, the present amendments go well beyond the rural areas. They would give regional councils a wide power to refuse applications to buy any education authority house."

The fact was that the Minister's mind was on Strathclyde which he felt, rightly or wrongly, had not implemented the voluntary code.

At this stage is is worth noting, even in retrospect, the four criteria of which, according to section 3B of the Tenants' Rights, Etc. (Scotland) Act 1980, island councils have to take note. They are, first, that it is an education authority house required for the performance of that function; secondly, that it is required immediately, or, thirdly, that it will be required within a perceptible time; fourthly, and most important or most confining of all, that there is no way in which the authorities can obtain a similar house.

It would be interesting if the Minister could tell us whether, as a consequence of that change, there have been any Government refusals of the islands' requests of this nature. My new clause seeks to apply the fourth criterion in such a way that the onus clearly rests on the regional authority or joint board to demonstrate a requirement. Therefore, I should think that the clause would be acceptable to the Government because they retain the final say.

The second ministerial argument about such a system being unnecessary is that an authority could make occupancy of a house a condition of employment. In Committee the Minister said:

"Schedule 1 of the 1980 Act provides that where a teacher, or any other employee, is required to occupy a particular house as a condition of his employment, he shall not have security of tenure or the right to buy."

That was nice and simple, but unfortunately the hon. Member for Cathcart rebutted this simply and comprehensively when he said:

"I do not believe that they could get it"—

that is, agreement of this type—

"included in a teacher's contract of employment. I doubt that many individual teachers would accept that as a contract nor would the negotiating body, when it meets, agree to such a change in teachers' contracts on a general basis."

An amusing point—perhaps it says something of the nature of these debates—is that the Minister's statement came after the hon. Gentleman's rebuttal. The Minister never tried to deal with what the hon. Member said. The best he could say, rather sadly, was, "I am disappointed."

It is not possible for regional authorities to get such an agreement from teachers, and in the case of fire officers the position is worse still. In January 1985 the joint negotiating body specifically forbade a firemaster to require that an officer occupy a particular house. I and the hon. Member for Cathcart do not believe that, in the case of teachers, the negotiating body would accede to such a proposal and, in the case of firemasters, they had discussions and rejected it. Thus, in making this argument, the Minister is suggesting that regional authorities can protect their statutory interests by securing safeguards which it is beyond their ability to obtain. That applies to education and fire authorities alike.

The third ministerial argument is the curtilage argument. In Committee the Minister said:

"we are introducing a new provision to meet the special position of regional councils by introducing a new category which provides that a tenant shall not have security or right to buy if his house comes within the curtilage of another building. This recognises, for example, the situation where a teacher's house might form part of or be attached to a school building, or a janitor's house coming within the school grounds. Both these instances were mentioned by the hon. Member for Cathcart and the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber may

recognise them in areas such as his constituency." —[*Official Report, First Scottish Standing Committee*, 16 January 1986; c. 193-94.]

I recognise that there are many such examples in rural areas where housing is in short supply. However, in many rural areas neither education authority houses nor fire houses are within the curtilage of the school or the fire station.

7.15 pm

There are many examples which are different. I think, for example, of education in Caithness and Sutherland and, in the case of fire, there are the examples of Kirkwall, Invergordon and Fort William.

I hold the view that the amendments accepted by the Government in 1984 in respect of the island councils and the amendments proposed by the hon. Member for Cathcart for regions and joint boards would have been the sensible way ahead. Indeed, one could argue that, since the island authorities are also housing authorities, they could meet education and fire requirements more easily from general needs than regional authorities which are not housing authorities.

I accept that the Government will not yield on this point. However, my new clause — it could be reintroduced in appropriate form in another place — would give authorities such as Grampian, Highlands and the Borders which have operated, as the Minister would agree, the voluntary code fairly an opportunity to make their case genuinely to the Government. The onus would be on the authorities to do so and the Government in the end would decide. Equally, if the Minister's contention is that Strathclyde was resisting a proper application of the voluntary code, the new clause would put that authority in the same position of having to make a case as the other local authorities would have to do.

This is a reasonable proposal on a matter which has caused, and which continues to cause, great concern among the rural education and fire authorities. I hope that the Minister will respond positively. If he is not able to give an absolute nay or yea tonight, I shall be perfectly happy if he says that the issue will be studied in another place. I hope that, in listening to the debate, he will recognise that the argument I have advanced is sound and sensible and is supported by reasonable parties.

Mr. Kennedy: I shall speak briefly in support of the new clause which my hon. Friend the Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston) has moved. I underline the sentiment that he expressed at the end of his speech, that even if this formulation of the clause is not acceptable to the Government, they should look seriously at the issue and the principles which it raises, and the difficulties which this legislation, if not altered from its present form, will cause in areas such as the Highland region. Perhaps the Government could use the opportunity in another place to deal with some of the difficulties which are expected to arise.

We have all received representations, especially from teachers in the Highland region. Teachers want the right to buy their own homes—that is understandable—and any sensible person would support that. The Minister acknowledged the difficulty in a letter to me dated 31 January 1986. He said—arguing, first, for the general policy of the right to buy, which he knows I support:

"I accept however that there may need to be restrictions on the sale of houses in rural areas."

The Minister is correct in that.

The new clause is not about every designated local authority house; it is about those occasions in remote rural communities, particularly on the west coast, but also elsewhere in the highlands, where the loss of the teacher's house would militate against the replacement of a teacher where necessary. I am sure the Minister will appreciate that that is a genuine concern in smaller communities. It is something about which we have received many representations.

The chairman of Gairloch high school council in my constituency wrote to me a month ago expressing great concern on behalf of the council at the proposal. He made the following telling points:

"1. Housing both private and public are very scarce and in great demand.

2. The few houses that become available for sale are therefore expensive and often well beyond the means of many young teachers."

The Scottish Office has never sought to deny, and we would never deny, that teachers are not well paid, and there is no doubt that they cannot afford large mortgages, particularly where housing is scarce, prices are high and accordingly the market is inflated.

Another difficulty faced in the highlands all too often, as the chairman of the Gairloch high school council points out, is that land is not as available as we would like it to be. There are many complicated reasons for that, but I shall not go into them now. That backdrop shows the legitimate problem. The chairman goes on to make the case, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber, that in many cases in rural communities the school house is an integral part of the school building. The Government appear to be aware of this problem, as there have been specific, and welcome, references to it.

This is not a widespread issue. It does not have to be applied as an absolute principle that the teachers who happen to live in the Highland region, for example, should not have the right to buy their own home. That is not what we are asking. The way in which my hon. Friend both phrased the new clause and argued for it shows how sensible it would be if the local authority—in this case the Highland regional council—when it felt that the proper exercise of its statutory function was being called into doubt by the provisions of the legislation, had the right to make a direct appeal to the Scottish Office. The counter-arguments could then be heard, and the Scottish Office and the Government would not be surrendering the final right of decision, because explicit in the new clause is an acceptance that they would have to make that judgment.

Mr. Maxton: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that island authorities have exactly that right on teachers' houses. The Government have introduced an amendment to the 1980 Act which established that right, because they saw the anomalies that they were creating. In Committee I moved an amendment that would have allowed the system to operate in all regional authorities, and I do not understand even now why the Minister would not accept it.

Mr. Kennedy: The hon. Gentleman puts his point fairly and with great force. It is a common-sense solution to a problem which we can all see coming, and which those in the area identified as soon as the Bill was published. Therefore, I hope that, if not tonight, in the other place, the Government will take steps to act positively to clear up what will soon be a genuine problem.

[Mr. Kennedy]

As my hon. Friend the Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber said, there are also the problems of the Highlands and Islands fire board. I shall not repeat all of his points, with which I concur. The fire board owns five houses, in Kirkwall, Lerwick, Stornoway and Fort William and, my particular concern, in Invergordon.

A letter from the clerk to the board said:

"If the Board are required to sell these houses they would no longer be available for incoming Officers in the event that new appointments were necessary. It is anticipated that it would be extremely difficult to purchase suitable replacement housing, particularly in the Islands areas and in Fort William. Further, in the absence of available accommodation it would be difficult to attract applicants for the positions in question. The threat posed by the terms of the Bill as presently drafted to the operational needs of the Brigade is therefore regarded as a serious one which, I would suggest, merits consideration of possible amendment of the relevant terms of the Bill."

That puts the position fairly and sensibly, and underlines the purpose of the new clause.

We support the right of teachers, and all those in other categories, to own their homes. However, as the Minister would no doubt agree, any right in society has always to be tempered by a sense of responsibility to the wider public interest. There may be occasions when, in my two examples of teachers and fire brigade officers, the local authorities involved should have the right of appeal to the Scottish Office, so that ultimately the Secretary of state and his Ministers will decide. Our approach is wholly sensible, and I hope that the Minister can respond in the constructive fashion in which the new clause has been moved.

Mr. Ancram: The new clause provides that regional councils may appeal to the Secretary of State, presumably for permission to refuse to sell a particular house, where they feel that the house has to be retained so that they can effectively fulfil their statutory functions. The amendment appears to be defective, although I shall not labour that point. As the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston) said, we discussed this matter in Committee. Therefore I am sure that the hon. Member will not be surprised to hear me say that I find the amendment misguided and unnecessary.

The Government fully accept that, in extending security of tenure and the right to buy to tenants of houses owned by regional councils, it is necessary to ensure that regional councils are able to retain those houses that they genuinely need to fulfil their statutory functions. However, it is better for the tenants and for the regional council landlords to provide for such houses to be excluded on the face of the legislation. This means that the tenants and their landlords will know clearly where they stand. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman appreciates the importance of that.

I say this in the belief that is possible to specify in the legislation those categories of houses that regional councils and other public authorities need to retain such properties. These are listed in schedule 1 to the Tenants' Rights, Etc. (Scotland) Act 1980. They include houses let to an employee of the landlord as a condition of his contract of employment and houses let temporarily pending development — for example, a region might need to acquire land to build a road.

The hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber used the example of the teacher, already used by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) in Committee. I am sorry if I did not respond then, but I had many points to which I had to respond. However, schedule 1(2)(2) to the 1980 Act says that a contract of employment means a contract "whether express or implied". Therefore, the provision does not have to be written into the employee's contract for a house so to be exempt. The problem raised by the hon. Member for Cathcart is therefore resolved.

7.30 pm

Sir Russell Johnston: That is a new argument. Is the Minister saying that, even if a teacher does not consent to stay in a particular house as part of his contract of employment, such an undertaking may be imposed on him by the regional authority?

Mr. Ancram: That depends whether it is implicit in the work that the teacher does. The advice that I have is that the condition of residence in the house would not have to be written into an employee's contract for a house to be exempt under the Tenants' Rights, Etc. (Scotland) Act 1980.

Mr. Maxton: What would happen when a teacher from one school takes a school house attached to another school because at that point the teacher from the other school —say, a single-teacher school in a rural area—has no wish to have that house but the authority wishes to keep the house available to employ another teacher when the present teacher retires? I know that that is complicated but I know that such situations apply in rural areas.

Mr. Ancram: I am not quite sure that I followed all the parts of the hon. Gentleman's hypothesis and I would not therefore wish to give a categorical answer. However, I think that what I have said about the implicit nature which is allowed for under the 1980 Act—the problem which the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber raised—would not arise.

As a consequence of extending security of tenure and the right to buy to tenants in dwellings owned by regional councils, we felt that it was necessary to add two further categories to the list of excluded houses in schedule 1. These appear in the new paragraphs added to that schedule by paragraph 18 of schedule 1 to the Bill.

The lists include houses let to serving members of a police or fire authority. That is why I was a little surprised by the comments made by the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber, and the hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye (Mr. Kennedy). I have not previously received representations about the difficulties that the hon. Gentlemen alleged over the position of rural fire service houses. We are proposing under the provision to exclude service houses. I stress that I have not received representations that this provision was deficient but I shall look into the point and write to the hon. Members for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber, and for Ross, Cromarty and Skye.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): I must tell the Minister that I have received representations from the Highlands and Islands fire brigade. The clerk of the brigade said, in terms, that the Bill does not contain adequate protection for the fire board and it does not appear that there are any grounds on which the board may resist the demands by an officer to purchase his house in locations where it is not possible to make available suitable

replacement housing when the need arises. Is the Minister saying that that is wrong and that the schedule specifically deals with the problem?

Mr. Ancram: I understand from the way that the Bill has been drafted that houses let to serving members of the police or a fire authority would be exempt from the right to buy. Again, these representations have been made to hon. Members and unfortunately as far as I am aware, such representations have not been made to me. I will look into the matter and if the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland so wishes, I will add him to my correspondence list.

The provisions do all that is necessary to exclude from the right to buy those houses that regional authorities need to retain to fulfil their statutory functions. I know that the hon. Member for Cathcart, has not discussed amendment No. 25. The hon. Gentleman's amendment removes a provision which is a good one and one which, as far as I know, has been welcomed by COSLA. That is a useful provision and I hope that the hon. Gentleman will not take me by surprise by pressing his amendment.

Sir Russell Johnston: Before we approach the question whether we vote, I should like to say a few words. The Minister appears to be saying that the new clause is unnecessary. However, it is a fact that education authorities — not just in the Highlands but throughout Scotland—are mindful that the new clause is necessary. I admit that I have not had representations from any fire authority other than the Highlands and Islands authority but, as my hon. Friends have said, the board is sure that the provision that the Minister has set out is not correct. I hope that the Minister will make an undertaking to look into the matter and I also hope that the Minister will examine the education aspect.

Mr. Ancram: I have dealt with the education matter. I believe that the case put forward by the hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye, was not sustained in the light of the provisions in the Bill, and not only in this Bill but in previous legislation. I therefore rejected the hon. Gentleman's argument.

In connection with the fire houses, I said that while I thought that the Bill as it stood provided the protection for which the hon. Gentleman's constituents were looking, I had not received the representations that he had received. I said that I would examine those representations and would write to the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends once I had had a chance to do that. On that basis, I hope that the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber will withdraw the new clause.

Sir Russell Johnston: I should like to make one last point in respect of the education authorities. It is passing strange—no stronger than that—that the argument has been produced late in the day that somehow or other, even if teachers are not likely to agree to occupancy of a particular house being a condition of employment, in some way that is not clearly defined if that is implied by the regional authority, it becomes the case. That is a very unsatisfactory argument which has not appeared before, even when the Minister has been subjected to representations from local authorities. That has been discussed both on Second Reading and in Committee. That is very odd indeed.

However, as the Minister is willing to examine the matters again — I take it from that that there is an implication that should he find anything wrong he will introduce amending legislation in another place—I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New Clause 8

AMENDMENT OF HOUSING (HOMELESS PERSONS) ACT 1977

"In the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977, in section 1(2), after paragraph *(c)* there shall be inserted —

"*(d)* it does not provide the ordinary facilities of a residence and it is inappropriate for his needs, or it is unreasonable for him to continue to live in it".

In section 4 there shall be inserted after subsection (6) —

"(7) Where a local authority has a duty under subsections (4) and (5) above to either secure that accommodation does not cease to be available or to secure that accommodation becomes available for the applicant 'accommodation' shall be defined as a separate dwelling house that shall conform to section 89 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 1966 and section 14 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 1974".'.—*[Mr. Dewar.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Donald Dewar (Glasgow, Garscadden): I beg to move, That the clause be read a second time.

This is an extremely important clause, and I regret that considerations of time means that we cannot have as full a debate on it as we might have liked. I am anxious that we should have the opportunity to sketch in the anxieties that are felt about certain judicial happenings in recent times in connection with the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977. We may have the opportunity of hearing the Minister give some reassurances about, or at least careful Government consideration of, the consequences of what has happened.

I am referring to the judgment of Lord Brightman in the interesting and recent case of Puhlhofer *v.* the London Borough of Hillingdon. That judgment was delivered on 6 February 1986 and is therefore hot off the judicial press. It may sound a long way from Scotland and the Housing (Scotland) Bill, but it is a House of Lords judgment and it interprets the term "accommodation" as used in the 1977 Act. It therefore has distinct and important consequences for local authorities in Scotland, and, more important, for homeless people or those who may become homeless in Scotland.

The Puhlhofer case can be described, in view of the facts, in a short compass. The couple had a complicated history, but the material fact is that when the courts started to consider their predicament they were asking for assistance under the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977. At the time they were living in bed-and-breakfast accommodation. A husband, a wife and two young children were living in one room in a bed-and-breakfast establishment. That room contained a double and a single bed, a baby's cradle, a dressing table, a pram, and a sterilisation unit. All that had certain repercussions on their limited income from social security benefits.

When the family applied for homeless persons status, the London borough of Hillingdon told them that it had accommodation available for occupation, but that it did not need to offer help under the 1977 Act, because the family had accommodation. That is an unsatisfactory and reactionary view, considering the difficult circumstances in which the family were placed. Therefore, it was decided

[Mr. Donald Dewar]

to take the matter to court to test the judgment by judicial review. Lord Brightman handed down his judgment on that case.

The case raised two questions. The first related to when someone is homeless, — that is, when a person has accommodation of a sufficient standard to allow a local authority to say that he is not homeless. The second question related to what accommodation was in terms of what is provided under the 1977 Act. If one becomes homeless, what must the local authority offer? What amounts to accommodation to satisfy the terms of the 1977 statute?

I do not want to criticise unnecessarily, but I am disappointed at Lord Brightman's approach. He stated that the Homeless Persons Act

"is not an Act which imposes any duty upon a local authority to house the homeless . . . It is an Act to assist persons who are homeless, not an Act to provide them with homes."

That may sound like a semantic argument, but it gave rise to some unfortunate consequences in his Lordship's mind. He continued:

"In this situation, Parliament plainly, and wisely, placed no qualifying adjective before the word 'accommodation' in section 1 or section 4 of the Act, and none is to be implied. The word 'appropriate' or 'reasonable' is not to be imported. Nor is accommodation not accommodation because it might in certain circumstances be unfit for habitation for the purposes of part II of the Housing Act 1957."

It is extraordinary that the judge should take the view that because the words "appropriate" or "reasonable" were not specifically included in the Act, accommodation does not cease to be accommodation merely because is it unfit for human habitation. One could argue that one could discharge one's duty under the 1977 Act by putting people in accommodation which is genuinely and literally, in terms of the statutory requirements, unfit for human habitation. That is too broad to leave unchallenged, and too dangerous to remain as the considered judgment of the courts' interpretation of the 1977 Act.

Lord Brightman continued:

"There are no rules. Clearly some places in which a person might choose or be constrained to live could not properly be regarded as accommodation . . . it would be a misuse of language to describe Diogenes as having occupied accommodation within the meaning of the Act."

He then said that anything short of living in a barrel would do, that it was a matter entirely for local authorities, and that no other standards should be imposed or expected.

The judgment could have alarming consequences, and is unsatisfactory. Will the Minister give the Government's view on that line of reasoning? Do Ministers think that it is satisfactory? Where does the judgment lead? In view of the judgment, what is the standing of the Scottish code of guidance under the Homeless Persons Act 1977? The House will remember that the code asks local authorities

"to bear in mind the relevant provisions of general housing and public health legislation",

and stresses that

"the basic need of families is for self contained accommodation."

In those two examples the code appears to interpret the word "accommodation" and to make some sensible suggestions about a local authority's duty under the Act. Lord Brightman's reasoning clearly undermines the code of guidance and may leave local authorities in doubt about where their duty lies. It is important that the Minister makes it clear where the Government stand on that.

7.45 pm

The new clause is comparatively simple and is tabled specifically to highlight that point. It is no secret that Shelter prepared the brief and drew the matter to our attention. I am grateful to Shelter for doing so, because without that it might have been a long time before we came across Lord Brightman's thoughts on the subject. We may have done so only when they started to have unpleasant, unwanted consequences north of the border.

The Minister will be aware that the new clause has all-party support. The hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Fletcher), asked me specifically to say that he had put his name to the clause. He would have liked to attend the debate, but unfortunately, he had to go to his constituency. He wanted to record his support for the anxiety that I have mentioned.

As the Minister, who is a member of the Faculty of Advocates, knows better than I do, a House of Lords judgment in a civil area has relevance in Scotland. Indeed, it is highly persuasive. I noticed, sadly, that the judgment was endorsed by Lord Keith of Kinkel and Lord Mackay of Clashfern who are in the Scottish legal world. The judgment will undoubtedly lay down a standard which will be difficult for the Court of Session to ignore in a judicial review on an application concerning the 1977 Act. That is why I am so anxious to debate the matter.

One of the genuinely alarming features of the judgment is Lord Brightman's remarks about judicial reviews. He said:

"My Lords, I am troubled at the prolific use of judicial review . . . And I express the hope that there will be a lessening in the number of challenges which are mounted against local authorities who are endeavouring, in extremely difficult circumstances, to perform their duties under the Homeless Persons Act."

No one wants frivolous applications to the courts, but we have come down a long and difficult road, most of which has been signposted by Brown *v.* Hamilton district council —that interminable Jarndyce *v.* Jarndyce performance— when we tried to establish the importance and availability of judicial review. The Minister will join me in paying tribute to the efforts that were made, particularly by Lord Drumpark, to evolve a new procedure which allows judicial review to be less of a legal marathon and obstacle race.

I hear reasonably encouraging reports of the new procedure in Scotland, so I hope that in passing the Minister will distance himself from Lord Brightman's expressions on the subject. It is important that on such a basic matter as this people should be free to go to the courts if they feel that the administrative discretion allowed to local authorities under the Act has been abused.

I hope that I have said enough to set out the limits of the argument. Shelter's brief talks of

"serious inroads into the duties of local authorities",

and points out that having taken legal advice it believes

"that the Homeless Persons Act will cease to have any practical use for homeless people."

That may be overstated. I hope that most local authorities will continue to take a responsible view, to take the common-sense meaning of the word "homeless", and to offer decent accommodation to those in that position. I hope that the loophole opened up by Lord Brightman will be ignored in the vast majority of cases. I hope that the Minister will at least show that he agrees with the general trend of my attack and that if the Government cannot accept the new clause — I accept that it will require consultation — consultation will be put in hand and

positive efforts will be made to find a solution which will ensure that Brightmanship does not break out in Scottish housing.

Sir Russell Johnston: I support what the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) has said. Nevertheless, I shall take the opportunity to give one more quotation from the past which the hon. Gentleman did not give but which I think is apposite. He referred to the case of the Hamilton district council *v.* Matthew Brown, in which Lord Justice Clerk Wheatley stated:

"I reject the argument that as long as accommodation was available it did not matter what the nature of the accommodation was. In my view it must be reasonable accommodation in all the circumstances. A pig-sty could be accommodation but not reasonable accommodation."

That was qualified afterwards by Lord Fraser when he said that a distinction might be made between temporary and long-term accommodation. However, in either case, it was fundamental in determining the Scottish code of conduct.

I should particularly like to know to what extent the Brightman decision has any effect on the position in Scotland. As a signatory to the new clause, I accept that the wording may not be perfect, but I think that both sides of the House would welcome an intimation from the Minister that he will take the problems into account and, if so required—I do not know whether it will be—will introduce legislation to prevent Brightmanism from becoming the law of the land.

Mr. Gordon Wilson (Dundee, East): As we have been discussing some legal judgments, perhaps the best thing that I can do is to say that I concur with the remarks of the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar). However, I will make a short observation of my own to add to the argument that he has lucidly put forward.

One of the difficulties of using a common brief is that the quotations tend to be used up during the early stages of a debate and afterwards there is repetition, but I would like to mention Women's Aid. I agree with the hon. Member for Garscadden that any responsible or sensible local authority would use its discretion and would follow the code of practice and rehouse those who were homeless. I should be surprised if many local authorities fell out with that aim. We have to return to the original case involving Matthew Brown, in which a local authority did not respond and a judicial review was necessary. Equally, in the case of the judgment we have just heard, a local authority again was not prepared to rehouse someone in suitable accommodation and, accordingly, a request was made for a judicial review.

Along with other hon. Members, I have received a letter from Scottish Women's Aid. It wants me to point out that it is worried about the situation. In many cases women who leave their husbands, perhaps after having been battered, go into temporary accommodation. If one follows the judgment in the Puhlhofer case, the temporary accommodation which they moved into could prevent them from gaining adequate accommodation in terms of the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977. It was found necessary to pass the Act in 1977, so obviously there must have been a need for it.

I also received some information from Shelter about the position in Dundee. It gave me two quotations, one about a women's refuge in Dundee where there were

"Two flats within one building. One flat had two bedrooms, each of which can house a mother and her children. The occupants share two toilets and one bathroom. They all share one small cooker in the kitchen."

That accommodation might debar someone from obtaining suitable accommodation.

The second quotation was about a night shelter in West Bell street, in Dundee. That accommodation consisted of "a single dormitory for up to 26 people. They share one bath and one shower. There are two toilets. No cooking facilities."

However, under the judgment in the Puhlhofer case, that, too, might debar those who are in that accommodation from their rights under the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977. I do not think that that is reasonable.

We have good grounds to be critical of the House of Lords because, in the original case of Hamilton district council *v.* Matthew Brown which the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston) quoted, the criteria which were adopted by the Lord Justice Clerk were very sound. He looked at the nature of the accommodation and I think that that is the most reasonable way of doing it. That statement was qualified subsequently, as the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber said, in the House of Lords, but the definition adopted by the Law Lords was better than that enunciated in the Puhlhofer case.

I understand that in Scotland, from the beginning of April, the legislation bifurcates between Scotland and England and Wales. If that is so, we can take advantage of this debate to put the law back to where everyone thought it was in 1977 and as was subsequently defined in the case of Hamilton district council *v.* Matthew Brown, which was the first case to interpret in 1981 the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977.

Those of us who have had the matter drawn to our attention are grateful to be able to bring it to the House at this stage in the Bill. I always appreciate the difficulties that Ministers may have in finding a legislative vehicle which will allow them to repair legislation which may have been savaged or mauled in the courts. In this case, we have a highly suitable Bill and, given the decision in the House of Lords, it would be very influential, if not binding, on the Scottish courts, especially in view of the concurrence of the two Scottish Law Lords.

I hope that the Government, through the Minister today, will correct the situation. I would not be happy if he were to say that, because the voluntary code is still in existence, it will adequately deal with the problem. That code of practice followed upon a statutory obligation which appeared in the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act. If the Act has holes knocked in it, statutory obligations become worthless. If that happened, the code would be neutered, and I do not think that anyone, including the Minister, would like to see that happen.

Mr. Ancram: I have listened carefully to the views expressed in this debate. Hon. Gentlemen may be assured that their concerns have been noted and I intend to consider them. Hon. Gentlemen will appreciate that it is not for me to comment on the decision of the Law Lords, although we will give careful thought to the implications of the judgment.

The decision illustrates some of the general principles underlying the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977. When a person presents himself as homeless under the Act, the local authority is required to look into the circumstances of his case, but the authority then has the

[Mr. Ancram]

discretion, having regard to the code of guidance issued by the Secretary of State, to reach its own judgment on whether the person is homeless and whether he falls into one of the priority need categories. Therefore, the purpose of the Act is to regulate the function of the local authority with respect to persons who are homeless or who are threatened with homelessness.

In allocating houses, local authorities have to deal with difficult decisions as to needs and priorities and to balance competing claims for the resources available. I have tremendous sympathy, as I think we all do, with a family living in overcrowded conditions. Their needs may require to be assessed alongside other applicants on the authority's waiting list who may be in equally difficult positions. An example is an elderly couple whose house suffers from dampness and condensation who may not be termed as homeless, but who may equally have a good reason for seeking a transfer. It is fair to say that the Act is primarily intended as a safety net for people who do not have a roof over their heads. It is important that it should not become a means at the other end of the scale by which other people, however deserving, can bypass the authority's normal rules for allocating houses according to its Members assessment of need.

Mr. Wilson: The hon. Gentleman has chosen an interesting example. Does he have any evidence that such an abuse of the housing rules has taken place? My experience in Dundee is that, when someone is homeless, a house is made available, but it is rarely in one of the higher amenity districts.

8 pm

Mr. Ancram: I hope that the hon. Gentleman did not misunderstand me. I was saying that the present position, which, to a large extent, gives local authorities discretion, would effectively allow local authorities to make proper judgments. This raises a marker about the potential dangers of looking for a statutory definition.

Having set out the general background, the decision of the Law Lords—that "accommodation" in section 1(1) of the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977 does not mean "appropriate" or "reasonable", as the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) said, but merely accommodation that can properly be described as such within the ordinary meaning of the English language—has implications. I should like to consider those implications further. I should like time to consider the report of the decision more carefully than any of us have been able to do so far. This is a matter on which I think it would be appropriate that I should consult my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment.

The decision concerned an English case and an Act which has application in Great Britain. I am advised, as the hon. Member for Garscadden suggested, that it would almost certainly be followed in Scotland. Clearly, there are implications for the whole of Britain which need to be looked at together. I do not believe that there is a strong case for importing a definition of "accommodation" into the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act for Scotland which may differ from that for England and Wales. I think that, in this respect, it makes sense to keep in step.

Mr. Dewar: I understand that the code of guidance is issued under the Act. Lord Brightman could not consider the code of guidance, for understandable reasons. Does the hon. Gentleman believe that that Scottish code of guidance is still binding on local authorities and that they are expected to observe its conditions, as before?

Mr. Ancram: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will allow me to come to that point. I can confirm that the code of guidance is referred to in the Act, although not necessarily in specific terms. Section 12 of the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act provides:

> "In relation to homeless persons and persons threatened with homelessness a relevant authority shall have regard in the exercise of their functions to such guidance as may from time to time be given by the Secretary of State."

That is the statutory basis.

I think that the Opposition will accept that the new clause could give rise to problems of its own. They are seeking by it to provide that, where an authority has a duty to secure accommodation, it shall take the form of a separate dwelling house which conforms to the statutory provisions relating to overcrowding and the tolerable standard. I sympathise with the intention, but I believe that we must be careful not to impose unrealistic duties on local authorities. Where the Act places an obligation on an authority to ensure that accommodation is available, it is for the authority to decide how best that obligation can be met.

Chapter 4 of the code gives some guidance to local authorities. In particular, it recognises that there may be cases where, as a last resort, authorities need to arrange accommodation in lodgings, guest houses or hotels. It is made clear, however, that this is to be a last resort and that such accommodation should be for as short a period as possible. I do not think that we can entirely rule out such accommodation as a temporary solution, which would appear to be the present effect of the new clause.

The hon. Member for Garscadden referred to the implications of the decision on section 4 in so far as it placed a duty on local authorities to secure accommodation for certain homelesss persons. At present, the code of guidance states explicitly in paragraph 4(15) that bed and breakfast accommodation is not to be regarded as appropriate permanent accommodation. Even as temporary accommodation, it is to be used as a last resort or for as short a time as possible.

What the code of guidance has to say about accommodation in respect of local authority duties under section 4 may still remain relevant. I do not necessarily accept Shelter's contention that it is overturned by the decision of the House of Lords. That is a matter of some doubt and one of the matters on which I should like to take legal advice and make an assessment. The position is complicated. This and other aspects must be given further consideration.

I assure hon. Members that I intend to give full and careful consideration to the implications of the decision. I shall want to consult and to hear the views of interested organisations. As part of that process, yesterday I met representatives of Shelter (Scotland) who set out their anxieties to me. I hope that, in the light of my assurance that I intend to give this matter consideration and to consult, the hon. Member for Garscadden will withdraw the motion.

Mr. Dewar: I think that the Under-Secretary of State has persuaded me that we should not push the new clause.

It would be unreasonable to do so. This matter must be carefully considered and we must ensure that we obtain the right answer.

I take at face value—I am sure that I am entitled to do so—the hon. Gentleman's assurance that consultation will be put in hand urgently, that he will consult interested bodies and take his own legal soundings on the impact of the judgment on Scotland. Clearly, that will take some time and it will not be possible to catch up with this question if action is needed during the passage of this legislation. If the advice is that the code of guidance has been undermined or set aside by the House of Lords' judgment, I hope that the hon. Gentlman will not hesitate to take steps to reinstate it or to ensure that there is a reasonable framework within which local authorities can exercise their duties. If that requires some form of legislation, I am sure that all the Opposition parties would be anxious to accommodate it, assuming that there was general agreement on the necessary steps.

Mr. Maclennan: I agree with the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) that the Under-Secretary of State has been very forthcoming, but he has not said what was his understanding of the law before the case. It would have been helpful to know whether the Government's understanding was in line with Lord Brightman's view. It certainly was not my view, and I doubt that it was Parliament's when the legislation was put on the statute book. In light of the fact that the Under-Secretary of State is obviously seized of the urgency of meeting the inquiries that will undoubtedly come from local authorities as to where their duties lie, I think that it would be wrong to press him further.

Question put and negatived.

Clause 2

INCREASED DISCOUNT WHERE DWELLING-HOUSE PURCHASED IS A FLAT

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): I beg to move amendment No. 27, in page 2, line 17, at end insert 'provided that where the flat is part of a deck access block, or of a free-standing tower block having at least ten consecutive floors of tenanted accommodation the discount shall be 50 per cent.'

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): With this, it will be convenient to consider amendment No. 28, in page 2, line 20, after 'cent', insert 'provided that where the flat is part of a deck access block, or of a free-standing tower block having at least ten consecutive floors of tenanted accommodation the discount shall be 80 per cent.'.

Mr. Marlow: I apologise as a mere Englishman intervening in a Scottish debate before the massed ranks of Scottish Members of Parliament. However, I have not come totally from out of space—in fact, I have come bearing gifts.

I am a member of the Standing Committee on the Housing and Planning Bill. The Committee passed an amendment which increased still further the generous increases in discounts which the Government had put in the original legislation. The discounts which we have increased are those that should be available for people living in flats, in high rise blocks or in deck access accommodation. As we know from tenants in London, Birmingham, Newcastle, Cardiff and Plymouth who live in such accommodation, their mouths are watering in anticipation of increased discounts. I think that it would be totally unreasonable if the people of Scotland were denied similar opportunities. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State will agree.

The amendment was passed. All parties participated in the debate and voted for it. The Labour party and the alliance supported it and five out of six Conservative Members who were not on the payroll supported it also. So the measure has a great deal of support in the House. It was a cross-party amendment.

As we know few flats have been sold. Many hon. Members are anxious that people should have the opportunity to buy their homes. A great number of houses have been sold, but not very many flats.

Discounts on flats and houses were in the past much the same. If somebody buys a house he has to pay the mortgage. He can pay other bills—maintain the house and insure it—but he is not forced to do so. If, however, somebody buys a flat, he is forced each year to pay, in addition to his mortgage, insurance, maintenance charges, service charges and a whole range of other charges that are outside his control. It is perfectly right and proper, therefore, that there should be a significantly higher level of discounts for the purchase of flats from local authorities.

A similar amendment was debated in Standing Committee on the Housing and Planning Bill. It was accepted and passed by the Committee. It is only right that the House should have a brief opportunity to discuss exactly the same amendment on this Bill.

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills): I rise to support the amendment, for the fundamental reason that I believe that there should be consistency in the United Kingdom's housing policy and that a distinction should not be drawn between the rate of discount that applies in Scotland and that which applies in England and Wales.

Mr. Gordon Wilson (Dundee, East): The hon. Gentleman says that he believes in consistency. Why, then, was that amendment passed without consultation with Scottish Members? It seems to have been passed by English Members and now they are trying to foist it upon us.

Mr. Shepherd: With great respect, there was a Scottish Member on the Committee. He was aware of the amendment and voted for it. The fact that other Scottish parties do not find that to be a convincing argument is not one with which I would necessarily agree. I should like there to be consistency throughout the United Kingdom. Furthermore, the right-to-buy legislation does not refer to flats, although they constitute 30 per cent. of the housing stock. However, sales of flats account for only 3 per cent. of total sales. If we cannot encourage the occupiers of flats to buy their homes, we shall end up with a completely unbalanced residue of housing stock. We shall be left with the most unsatisfactory form of housing.

Mr. Maxton: The hon. Members for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) and for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) keep referring to flats, but their amendment does not cover all flats. A distinction is drawn between certain flats and the flats which are covered by their amendment.

Mr. Shepherd: Substantial statistics were not available to enable us to identify the nature of the sales,

[Mr. Shepherd]

but we reached cross-party agreement about those which it was identified are the most difficult to sell. That is why we focused upon the most difficult element, which we deemed to be those which are included in the amendment. For those reasons I support the amendment of my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North.

Mr. Maxton: The idea that there must be consistency between what happens in England and Wales and what happens in Scotland on housing matters is complete and utter nonsense. If that were so, there would not be separate housing legislation. One Bill would cover the whole of the United Kingdom. The hon. Member for Northampton, North may believe that that is right, but no Scottish Members believe that that is right. The Bill contains major differences relating to the legislation that affects housing associations in Scotland compared with that which affects housing associations in England and Wales. There is no reason, therefore, why different discounts should not apply in England and Wales compared with Scotland.

I shall explain briefly why my Labour colleagues on the Standing Committee voted for the amendment of the hon. Member for Northampton, North. It was a wrecking vote. It was designed to wreck the clause and make it inoperable —*[Interruption.]* Conservative Members may deny that but if they read *Labour Weekly* they will see that that was exactly the argument that was put forward by my hon. Friends who were leading for the Opposition.

Mr. Shepherd: It may be that one should read *Labour Weekly*, but it might be helpful if one read the *Hansard* report of the proceedings in Committee. The hon. Gentleman would then be better informed about the views of his colleagues.

Mr. Maxton: I prefer to read *Labour Weekly*. Scottish members have opposed and continue to oppose the Government's increase in the discount for flats. The discounts for the sale of council houses are too high. If we are pushed to a vote tonight, we shall certainly vote against the amendment.

8.15 pm

Mr. Ancram: Having listened to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) I am amazed at his view that in order to find out what the Labour Party mean by their vote we have to read *Labour Weekly* rather than *Hansard*. However, it appears on the face of *Hansard* that many of the hon. Gentleman's colleagues supported my hon. Friends the Members for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) and for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) who have spoken in this short debate. His colleagues voted for an amendment of the type that is now before us.

I appreciate the concern of my hon. Friends about the need to increase flat sales. They know that the increase of 10 per cent. in the discount was precisely to achieve that purpose. Their argument in Standing Committee on the Bill was to the effect that they did not think that that went far enough. They wish a further incentive to be introduced.

The corresponding part of the Housing and Planning Bill has been amended, with the result that the provisions contained in the Bill that is before us today and in the Housing and Planning Bill are no longer identical. It would no be right in principle for tenants who live in similar houses to have a different entitlement to discounts in England and Scotland. Therefore we have tried to create consistency where no consistency previously existed. Our intention is to try to keep England and Scotland in step. Therefore we shall look again at flat discounts and bring forward—if necessary in another place—amendments to ensure that there is no divergence.

I do not, however, believe that these amendments are satisfactory, and in their heart of hearts my hon. Friends may believe that that is the case, too. I recognise the strength of the views that have been expressed on an all-party basis in Committee and also in the House in favour of an improved discount for flat dwellers. I join my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing, Urban Affairs and Construction in giving the House an assurance that we shall look carefully at how best to give effect to those views. In the light of this assurance, I hope that my hon. Friends will withdraw the amendments.

Mr. Marlow: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for what he has said and for the way that he has said it. I said in my brief introductory remarks that my idea was to give to Scotland the opportunity to have the same discounts as are now to be made available in England and Wales.

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) feels that Scotland does not need the same opportunities. That is his point of view and he is entitled to it. However, he then went on to say why the amendment was passed and why it was supported in Committee by the Opposition. I have a slight advantage over the hon. Gentleman. I was there. An amendment previous to this amendment was moved by the Opposition Front Bench. It was to show the Opposition's concern about the sale of flats in areas that they defined as being areas where it was difficult to let.

The reason for this amendment being put forward and eventually accepted was that it was agreeable to the Conservative Back Bench and the Labour Front Bench. It was not a wrecking amendment. The hon. Gentleman would be well advised to read the *Hansard* report of the debate. He will find that there is a distinct difference between his housing policy and the housing policy of his hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker). The hon. Member for Perry Barr says that his housing policy is concerned with people rather than with dogma. His housing policy might therefore be in advance of that of the hon. Member for Cathcart. The time will shortly come when he will follow behind his hon. Friend the Member for Perry Barr.

In view of what my hon. Friend said and the satisfactory commitment that he has given, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 13

PAYMENTS ETC. IN COMMUNITY-BASED HOUSING ASSOCIATIONS. 1985 c. 69

Amendment made: No. 11, in page 10, line 35 after 'dwelling', insert ', or as the case may be part,'.—*[Mr. Ancram.]*

Mr. Millan: I beg to move amendment No. 12, in page 10, line 46, at end insert

'or—

(iii) has lived in a dwelling within the particular community mentioned in subsection 4*(a)* below

relevant to the association for a continuous period of at least three years immediately preceding the granting of the tenancy.'.

The amendment deals with the granting of tenancies to persons who are either committee members of community-based housing associations or who are close relatives of committee members. The granting of such tenancies is completely forbidden at present but the Bill goes some way to meet the rights of those people by including provisions under which in certain circumstances tenancies can be granted to committee members or to close relatives of committee members.

The provisions are very restrictive. Strong feeling has been expressed in local housing associations. When an amendment was moved in Committee there was reference to representations that I had from Linthouse housing association. Housing associations feel that the rules are grossly unfair to people who voluntarily give up their time to act as committee members of community based housing associations. The restrictive rules are unfair not only to committee members but even more so to close relatives. A son or a daughter is not eligible for the allocation of a house, regardless of need.

I am sorry that the Minister did not accept in Committee the amendment that such tenancies could be granted provided they fell within the published rules of the association for the granting of tenancies. That would be a much more satisfactory way of dealing with the matter. In my amendment I am not returning to that concept although it would be best. I have included another condition, namely, that any person to be granted a tenancy either as a committee member or as a close relative should have had a continuous local association for at least three years immediately preceding the granting of the tenancy. That would meet the fear that committee members might abuse the provision by granting tenancies unfairly or unjustifiably to themselves or to their relatives.

I do not approach the matter on the basis of requiring stringent safeguards in case committee members behave disreputably. If there is a problem, it is offensive to approach it like that. Committee members give up their time voluntarily and put in much effort to improve housing conditions in their communities. They should be dealt with as public spirited local citizens who are doing their best for the local community. If there is a fear of unfair treatment, it might be necessary to put safeguards into the Bill. As I have said, the safeguard that was proposed in Committee was best. My amendment is much more limited, although it requires a genuine local connection.

The present provision is grossly unfair not just to committee members but to immediate members of their families. It discourages public-spirited people from acting as committee members of housing associations. We should remove the disincentive and treat committee members with fairness and generosity in view of their voluntary activities. Although the amendment is limited, it recognises that before a tenancy could be granted the prospective tenant should have had a demonstrative local connection for at least three years. I hope the Minister will accept the amendment in the spirit in which I move it.

Mr. Kennedy: I support the amendment. Skye and Lochalsh housing association is perhaps a peripheral example of the point the right hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Millan) was making. When the association first wrote to me about the Bill in general it pointed out that the 12 highly motivated active local residents give their time, skills and commitment to the association entirely voluntarily. It is important to stress that. I am glad that the right hon. Member did so.

Lest there be discrimination in carrying out the policy, the right hon. Gentleman has suggested that a person should have been established in the locality for three years before being granted a tenancy. That is relevant not just in Skye but in other parts of the Highlands where there are many holiday homes, the existence of which causes aggravation and disenchantment to many people who give their time voluntarily to the running of housing associations. That point has been made to me specifically by the housing association of Skye and Lochalsh. It pointed out that at least 12 per cent. of the housing stock in the area is used as holiday accommodation. In some communities the figure is as high as 50 per cent. Anything which helps to underpin a direct local connection which has been sustained for some time is to be welcomed in the context of my constituency. Therefore I am happy to support the amendment.

Mr. Maxton: I briefly support my right hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Millan). It is wrong that there should be an anomaly in the treatment of relatives of voluntary committee members of housing associations compared with district councillors and housing officers and housing employees of district councils. In the latter case there is no bar on the rights of relatives in the granting of tenancies. Yet people who have built the housing association movement in Scotland are discriminated against. Scotland is different from the rest of the United Kingdom with its community-based community housing associations. We have a right to be proud of those associations yet we are placing this burden on the relatives of committee members. It is not right. I support the amendment.

Mr. Ancram: I understand the right hon. Gentleman's reasons for tabling the amendment which, as he explained, would increase the range of circumstances in which a community-based housing association could grant a tenancy to a committee member or a close relative. I am not sure that the hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye (Mr. Kennedy) was appraised of the fact that the clause refers only to community-based housing associations as designated under the terms of that provision. I do not know that the amendment would help in his area.

The particular problems of community-based housing associations in relation to the granting of benefits centre around the nature of their activities and the fact that those are confined to a limited geographical area. Their renovation programmes must, therefore, at certain points, conflict with the interests of their committee members or their relatives who live in houses which are or are likely to be affected by the programme. In that position there is a clear need on grounds of equity for an association to be able to buy houses from and offer a tenancy to those people when their existing houses are directly affected. The clause as drafted gives them that ability and the 12-months period makes allowance for those who have moved out of the area recently or temporarily.

8.30 pm

The right hon. Member for Govan has suggested that community-based housing associations should be able to grant tenancies to committee members or relatives who

[Mr. Ancram]

are currently resident in the area but not in houses owned by or being acquired by the association. I see that as a distinctly different category of allocation from those categories that are already provided for in new section 15A*(b)*. The same arguments about the direct effect of the development programme on their homes do not apply, and without that distinction they are not in a materially different position from the relatives of committee members of any other housing associations, whether community-based or not.

The provisions that are set out in clause 13 were drawn carefully to provide a specific solution to a particular problem, which is probably unique to community-based housing associations in Scotland. As such, I accept that it merits a solution that is not available to housing associations generally, but only to the degree that the problem can be demonstrated to be uniquely different from those of other associations. That is where the amendment falls down, and it is for that reason that I do not believe that it is necessary, or even desirable, to widen the clause in the way that is proposed. Accordingly, I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will withdraw the amendment. If he does not, I shall have to ask my right hon. and hon. Friends to reject it.

Mr. Millan: I have no intention of withdrawing the amendment, especially after such an unsatisfactory reply. The Minister has not directed himself to the real unfairness that currently exists. There are three community-based housing associations in my constituency that are operating in different parts of it, and committee members are typically those who have lived in their local communities all their lives. In some cases their sons and daughters have lived in those communities all their lives. It is absurd that they should be debarred statutorily from being allocated a house in their particular areas. That is monstrous.

There are satisfactory ways of avoiding any suggestion that someone is being treated unfairly or with undue favour. There are different ways of avoiding unfairnesses and the method that was proposed in Committee was rejected. The amendment sets out another approach and that, too, is being rejected. The Minister is turning it down without advancing any substantial argument in favour of refusing to deal with the problems. He is doing so without any real recognition of the sense of injustice which the present provisions cause to committee members as well as to their unfortunate relatives, who in some instances may have nothing to do with the committee members or with them becoming committee members. If I live in a certain community and my brother decides to become a member of a community-based housing association, why should that deny me statutorily of any prospect of being housed by the association? That is absurd and I have no intention of withdrawing the amendment.

Something will have to be done to remedy this injustice and if the Minister will not take the sensible course and have an appropriate provision inserted in the Bill in this place, I hope that those in another place will do the job that requires to be done.

Amendment negatived.

Clause 14

EXTENSION OF SECTIONS 44 AND 45 OF 1985 ACT TO SCOTLAND

Amendment made: No. 13, in page 12, line 18, after '*(e)*', insert 'or *(f)*'.—*[Mr. Ancram.]*

Schedule 1

AMENDMENT OF 1980 ACT

Amendments made: No. 15, in page 21, line 38, after 'charity', insert '—(i)'. No. 16, in page 21, line 41, leave out '." and *(g)*' and insert '; or

(ii) which but for section 4(4) of, and paragraph *(g)* of the Second Schedule to, that Act (exempt charities) would require to be so entered; or

(f) where by virtue of section 49(2) of the said Act of 1960 (extent) a landlord so mentioned is not one to which Part II of that Act (registration of charities etc.) applies, but—

(i) the landlord has, in respect of all periods from 3 October 1980, claimed and been granted (whether or not retrospectively), under section 360(1) of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1970 (special exemptions for charities), exemption from tax; and

(ii) the rules of the landlord, registered under the Industrial and Provident Societies Act 1965 and in force at the date of the landlord's first being registered by the Housing Corporation, were such as would have admitted of such exemption had it been claimed as at the said date of registration; or

(g) where, within a neighbourhood, the dwelling-house is one of a number (not exceeding 14) of dwelling-houses with a common landlord, being a landlord so mentioned, and it is the practice of that landlord to let at least one half of those dwelling houses for occupation by any or all of the following—

(i) persons who have suffered from or are suffering from mental disorder (as defined in the Mental Health (Scotland) Act 1984), physical handicap or addiction to alcohol or other drugs;

(ii) persons who have been released from prison or other institutions;

(iii) young persons who have left the care of a local authority, and a social service is, or special facilities are, provided wholly or partly for the purpose of assisting those persons.";

(g) after subsection (11) there shall be inserted the following subsections—

"(11A) The Secretary of State may by order amend, or add to, the list of classes set out in sub-paragraphs (i) to (ii) of paragraph *(g)* of subsection (11) above.

(11B) The Commissioners of Inland Revenue shall, as regards any registered housing association, at the request of the Secretary of State, provide him and the Housing Corporation with such information as will enable them to determine whether that association is a landlord in respect of which this section will not, by virtue of subsection (11)*(f)* above, apply; and where a registered housing association is refused exemption on a claim under section 360(1) of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1970 the Commissioners shall forthwith inform the Secretary of State and the Housing Corporation of that fact.

(11C) Where information has been received by the Housing Corporation under subsection (11B) above and having regard to that information the Corporation is satisfied that the housing association to which it relates is not a landlord in respect of which this section applies, they shall make an entry to that effect in the register of housing associations maintained by them under section 3(1) of the Housing Association Act 1985, and they shall cancel that entry where subsequent information so received in relation to that housing association is inconsistent with their being so satisfied."; and

(b)'.

No. 19, in page 25, line 39, leave out '18' and insert '16'.

No. 20, in line 40, at end insert—

'*(bb)* whether, or to what value, the applicant or any of his family owns or has owned (or any of them own or have owned) heritable or moveable property; or'.

No. 21, in line 44, at end insert '; or

(d) whether the applicant is living with, or in the same dwelling-house as—

(i) his spouse; or

(ii) a person with whom he has been living as husband and wife.'.

No. 22, in page 26, line 28, leave out from 'area' to '; and' in line 33 and insert

', or

(ii) any of the matters mentioned in paragraphs *(a)* to *(c)* of section 26(1) of this Act'.

No. 23, in line 34, after 'requirement', insert'—(i)'.

No. 24, in line 37, after 'period', insert '; or

(ii) that a divorce or judicial separation be obtained; or

(iii) that the applicant no longer be living with, or in the same dwelling-house as, some other person.'.—*[Mr. Ancram.]*

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the Bill be now read the Third time.—*[Mr. Ancram.]*

8.36 pm

Mr. Maxton: I shall be brief, but I wish to make it clear that, while the Government have made some concessions for charities and special need housing, the basic objection to extending to tenants of housing associations the right to buy, especially to community housing associations, still remains.

We object strongly to the changes that the Government are making to discount arrangements both in raising the percentages for flats and in reducing the repayment period for that discount from five years to three. We do not believe that those changes are necessary. They are part of a sell-off. They demonstrate the Government's great ideological desire to get rid of every council house that they possibly can. This is the only part of their housing policy that is not directed to the cutting of housing expenditure. Against this background, I shall be asking my right hon. and hon. Friends to vote against the Bill's Third Reading.

8.38 pm

Sir Russell Johnston: I shall ask my right hon. and hon. Friends to vote against the Bill's Third Reading. We are not opposed to the right to buy. We shall oppose Third Reading because it is our view that this measure could blight the remarkable progress of the housing associations, which have done so much to provide houses for those who would otherwise not have them, and to make improvements where improvements would not have been made, as well as filling a continuing gap between the private and public sectors in housing provision. We accept the right to buy, but we believe that there is a right to rent.

8.39 pm

Mr. Alexander Eadie (Midlothian): We have been asked to give a Third Reading to a Bill which only tinkers with the problems of housing in Scotland. It refers to the sale of houses and the role of housing associations but it hides what is happening—for example, how vast sums are being extracted from the public purse for private gain. I am thinking of Newton Grange in my constituency, where many think that what is happening borders on a public scandal. I refer to the former 550 National Coal Board houses at Newton Grange, which were on land leased from the Lothian estates by the board. When, in 1983, the lease expired, the land and properties reverted to Lothian estates. It is not disputed that many of the houses needed substantial improvement. Despite repeated questions to the Government and the NCB, I have never been able to discover whether Lothian estates acquired all of that property without payment. The secrecy of the matter brings me to the reasonable conclusion that there is something to hide.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I must remind the hon. Gentleman that on Third Reading we must confine ourselves to what is in the Bill. The hon. Gentleman is going well outside the Bill.

Mr. Eadie: I intend to speak for only a few minutes and I believe that the House will realise that what I am saying is in order.

The case that I am outlining illustrates that the arguments used in support of the Bill are defective. In March 1984, the Housing Corporation approved funds for rehabilitation by Castle Rock housing association of 119 houses in the Newton Grange No. 1 housing action area. It is public knowledge that Lothian estates acquired a small fortune as a result of the Castle Rock housing association's decision. I do not criticise that, but Lothian estates paid little or nothing for the properties and demanded more than £300,000 for the properties which the Castle Rock housing association proposed to rehabilitate. Housing associations are mentioned in the Bill. The Castle Rock housing association eventually paid £209,750 for the properties in the housing action area.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I find it extremely difficult to relate what the hon. Gentleman is telling the House to what is in the Bill.

Mr. Eadie: The Bill affects the funding of housing associations and how public money will be disbursed. I am therefore entitled to speak on behalf of my constituents and to say that the Bill should not receive a Third Reading.

Lothian estates acquired a small fortune of public money perfectly legally, but the circumstances surrounding the sale are of dubious propriety, to put it mildly. It is not that Lothian estates is a good landlord. When pressed about the dubious propriety of its actions, it oozes a spirit of benevolence. I have had many letters from constituents. I draw the Minister's attention to Mrs. Young of 47, The Square, Newton Grange because the House is entitled to know that the public purse has been robbed. The Minister happens to be the son and heir of Lothian estates, and therefore of the public money to which I have referred. We are entitled to know why he is piloting the Bill through and why he has the right to pilot it through, as he will get some of the money I have mentioned.

This is a disgraceful Bill in many respects. It will not solve Scotland's housing problems and it will merely transfer housing from public to private hands. It is more concerned with profit than housing and I hope that the House will not give it a Third Reading. I also hope that the Minister will have the decency to say what is his vested interest and why he is taking the Bill through the House as a landlord who stands to gain substantial sums of money.

8.44 pm

Mr. Ancram: When the hon. Member for Midlothian (Mr. Eadie) considers that speech in the cold light of day, he may feel that his remarks were unworthy. Listening to the political prejudice enunciated by the spokesmen for the Liberal party and for the Labour party strengthens my view that the Bill is good for tenants and good for housing in Scotland, and I ask my right hon. and hon. Friends to support it.

Question put, That the Bill be now read the Third time:—

The House divided: Ayes 196, Noes 138.

Division No. 91] [8.45 pm

AYES

Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Ancram, Michael
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, John
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brooke, Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon A.
Butcher, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Colvin, Michael
Cope, John
Cormack, Patrick
Corrie, John
Couchman, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Dunn, Robert
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Anthony
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Gardiner, George *(Reigate)*
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Gower, Sir Raymond
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Grist, Ian
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John S
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Hayes, J.
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hickmet, Richard
Hicks, Robert
Hirst, Michael
Holt, Richard
Howarth, Alan *(Stratf'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howell, Ralph *(Norfolk, N)*
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Jenkin, Rt Hon Patrick
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Robert *(Herts W)*
Kellett-Bowman, Mrs Elaine
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lawrence, Ivan
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
McCurley, Mrs Anna
Macfarlane, Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
McNair-Wilson, M. *(N'bury)*
Madel, David
Major, John
Malins, Humfrey
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Antony
Mather, Carol
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Miller, Hal *(B'grove)*
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morrison, Hon C. *(Devizes)*
Mudd, David
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Tony
Normanton, Tom
Onslow, Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patten, Christopher *(Bath)*
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry
Portillo, Michael
Powley, John
Prentice, Rt Hon Reg
Proctor, K. Harvey
Raffan, Keith
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Rippon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Robinson, Mark *(N'port W)*
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Richard
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Terlezki, Stefan
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Waddington, David
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Wall, Sir Patrick
Waller, Gary
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Wheeler, John
Whitfield, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Michael
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Francis Maude and
Mr. Gerald Malone.

NOES

Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bidwell, Sydney
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'mline E)*
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Brown, Ron *(E'burgh, Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Buchan, Norman
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alexander *(Montg'y)*
Carter-Jones, Lewis
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Thomas
Clay, Robert
Clelland, David Gordon
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S)*
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Craigen, J. M.
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Donald
Dormand, Jack
Douglas, Dick
Dubs, Alfred
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Edwards, Bob *(W'h'mpt'n SE)*
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
George, Bruce
Godman, Dr Norman
Golding, John
Gourlay, Harry
Hamilton, W. W. *(Fife Central)*
Hardy, Peter
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Hart, Rt Hon Dame Judith
Haynes, Frank
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Janner, Hon Greville
John, Brynmor
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kennedy, Charles
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James

Leadbitter, Ted
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McKelvey, William
MacKenzie, Rt Hon Gregor
McTaggart, Robert
Madden, Max
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Maxton, John
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meacher, Michael
Meadowcroft, Michael
Michie, William
Mikardo, Ian
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Nellist, David
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Park, George
Patchett, Terry
Pavitt, Laurie
Pike, Peter
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Robinson, G. *(Coventry NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Silkin, Rt Hon J.
Skinner, Dennis
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Stewart, Rt Hon D. *(W Isles)*
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Thomas, Dafydd *(Merioneth)*
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Tinn, James
Wainwright, R.
Welsh, Michael
White, James
Wigley, Dafydd
Wilson, Gordon
Winnick, David

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. James Hamilton and
Mr. Allen McKay.

Question accordingly agreed to.
Bill accordingly read the Third time and passed.

Salmon Bill [Lords]

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ernest Armstrong): Mr. Speaker has selected the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition.

8.55 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. John MacKay): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

When the Government announced our intention to bring forward salmon legislation, there were critics who accused us of wasting parliamentary time on a minor issue when we had so many other problems such as unemployment. Leaving aside the point that legislation does not create employment, other than perhaps for the bureacrats, I believe that this attitude showed a considerable ignorance of the Scottish rural scene. While those employed directly or indirectly in the salmon industry may not add up to a lot of people in Glasgow or west central Scotland terms, they add up to a lot of people in the remote rural corners of Scotland, often in the most fragile economic parts of the countryside.

Angling in general is the biggest participation sport in this country. It is a multi-million pound industry. Salmon angling is the most sought after and often the most expensive part of the angling scene and, dare I say it, often the most unrewarding. There have been many efforts to quantify the value of salmon angling to Scotland. Figures have been put variously at between £22 million and £140 million per annum. If the true figure is somewhere in the middle that clearly indicates the importance of salmon angling to many parts of rural Scotland. In addition to ghillies, boatmen and keepers directly employed, hotels, self-catering, shops, restaurants and all parts of the rural economy benefit from the angler. That angler will come, and continue to come, only if he feels he has a reasonable chance of catching fish, and that depends on how well we conserve the stocks of salmon.

The legitimate netsman is equally an important part of the rural economy. I can think of parts of my constituency, and I am sure other hon. Members can do of theirs, where the netting forms a very important part of the annual fishing cycle, enabling fishermen and their families to make a living in the country, often, in my case, on islands. Their survival is linked, critically, to the survival of the salmon and in sufficient numbers to allow them a reasonable catch.

The Bill has a direct impact on employment in the countryside. Its aim is to improve the protection of the salmon so that the legitimate netsman and the angler can have continuing livelihood and sport.

The Bill has three main objectives. The first is the modernisation and improvement of the administrative arrangements in Scotland. The management of salmon stocks is the responsibility of district boards, which are composed of an equal number of upper, or rod, proprietors and lower, or netting, proprietors with the person owning the fishery with the highest rateable value being automatically the chairman. We propose to modernise and democratise the arrangements by providing for the chairman to be elected by a meeting of proprietors in the district and for the co-option of representatives of anglers and tenant netsmen who have a significant interest in the proper management of salmon fisheries.

[Mr. John MacKay]

Because of their substantial financial investment, the Bill provides for a constitution that gives proprietors a majority of the votes. The Bill also provides for amalgamation of districts where the proprietors consider that this is necessary to create a more viable management unit. All told, we hope that the new provision will encourage greater coverage of Scotland by district boards. At present, there are in existence only about half the boards in the 108 districts for which the existing legislation provides.

The second main objective is the streamlining of the arrangements for the regulation of salmon fisheries. It is intended that certain changes which at present require primary legislation may in future be achieved by statutory instrument, subject to parliamentary approval where appropriate. This will allow a quicker response to changing circumstances, for example in relation to the length of close times and the prescribed methods of fishing.

Thirdly, there are further measures to combat poaching through new offences of being in possession of unlawfully taken salmon, and also the powers enabling the Government to bring forward salmon dealer licensing schemes.

This is, of course, not a purely Scottish Bill, although the major part of it deals with the situation in Scotland. From the outset it was recognised that, as regards the new possession offence, the measures could be effective only if they applied throughout Scotland and England and Wales.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): Will the Minister accept that severe problems face the future of salmon in Wales, and no doubt in England as well? Why do the Government not see fit to take more radical steps to safeguard the interests of salmon and salmon fishing in Wales and England, as well as in Scotland?

Mr. MacKay: As I continue my speech the hon. Gentleman will see that we are taking important and radical measures in England and Wales. The main thing that we are doing in Scotland is to improve the arrangements for the district fishery boards, and, I hope, improve their role. I have no doubt that my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food will touch on the hon. Gentleman's point about England and Wales when he sums up.

As some, at least, of those here this evening will know, the Bill has undergone fairly rigorous scrutiny in another place. One of the outcomes of this was the inclusion of powers which would enable the introduction of a dealer licensing scheme in England and Wales.

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): Following on the point made by the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley), Welsh salmon conservation is important. Clause 28 will be important for Welsh salmon interests. Will the Government introduce a scheme urgently? Will the Minister advise the House that the obvious authority to implement the scheme is the Welsh water authority, which has the fullest knowledge of and involvement in Welsh fishing interests?

Mr. MacKay: I shall come later to the licensing scheme, especially with regard to Scotland, but I know that the hon. Gentleman has to be in a Committee, so I say to him that in both Scotland and Wales we hope to act as quickly as possible. In Scotland we have the mechanism, which I shall explain when I come to that part of my speech. I know that my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food hope to act as quickly as possible in England and Wales. I think they recognise that the water authorities look like being the appropriate vehicle, but some thought will have to go into that because it is a new concept. In Scotland we already have dealer licensing, as I shall mention when I come to it.

The Bill has been criticised by some as falling short of what was required. It is a fact, however, that there has to be a limit to any piece of legislation, and I am in no doubt that the Bill addresses itself to the main elements of salmon fisheries which require attention. I hope that the Bill will commend itself to the House as an appropriate and practical response to what is needed.

Mr. John Morris (Aberavon): Before the end of the Minister's speech, may I declare an interest — an unsatisfied interest—as a fisherman in west Wales. We want better conservation measures. Will he consider sympathetically in Committee an amendment to provide that when rivers in Wales, or indeed in other parts of the country, are very low, all fishing should be banned for a short time in order to conserve the salmon and ensure that they arrive in the river at the appropriate time?

Mr. MacKay: I appreciate that some time will be spent in Committee on this difficult question of drought, just as there was in another place on the same subject. As a fellow fisherman, I appreciate the point made by the right hon. and learned Gentleman. I am sure he is aware that there are major problems of definition and area. The simple proof of the oft-repeated statement that low water means that net fishermen take a disproportionate amount of salmon and that this has a deleterious effect on the stocks, is difficult to obtain. This is an important issue, and I shall listen sympathetically to the points that are made about it. I look forward to an interesting debate. However, the right hon. and learned Member was a little premature if he thought that I was about to sit down.

I said that the Bill was an appropriate and practical response to what is needed. It is practical because, down the years, there have been a variety of views on what should be done about salmon management, conservation and other matters. It would have been possible for the Government to rest on the fact that, beyond general principles and statements of intent, there could be said to have been a lack of real and general consensus over a number of areas. We have, however, focused on the areas of importance, and the general response in another place was that the Bill is a worthwhile measure.

In deciding to build on the existing structure and arrangements in Scotland, we were conscious of the fact that the Scottish legislation, essentially the Acts of 1862 and 1868, has stood the test of time in many respects, and one must acknowledge the far-sightedness of those who drafted these provisions. It is also worth noting that, despite the effects of activities such as high seas fishing and large-scale poaching, our salmon stocks have been remarkably well maintained. It is interesting to note—certainly as regards Scotland—that the fluctuations in

catches over recent years are not novel. There were short-term variations in the 1930s, and at the end of last century, every bit as great as that in the 1960s and 1970s. However, we cannot be complacent, and in particular we must continue to give a lead to other countries when it comes to national conservation measures.

Mr. Michael Forsyth (Stirling): I acknowledge the point about variations in given years, but surely my hon. Friend will accept that world stocks of salmon have declined by about 50 per cent., as indeed they have in Scotland, over the past 20 years.

Mr. MacKay: I accept my hon. Friend's point about the world stocks of salmon. However, if my hon. Friend were to look at the figures in the most recent statistical bulletin published by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, he would see that over the past 30 years there was first a marked increase in the salmon take and then a decline. The current figure is not too far from the figure for the early 1950s.

I know that there are debates on how the cycles are caused, and these debates have gone on for a long time. There are mysteries about salmon, including these cycles. It is important that we take all possible steps to conserve salmon and make certain that we can, as far as knowledge permits, control these cycles, which would be to the benefit of both the legitimate netsmen and the salmon angler.

Before I describe the various clauses I should like to draw the House's attention to the four particular points.

The first is the possession offence, to which I have already referred. As the House will know, poaching is no longer confined to small local operations, but is carried out on a large and well-organised commercial scale. The provisions in the Bill will allow action to be taken against those involved with the outlets for poached salmon and should have a significant effect on the level of poaching by making it more difficult to dispose of illegally caught fish. Clauses 21 and 29 set out respectively provisions for Scotland, and England and Wales. The fact that the wording is not identical reflects a difference of starting point. In the Scottish case we have chosen to build on the existing provisions in the Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries Protection Act 1951, whereas in England and Wales the approach has been to build on the Theft Act.

The net result of both clauses is to ensure that it will no longer be the case that someone can be in possession of salmon, believing, or having reason to suspect, that it had been illegally taken, and not be convicted. Hitherto, this has been a major gap in the enforcement of salmon legislation. The new clauses strike the right, and essential, balance between improving the prospects of convicting those involved in the illegal handling of salmon, without going so far as introducing measures which could lead to the conviction of innocent people.

Mr. Norman Buchan (Paisley, South): Can the Minister think of any comparable clause in our legal system that attributes guilt on the basis of suspicion?

Mr. MacKay: There are some examples, and my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) may be able to find them. I cannot put my hand on them while I am making this speech, but they are there. It is sensible to take this small action to make sure that people cannot get away with large-scale poaching of salmon. Perhaps the hon. Member approves of that, but I know that most hon. Members do not. In my constituency we could greatly improve the chances of catching people and bringing them before the courts and, if the evidence is properly there, of getting convictions, if the House passes the two clauses.

Mr. Martin J. O'Neill (Clackmannan): Is the Minister suggesting that it has been acceptable to poach one for the pot, as was said in the debate in the other place, but that larger-scale poaching is unacceptable? If he is claiming that, he is flying in the face of historic evidence about the treatment of poachers.

Mr. MacKay: The hon. Gentleman should know that it is a question of scale. The Bill is being approached from a conservation point of view. The person who goes out and gets one for the pot is not endangering the species, but those who poison rivers or net rivers by setting miles and miles of monofilament net are endangering the species. That is especially true of the poisoner. If the hon. Member has ever seen a river after a poisoner has been at work, he will know the deep feelings of bitterness in the breasts of countrymen when they see the havoc that has been wreaked down river.

Dealer licensing will be a valuable complement to the new possession offences, and it is the intention to have detailed schemes under subordinate legislation brought forward as soon possible after the enactment of the Bill. These schemes will be subject to the affirmative resolution of both Houses. Here again the net result will be the same, although the starting points north and south of the border are different. In Scotland we are building on the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982. In England and Wales, where there is no similar legislation, the provisions will have to be made in another direction. I have already said that the water boards are one possible direction in which my right hon. Friends in the south will be thinking of moving.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I apologise for interrupting my hon. Friend. The dealer licensing scheme is crucial to the effectiveness of the Bill in dealing with poaching. Will it be possible for the Committee to have some information about how it will operate?

Mr. MacKay: I note what my hon. Friend says. It depends on how readily and quickly we can move with our consultations in Scotland with COSLA, as it is directly involved through the Civic Government (Scotland) Act and the police, and in England and Wales where the Government will have to talk to, among others, the water authorities. I cannot promise my hon. Friend that we shall have any more details in Committee about how we intend to implement this. Of course, that point will come to the House for debate under the affirmative order provision.

I was about to mention my third point concerning water bailiffs. There has been much ill-informed comment in Scotland about the role of water bailiffs in the dealer licensing scheme, including the suggestion that they be given the power to enter and search dwelling houses. Let me scotch—if I may use that word—that suggestion once and for all.

With regard to unlicensed premises, which include dwelling houses, the police have a power of entry and search under section 6 of the 1982 Act. They have, however, to satisfy a justice of the peace or sheriff, on

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oath, that there is reasonable ground for suspecting that an activity for which a licence is required is taking place there. If satisfied, a warrant may be granted by the sheriff or justice of the peace. That power of entry and search is one reserved to the police and there is no intention of extending the power to water bailiffs in the context of salmon dealer licensing.

The fourth point concerns clause 33 which commits the Government to a review, three years after the enactment of the Bill, of the salmon net fisheries in the north-east of England and in the Scottish east coast salmon fishery districts as far north as the river Ugie. This review embraces the undertaking given in my hon. Friend's statement of 7 November 1985 to review the effects of the new measures being introduced in the north-east English drift net fishery. The decision to introduce this clause was welcomed in another place, and I hope that it will commend itself to this House, and the conflicting interests in it.

I hope the House will find it helpful if I describe briefly the specific provisions of the Bill. Clause 1 creates new salmon fishery districts but builds upon existing districts by retaining existing coastal limits and existing names. The new districts will include, not only the major rivers flowing into the sea between the existing coastal limits of the district but all other rivers that do so. Regulatory provisions are applied to minor rivers as they presently apply to the major rivers in any district. Subsection (2) as read with clause 2 will enable districts to be amalgamated. There is, in subsection (4), the power to make minor adjustments to district boundaries.

Clause 2 and schedule 1 provide the power and procedure for making a designation order to abolish salmon fishery districts and create new districts. This power can be used, as I have said, to enable districts to amalgamate or, where the extent of existing districts is considered to be unsatisfactory in some way. The procedures to be followed before a designation order is made, are set out in schedule 1 and include provisions for consultation, publication and the receipt and consideration of objections.

Clauses 3 to 9 deal with the regulation of salmon fishing. Clause 3(2) deals with technical matters such as the construction and use of cruives and dams and the mesh of nets. Clause 3(3) deals with the duration of the weekly close time and enables changes to be made by regulation subject to annulment by resolution of either House. At present, any such change would require primary legislation. This change provides flexibility which has long been asked for.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): I hope that the Minister recognises that there are anxieties about this part of the Bill, not that it is not right that the Minister should from time to time update these specific rules. However, fishermen may find that, when the Minister makes a change in a permitted fishing method, the only recourse open to an aggrieved person is to ask a Member of Parliament to pray against an order. There may be a repetition of the position that exists now over the monofilament net ban, where large sections of the industry believe that they have not been consulted and their Members of Parliament have no means of voting against the provision.

Mr. MacKay: That is the usual cry when all consultations are carried out. If people do not agree with the results of the consultation, they say that the consultation has not been adequate. However, this is the way that Parliament works and it is the only way that the changes to legislation that are needed from time to time, for example in the close time, can be made.

It will be observed that, whereas the annual close time for all districts except the Tweed is currently a fixed period of 168 days, although it may commence on different dates in different districts, clause 6 provides that in future the "annual close time will be a continuing period of not less than 168 days".

There is no change in the provision that angling may take place after the start and before the end of the annual close time. However, as a district may in future, as a consequence of a designation order under clause 2, include more than one major river, we felt it prudent to provide that there might be different close times for different rivers within a district. It will be noted that a change in an annual close time may be made only on the application of a district salmon fishery board, or on the application of any two proprietors within a district where no board is in existence. The procedures in schedule 1 contain safeguards with regard to publication, notification and so on. Alterations to estuary limits under clause 7 will also depend on an initiative at district board or proprietorial level.

Clause 9 provides that regulations made under clause 3 will, in general, apply to the Tweed. The present annual close time of 153 days for that river is retained but, as in the case of other rivers, as a minimum period in future.

Clauses 10 to 12 deal with salmon fishery proprietors and their qualifications to vote for and be elected to a district salmon fishery board. The present distinction between upper and lower proprietors and their power to appoint a mandatory to act for them are retained. Clause 11 provides for the unusual position of there being only one proprietor of a salmon fishery in a district, and where, following enactment, he ceases to be so because other rivers and proprietors are included in the district.

Clauses 13 to 17 provide for the constitution, membership, powers and duties of district salmon fishery boards, clause 13 and schedule 2 deal with elections to and the constitution of a district salmon fishery board. The concept of an association is new in salmon legislation, but I am advised that we are on sound and desirable grounds in requiring proprietors to form an association and elect a committee which will then become the district salmon fishery board.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Will the Minister clarify the relationship between the Government and brown trout interests?

Mr. MacKay: That is opening up the much wider issue of the relationship between salmon fishery boards and brown trout interests. As the hon. Gentleman knows, the legislation deals specifically with salmon. We may have an interesting debate in Committee about whether brown trout should come within the scope of salmon fishery boards and their names altered, or whether we should consider an alternative to preserve brown trout fishing which, at the risk of digressing from the motion, is equally important to many people and the tourist industry.

As at present, boards will be voluntary organisations so that they will be created only at the wish of proprietors.

The procedure for setting up boards is set out in schedule 2. We have retained the existing procedure for weighted voting, but have updated the valuation figures which determine whether a proprietor is entitled to multiple votes. We have also provided that, however small the valuation of a fishery, the proprietor will be entitled to one vote. Provision is made in the schedule for the co-option of representatives of anglers and tenant netsmen.

I have already mentioned our intention to introduce a salmon dealer licence in Scotland. The enabling power is clause 19. The intention is that district and islands councils will be the licensing authorities. At an earlier stage in our consultations the idea of a dealer licensing scheme was welcomed in principle by COSLA and the Association of Chief Constables. My officials will be consulting further with these and other bodies, and I shall certainly try to get some of the details for the Committee stage.

Clause 20 adds to section 2 of the Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries (Protection) (Scotland) Act 1951 permitted methods of fishing for salmon in the sea. Power is given to define by regulation the terms net and coble, bag net, fly net or other stake net. This should be a useful provision.

Clauses 21 to 27 deal with offences and introduce new penalties in Scotland. Clause 21 provides the new offence in Scotland of a person being in possession of salmon either believing that it has been unlawfully taken or possessing it in circumstances in which it would be reasonable for him to suspect that it had been unlawfully taken. Clause 29 provides for the offence as it will apply in England and Wales. Although worded slightly differently in places, the effect of the clauses will be essentially the same and provision is made so that prosecution may take place regardless of which side of the border the original offence took place. It will be a defence to show that no relevant offence had been committed.

Clause 22 will enable a court to find an accused guilty of any one of the specified alternative offences if satisfied that the accused did not commit the offence charged but committed the alternative offence.

Clause 23 makes it an offence to introduce salmon or salmon eggs into inland waters in a district where there is a district board without the board's consent.

Clause 24 provides for exemption from certain offences where a person has the permission of my right hon. and learned Friend. It will be noted that he may give his consent only where all affected proprietors in a salmon fishery district have also consented. That provision will, for example, enable an otherwise illegal method of fishing to be used in individual cases—for example, salmon ranching or other developments in salmon fishing.

Clause 25 adds to the present exemptions for acts done for scientific purposes or for the purpose of protecting and improving salmon stocks.

Clause 26 provides for the application of clauses 24 and 25 to the River Esk and to the River Tweed.

Clause 27 removes the right of a clerk to a district board or any other person to prosecute offences relating to salmon. In future prosecutions will be undertaken solely by the procurator fiscal. Clause 28 enables a dealer licensing scheme to be introduced in England and Wales.

Clause 29 makes it an offence in England and Wales for someone to receive or handle salmon where he believes, or it would be reasonable for him to suspect, that it had been taken illegally. This clause parallels clause 21 which relates to Scotland.

Clause 30 will remove the unnecessary requirement under section 30 of the Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries Act 1975 that fish farms in England and Wales must obtain the consent of the water authority before they introduce fish or spawn into their waters. This is a change which was forecast in the 1981 consultation paper on inland and coastal fisheries in England and Wales.

Clause 31 modifies the penalties under the 1975 Act for fishing with an illegal or unlicensed instrument, removing a distinction between acting alone and acting with another.

Clause 32 amends the provisions of the Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries Act 1975 regarding fishing of licensed nets by authorised servants or agents of the licensee. The effect will be that, in areas where the number of licences issued is restricted under section 26 of the 1975 Act, the servants or agents must be accompanied by the licensee when they fish with the net. The only exception will be in the case of illness or injury.

Clause 33, as I said earlier, commits the Government to a review, three years after the enactment of the Bill, of the salmon net fisheries in the north-east of England and on the Scottish east coast.

Mr. Morrison *rose*——

Mr. MacKay: I will finish, if my hon. Friend will allow me.

In the course of my remarks I have dealt with schedules 1 and 2. I should also refer briefly to schedules 3, 4 and 5. Schedule 3 is a necessary provision to allow existing district boards to continue in operation in their present form for a period of up to three years if the proprietors so wish. Boards can, of course, be reconstituted in terms of the provisions of the Bill within this period. Paragraph 6 of schedule 4 will remove some of the restrictions which currently apply to the publication of salmon statistics. Schedule 5 is a list of repeals and from them the House will be able to judge the extent of the modernisation contained in the Bill. We are repealing entirely seven Acts, with removal of sections of some other Acts.

One of the features of the Government's approach to consideration of the Bill has been the willingness of Ministers and our Departments to listen to the views of salmon and other interests and where possible to take these into account. That has, I think, been acknowledged as a constructive and essentially non-political approach and I very much hope that this attitude will be reflected in our debate today and in the succeeding stages in this House.

9.28 pm

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): The Under-Secretary of State may well be hopeful, but I may be about to shatter some of his hopes, because I beg to move, to leave out from "That" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

"this House declines to give a Second Reading to the Salmon Bill *[Lords]* on the grounds that it would extend the powers and privileges of private proprietors of salmon fisheries without making adequate provision for anglers or for the wider public interest, and that it is an inappropriate and inadequate measure to deal with the urgent need to conserve salmon and other fish species, and to protect the environment of rivers and estuaries for the benefit of the whole nation's sporting, recreational and environmental interests."

I should declare an interest in the Bill because it would, as I understand it, extend my rights and privileges as one who happens to farm land adjacent to a Scottish river. I do not fish on the River Tweed or derive any benefit from

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it—nor do I want to—but the Bill will give me a greater say in the administration of the river than it gives to the people who fish on it. It is amazing that, in this day and age, legislation should entrench the powers of absentee landlords, foreign investors and, in this case, a Labour Member of Parliament while doing practically nothing for local fishing interests. That is absurd, and that is why I have tabled the amendment.

I acknowledge the obvious fact that the number of salmon in our rivers has fallen disastrously in recent years. Urgent action is needed to protect these magnificent fish from the threat of extermination. Scottish Office statistics published in December last year show that the total recorded catch of salmon and grilse in 1984 was the lowest since records started in 1952. The trend since the mid-1960s has been extremely worrying. With that in mind, obviously I welcome the fact that the Government have decided to do something about it, but that is about as far as I can go.

The Government, in presenting the Bill and using this parliamentary time, have given themselves an opportunity to bring Scottish freshwater fisheries legislation into the 21st century, but instead they have opted to stay in the 19th century. They are simply building on failure by readopting the discredited framework of the Salmon Fisheries (Scotland) Acts 1862 and 1868 which concentrated all power in the hands of the private proprietors of salmon fishing rights, the riparian owners.

It is a bit much for the Under-Secretary of State to say that he is democratising Scottish district salmon fishery boards. The franchise will be extended only to the people who own the fisheries. How that can be called democratisation is beyond me. Even supposing that those riparian owners never took any account of their own private interests in exercising their powers on district salmon fishery boards, it is inevitable that others will see the district boards as protectors of the landlords' interests. Similarly, bailiffs appointed by such boards are bound to be seen as the landlords' men. I believe that this fundamental inequity in the constitution of the Scottish district boards is a significant factor in the lawlessness afflicting so many rivers in Scotland.

The concept of the private ownership of a wild fish which happens to be swimming in water adjacent to someone's estate is pretty absurd. That is why most people —this point was raised earlier—have a certain sneaking respect for the traditional poacher who catches a few fish in the laird's water. He may be breaking a law which most people believe is silly. That is all very well when we talk about the one poacher catching the one for the pot about which we hear but, because the law has fallen into disrepute, there is a big poaching industry using sophisticated gear and marketing techniques. We have only this discredited law and these laughable district fishery boards to deal with the problem in Scotland.

We want a new type of river authority with genuine representation for all the people with legitimate interests in the river, including elected local councillors. I believe that the token presence on the existing boards of co-opted representatives with no power to outvote the riparian owners is hopelessly inadequate. We need genuine representative river boards wich will command the respect of all concerned. The Bill simply restores the failed and discredited structure of Scottish river boards from the 1860s legislation. I believe that that fundamental flaw will undermine the conservation objectives in the Bill.

As we all know, the crisis facing the Atlantic salmon has international dimensions. We now have a fully fledged international organisation—the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organisation — based in Edinburgh working on this problem. If we want NASCO to succeed in its efforts to get Greenland, Iceland, the Faroes and the other north Atlantic countries to observe their quotas and to control the fishing efforts in their waters, we must put our own house in order. That means firm and fair control of all our salmon fisheries, both in our rivers and at sea. The thrust of new legislation should be to conserve salmon for the benefit of all concerned, but I doubt very much that the Bill can measure up to that objective.

As for the detailed points of the Bill, first must come the proposal to extend the annual and weekly close times to allow more fish to get to the spawning grounds. That is a sensible objective, although the Salmon Conservancy and the Salmon and Trout Association want that principle to be further extended. There may be a case for a more flexible approach, based on scientific evidence, in a particular year or in a particular river, in much the same way as certain sea fisheries are regulated from time to time. However, when referring to any of these restrictions it has to be pointed out that there is no close season for those who ignore all of the regulations with absolute impunity.

The licensed net fishermen on the River Tweed—the river that I know best because I live on it—voluntarily have postponed the start of their season during the current year, but when I went for a walk along the banks of the River Tweed near my house last Sunday I saw plenty of evidence of the continuing activities of the poaching fraternity.

I agree with the Government that poaching will probably be most effectively and fairly deterred by controlling the trade in salmon. There are two ways to control that trade: either by tagging salmon, as is the practice in New Brunswick, Canada or, as the Government have decided to do, by introducing a dealer licensing system. Given the right framework, either of those systems could work. However, it would have been absurd if the licensing system had stopped at the English border. I am happy to notice that the Government have already accepted that point by introducing an amendment in the other place.

The regulation of dealers should go hand in hand with properly constituted, staffed and funded district fishery boards. I have said something about the shortcomings of the constitution of these boards. I must now say something about the fact that there is to be no Government funding of the boards. I must also express concern about the staffing of the boards, in particular about the appointment of water bailiffs. The landlords who control the district boards can appoint whomever they like as bailiffs. The Bill will provide the bailiffs with very extensive powers. Clauses 21 and 29 establish powers to search vehicles and premises. The courts will be able to convict upon the uncorroborated evidence of a single witness, presumably the water bailiff. There is to be the disturbing extension of a recent precedent whereby an accused person can be presumed guilty of the offence of handling a poached fish until he can prove that he is innocent. Clause 21 says that a person who is in possession of salmon

"in circumstances in which it would be reasonable for him to suspect that a relevant offence has at any time been committed in relation to the salmon shall be guilty of an offence".

Even if it is reasonable to suspect that he might have known that an offence had been committed, he can be guilty of an offence. We should be thankful for the small mercy that the Bill also says:

"It shall be a defence in proceedings for an offence under this section to show that no relevant offence had in fact been committed in relation to the salmon."

However, it also says:

"It shall be lawful to convict a person charged under this section on the evidence of one witness."

It may be too difficult to get somebody prosecuted for poaching now. However, with that kind of legislation on the statute book I fear that it could be rather too easy to get innocent people convicted. It may appear to be attractive to set that kind of legislative precedent in order to stamp out particularly heinous crimes such as drug trafficking, but is it justifiable to undermine some of the fundamental principles of Scottish, and for that matter English, justice, in order to make it easier to prosecute poachers who are after salmon?

I appreciate that there is a need to provide effective control over the trade in contraband salmon, but the House should consider carefully the civil liberties aspects of that part of the Bill. The Government are challenging the Scottish principle of corroboration. The principle that somebody is innocent until he is proved guilty is also being undermined.

If water bailiffs are to be given that kind of power and authority, I want to be absolutely certain that the individuals concerned will be properly selected, trained and controlled—if necessary, with the sanction of police authority. In England and Wales, bailiffs are appointed by properly constituted public water authorities, but in Scotland we are back to our old friend, the riparian owners on the district salmon fishery boards. It is right to demand that the bailiffs should be properly controlled and supervised.

On the licensed netting operations in river estuaries and off the coast of the north east of England, I have some sympathy for the 182 licence holders who are carrying on a long established traditional fishery off the Northumberland and Yorkshire coast. But with modern monofilament nets their catch has increased dramatically from about 15,000 fish in 1965 to over 50,000 in 1984 at a time when the overall number of salmon running in the rivers has been falling spectacularly. Obviously something will have to be done. Clause 33 provides for a review of the fishery. I understand that the Government may be considering the possibility of phasing out that drift net fishery.

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, (Mr. John Selwyn Gummer): There is no question of the Government considering that. The Government are considering what they have put into the Bill. It is wrong for the hon. Gentleman to put any such words into the mouth of the Government.

Mr. Home Robertson: That was not my understanding, but I am grateful for that assurance from the Minister of State. I believe that the traditional netting techniques, subject to proper controls, are a valuable part of the local economy in the areas concerned and, indeed, form an attractive part of the local scene in those areas. Those fisheries provide regular seasonal employment and are part of the tourist attraction of the area. So it should not be necessary to hound out of existence those people or the licensed drift net fishermen that I have been talking about. I am glad to hear that that is not the intention of the Government.

The Government may not be thinking about closing down the fisheries, but I know that my old friends the riparian owners are making strong representations about the closure of licensed net fisheries. I am not happy about such a suggestion. The riparian owner lobby want to build up a lucrative business with rich seasonal visitors. We must ensure that wherever possible regular employment is protected.

Mr. John MacKay: That last remark is uncalled for. If the hon. Gentleman were to read the reports of the debates in another place, he would see that some of the major owners in Scotland were happy to go along with the amendment that is proposed. In fact, no division was called in the other place on going down the road that the hon. Gentleman has conjured up. His attack on the riparian owners in this regard is uncalled for.

Mr. Home Robertson: I read the reports of the debates in another place. It was a fascinating catalogue of vested interests. I have also read the representations made by some of the fishing interests. It is clear that, although they might not put it in writing, many of them would like to do away with the netting operation. I hope that it will be possible to achieve a compromise which will conserve the salmon and provide a fair share of the available catch to all legitimate interests. In passing, I should like to see considerably more public access to salmon fishing and rather less emphasis on the exclusive rights of the very rich on some rivers.

I conclude with a general observation about the restrictive scope of the Bill. It started off as a largely Scottish Bill. It was expanded somewhat in another place but it is worth quoting the words of the Welsh Water Authority in a recent report:

"Illegal fishing is possibly the most important single factor affecting Welsh fisheries."

I have had similar representations from the North West Association of Sea Angling Clubs, and the Bass Anglers Sports Fishing Society makes the point that the Bill should be extended to other endangered fish species such as bass and trout, which has been referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell). It has also been suggested that the Bill could deal with the problems of pollution and acid rain. Those subjects can be touched on in Committee.

I am greatly indebted to all the organisations that have taken the trouble to comment on the detail of the Bill and in particular to the River Doone Angling Improvement Society and the Scottish Anglers National Association. All in all, it is a sadly unsatisfactory Bill. The anglers are disappointed by certain aspects and the debates in another place show that even their Lordships could see certain flaws.

The Bill is supposed to deal with the critical situation which is facing Atlantic salmon in Scottish rivers. I fear that it will fail for a number of reasons, especially because of the fundamental lack of credibility of the unrepresentative district salmon fisheries boards which will have to apply the law in Scotland. It is for that reason that I urge the House to support the reasoned amendment.

9.45 pm

Mr. John Corrie (Cunninghame, North): First, I declare an interest in the Bill. I have a mile and a half of salmon fishing on the River Dee in the south-west of Scotland, which is open to anyone who wants to fish it. Children from the local village fish it free of charge at any time if they want to do so.

I give a warm welcome to the Bill. It makes a start to conserving salmon, and that is vital to the whole of Scotland, especially for the tourist industry. We should like to see much tougher legislation directed to netting at sea. We must accept that if we are to continue to have salmon in Scotland we shall have to continue to talk to representatives of countries where our salmon return each year. Only if we reach agreements with them shall we have salmon returning to our rivers.

I pay tribute to the existing river boards and those who look after them. Much work is done even now to try to ensure that our rivers still have salmon in them. Much is spent on restocking rivers, by seeding and ensuring that there are fish who return in future. The river of which I have a mile and a half has a hydroelectric dam at sea level within the tidal area, which makes it extremely difficult for the fish to get up the river.

Droughts present a problem, and it is tragic that when rivers are low we are allowed to continue fishing. Something must be done about that. When there is stale water in the rivers in my area, the salmon will not face it. The same fish will move up and down the estuary on numerous occasions, and every time they come back up yet more are caught by the nets in the estuary. Until the fresh water runs, the fish will not go up the river, and there is the danger of disease setting in. I hope that we can consider possible ways of closing off rivers when there are serious droughts.

I shall not go through the Bill clause by clause. I am aware that many hon. Members wish to participate in the debate and I shall try to be brief. However, there are a number of questions which I wish to ask. One of the most damaging features in most rivers in Scotland is acid rain. The damage can be reduced by keeping trees well away from the sides of our rivers, especially at the heads of the rivers where there are large pine forests. When we have the new boards, will we have any powers even to advise those in the upper reaches where we have the spawning beds that a piece of simple conservation in keeping the trees back from the river heads will do an enourmous amount to help to protect our fish?

We must protect our salmon from commercial poachers and the methods that they use. My river was contaminated with cyanide only two years ago. It is only when one sees the destruction that that causes, from the point where it is put in the river downstream, where it killed every living thing apart from the salmon that it was supposed to kill, that one ceases to have any sympathy for the poachers.

It is important that the salmon get up the rivers and it is vital that the smolts get down the river. That was reasonably well covered in section 19 of the 1968 Act. However, there is a new dimension that we must consider. Many rivers in Scotland have fish farms on them and most of the fish farms draw their water off the river through sluices. We must seriously consider putting grids on sluices to ensure that the smolts are not passing through to the fish farms. If that happens, it is guaranteed that they will die quickly from the diseases that are to be found in the farms. The smolts are of no use to the farmers of trout.

I see that the Bill covers salmo salar and salmo trutta. Herling is mentioned in many of the Acts of Parliament which are affected by the Bill and I wonder whether it is also covered here. Trout are a game fish in the rivers that flow into the Solway, but I assume that they are not covered by the Bill.

The Bill is intended to improve salmon management and to improve and conserve stocks. I am pleased that the option of tagging has not been dropped. That would have led to legalised poaching. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, the Member for Agyll and Bute (Mr. MacKay), knows that I pushed very hard for a licensing system. Like the hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson), I am pleased that England and Wales will now be covered, because there is no doubt that much of the fish that is poached in the south of Scotland is taken to England and sold.

It is important to consider the Bill's approach to the illegal taking of salmon and the carrying of salmon. We shall have to wait until the Committee stage to consider that matter more deeply, but it worries many hon. Members. I also wonder whether the Bill covers the theft of all salmon. We have salmon from the river, salmon from nets on the coasts and fish farms. Theft from fish farms is a new industry. Will those who steal fish from fish farms attract the Bill's penalties?

There has been a substantial increase in the tonnage of fish produced by fish farms, and that will continue. A scarce commodity commands a premium price. I hope that, as fish farms produce more fish, the pressure on poachers will diminish. It is too late to go into a long debate on drift netting but, tomorrow, before the House will be a Statutory Instrument banning the carriage of monofilament nets in Scotland. It must be galling to all Scotsmen to think that the shoals of salmon which go down the east coast of Scotland, where they cannot be caught by such nets, are slaughtered when they reach the north of England. We must scrutinise netting in that area. The numbers that have been quoted already show that the stocks are diminishing in those areas.

I am not sure what happened in another place regarding the owners of smokers for salmon and roe. Will they be licensed? I hope that anybody who abuses a licence will lose it and be liable to punishment.

Rod fishing is undoubtedly one of the fastest growing leisure sports in Scotland. Although some beats are extremely expensive, many other rivers are cheap and easy to fish. However, such rivers will be useless unless the fish come back. I sincerely hope that the Bill will help to conserve salmon. Those of us who enjoy fshing and perceive the growing requirement of fishermen for rod and line want it to succeed.

9.53 pm

Mr. Roy Mason (Barnsley, Central): I welcome the Bill, but I must express my disappointment over the fact that, on the major issue of salmon conservation, it falls far short of the demands that many of us have made over the years.

Now that the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organisation is being established in Edinburgh, we must prove that we take the problem of salmon conservation seriously. It is a pity that, having at last obtained a slot in

the legislative programme, the Government have produced such a timorous and half-hearted measure. I must admit, however, that some progress has been made. Thanks to the expertise and detailed knowledge of a number of Members in the other place, the Bill now before us has been improved.

On the question of salmon conservation, the Minister must constantly be aware and repeatedly be reminded that three major steps must still be taken: nylon monofilament gill nets should be banned, poaching should be drastically curbed and drift netting off the north-east coast should eventually cease if we are serious about salmon conservation. In 1984, 7,700 salmon were taken by this method, compared with about 2,000 in 1959. This is a sign of the rising take of salmon by this interception netting technique. It is bound to have a calamitous effect on salmon stocks, on conservation and on legal salmon fishing off Scotland.

The Government have recognised the seriousness of the situation and, albeit slowly, are starting to impose some controls and restrictive measures, in alliance with the Yorkshire and Northumbrian water authorities, to curb the exploitation of the system. The licensee has to be present when a salmon is netted—and not before time. Too many licences have been issued with not many checks on who is using them. The Bill will help to curb some of the abuse. Night fishing by drift nets is to be banned, and we are to see the introduction of standard close times. As the Ministry said, this should help to control the problem—control, but not get rid of it.

I am aware that some fishermen's livelihoods are at stake here, but there is no reason why over a phased period of time, with proper compensation for those drift netters who are likely to suffer, the Government should not be able to set a date for the ending of drift netting off the north-east Yorkshire and Northumbrian coastline. According to the 1985 Yorkshire water authority board, 29 drift net licences were issued for the 1984 season, and these are to be reduced to 22. It is interesting to note in the report that due to low river flows at the time when fish would normally run, they remained at sea, where high numbers of salmon were caught, no doubt by the drift netters.

Yorkshire has one major salmon river, the River Esk, linked by Whitby to the sea. Because of the poor rod catches of salmon in past years, the Yorkshire water authority has introduced 30,000 salmon smolts into the middle and upper reaches, of which 1,000 were tagged to assess the numbers returning to the river. It will be interesting to see how many do so.

Mr. James Tinn (Redcar): My right hon. Friend refers to phasing out, with compensation by the Government, of the drift netters off the north-east coast in order to conserve salmon stocks. He accepts that idea, but I certainly do not. Would he apply that principle in order to conserve coal stocks and phase out some of the Yorkshire mines, with compensation for the miners?

Mr. Mason: That is exactly what has been happening. The Government have been managing to run down the coal mining industry by providing financial compensation. The 23 nets involved off the Yorkshire coastline should be adequately compensated, but given time to phase out their operations. I think that this will be a worthy step in the cause of salmon conservation.

Mr. Beith *rose*—

Mr. Mason: The hon. Gentleman will no doubt raise the same point as he raised on the last salmon Bill, and I shall give him the same reply.

Mr. Beith: It is a slightly different one. What is the logic of phasing out the drift net fishery at sea, as opposed to phasing out the net fishery or even the angling in the rivers? Why should any one section be removed?

Mr. Mason: It is obvious from the figures that I have given that the drift net fisheries off the north-east coast of Yorkshire and Northumbria, taking 7,700 salmon which are searching for the estuaries and the rivers and never getting the chance to spawn, are having deleterious effects on stocks.

Mr. Gummer: Why does the right hon. Gentleman suggest that that 35 per cent. should be phased out and the other 65 per cent. ignored? I find that difficult to understand.

Mr. Mason: I do not want it to be ignored. I am just making the point that drift netting should cease in relation to Yorkshire and the River Esk. That should apply also to the Northumbrian coastline. It should be phased out with financial compensation.

It being Ten o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at this day's sitting, the Salmon Bill *[Lords]* and the Ways and Means Motion may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Mr. Neubert.]*

Salmon Bill *[Lords]*

Question again proposed, That the amendment be made.

Mr. Mason: There is no mention in the Yorkshire water authority's last report of salmon poaching on the River Esk, yet there is no doubt that that highly organised criminal practice has been responsible for the poor rod catches and, therefore, the introduction of the 30,000 smolts, but the writing has been on the wall for years.

The 1982 report of the water authority said:

"Salmon catches on the river are still well below the long-term average and the trend is a steady decline."

Even in 1981 the water authority said:

"It is sad to relate, salmon catches on the river"—

and so on. The wording is the same. In 1980 it said:

"During 1979 there was a dramatic decline in the number of salmon and migratory trout caught by rod and line in the River Esk".

Why? One reason is the undoubted take of salmon by drift netting at sea, but the other main reason is poaching.

In 1977, 40 illegal fishing nets were discovered on the River Esk alone; in 1978, 80; in 1979, 100; in 1980, 157, and in 1981, 180. Five persons caught in possession of an illegal net were fined—two of them £25, one £50 and two £100. None received the maximum penalty of £500, and none were gaoled. That was disgraceful leniency by magistrates. They imposed no deterrent measures, yet they had the weapons in their hands. Magistrates should realise that poaching our salmon rivers in Scotland, Yorkshire and south-west and Wales has become a national scourge and that it is incumbent upon them to help to wipe it out.

In 1982, in spite of the many criminal gangs operating on the River Esk, nine salmon poachers brought before the

[Mr. Mason]

petty sessional division of Whitby Strand were found guilty and fined an average of £59. What an indictment of the Bench! As recently as last year 153 illegal nets were found, yet there were only 18 convictions. That is on one river—the salmon River Esk in Yorkshire.

I quote from a letter that I received from a member of the Yorkshire water authority. He said:

"It is now necessary for the bailiffs to work in teams of four when patrolling the river, and the problem can only be contained by maintaining this level of manning together with the full back-up facilities of radio and other surveillance technology and the co-operation of the local police force . . . Moreover, it is often very disappointing to have put considerable effort into obtaining a prosecution for poaching and then find that when the case comes to court, the fines are ridiculously low. The expense to the Authority of each case can be very high indeed, but the costs awarded by the courts rarely even partially cover the expenditure."

Poaching is now big business. Poachers operate in gangs, creating intimidation on the rivers and using violence against bailiffs. They wreck the legal fishermen's boats and nets and put them out of business. They use high quality nets and even cyanide. In a letter, a bailiff in the south-west told me:

"The water bailiffs around Barnstaple have received physical violence from poachers—one bailiff had paint remover thrown over his car and there have been numerous cases of tyre-slashing . . . It has been suggested that a lot of revenue earned by these poacher crooks goes back into drugs and other serious crimes, i.e. smuggling of drugs into England, and most poachers seem to have criminal records in other fields."

Mr. Buchan: In view of the terrible situation, is it not curious that my right hon. Friend is content to leave matters in the hands of private security, in the form of river boards and water bailiffs, instead of having proper social prevention?

Mr. Mason: I have not dealt with that yet, but that was what my hon. Friend the Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) said when talking about providing better facilities and improving the water boards in Scotland. The water authorities want more facilities and more money, and it is incumbent upon the Government to assist them in this respect.

There have been many complaints of water authorities not being able to provide the requisite number of bailiffs because of the squeeze on cash. The bailiff from whom I received the letter was astounded by the information that I received from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, which showed that 283 illegal nets were recovered from Devon and Cornwall — the highest total for any region—followed by 180 on the River Esk in Yorkshire, 126 from Anglia and 88 from Wales.

This is a widespread national criminal racket, and that is why I welcome the national licensing system. On Tuesday 4 May 1982 I questioned the Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, on whether he would introduce legislation to control the sale of salmon through licence holders only. That is now in the Bill, so at least some progress has been made.

I hope that one of the penalties to be considered will be the loss of a trading culprit's licence. Once we have embarked on the course of prosecuting those who have obtained salmon in suspicious circumstances — as the Minister said at a very low price, received at a late hour, or by a backdoor transaction — and they are found guilty, their licence to trade should be in jeopardy. That is the sort of deterrent that is required. The receiver should be as guilty as the stealer. These poacher crooks must be stopped, and if we cut out the outlets and have the right sanctions for those outlet dealers who are found guilty, we have a chance of doing so.

The ban on nylon monofilament gill nets must also be considered. I am pleased that the Government are considering banning the carriage of monofilament nets in British fishing boats while in Scottish waters, and also the use of gill nets to fish the salmon. That is another encouraging advance.

I shall not intrude into the massive, detailed management problems of the Scottish salmon fishery districts and boards. For me, suffice to say, the Bill has advanced from a timorous measure to more useful legislation. It may be better still when it is returned to another place. I support it, for the reasons that I have advanced, and although I know full well that it could be better, I shall not oppose it tonight.

10.7 pm

Sir Hector Monro (Dumfries): I am glad to follow the right hon. Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Mason). He has always taken a firm line on the conservation of salmon and all fish stocks and he is known as a highly competent angler.

The right hon. Member's speech shows the paradoxical position of his hon. Friend the Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) on the Front Bench, who is prepared to divide the House on the Bill. That seems quite astonishing. The hon. Gentleman is out of touch and quite wrong to criticise the district salmon fishery boards which after all represent the netting authorities and local authorities as well as the riparian owners. If those volunteers did not look after most of the rivers in Scotland nobody elsewould. The hon. Gentleman has set a poor example by his speech tonight for making any improvements in fishing in Scotland.

Bearing in mind the constraints of time and the breadth of legislation, I have to say I am a little disappointed that the Bill does not go as far as I would have liked. It is, to a degree, a missed opportunity. It is not often that we get the opportunity to discuss salmon fishing, and even less often that there is any legislation on it. I am glad that the Bill made good progress in the other place and had some valuable amendments to it that were either introduced by the Government, or accepted by them after detailed discussion.

I hope that we shall have a little more time before Committee, because we have to carry out detailed consultations with a large number of fishing interests, and consider amendments. I hope that we shall have at least a fortnight before the Committee begins. By then, too, the House will have had the advantage of the report of the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs that deals with fishery protection, which will give valuable information.

Sadly, I have no interest to declare, having no fishing rights. However, I have a constituency with a number of good salmon rivers and a major salmon smokery, which provides much employment. There is also employment for those involved in netting on the Solway Estuary.

I am pleased that the Government are making changes in the district salmon fishery boards. Their structure had become somewhat antiquated and greater flexibility will

be an advantage, although I see difficulties without some form of financial incentive or pump-priming for new boards to be set up where there are none now.

As my hon. Friend the Minister knows, I am keen, as are my hon. Friends on both sides of the Solway, to have a joint Solway board. I hope that we shall be able to introduce an enabling clause that will allow the district boards in Scotland to discuss with the North-West water authority the future of the Solway without having to come back to the House for primary legislation. This may be of tremendous advantage to salmon fishing in the Solway area.

My noble Friend Lord Gray said that we would close the river Esk loophole. I say no more than that, because it has been a difficult problem, but I would like assurances again from my hon. Friend the Minister that this will take place in Committee. I also hope that the North-West water authority will soon bring in a limitation order so that it can restrict the number of haaf net licences that is issued on the English side of the Solway.

I have studied all the detailed proceedings in the other place and I was disappointed that the Government could not see their way to support an amendment to restrict netting and other methods of fishing in exceptionally low water conditions caused by drought. The noble Lords who tabled the amendment won all the arguments but withdrew it. I hope that this will be considered because there is a tremendous weight of evidence in favour of it, although the Government kept coming back with the reply that they had no evidence to support the amendment.

One of the main objectives of the Bill is to deal with poaching. Parliamentary questions have highlighted the number of prosecutions. I noted reports in one newspaper today that there were no fewer than 2,300 nets confiscated on the River Tweed, and 240 prosecutions in that area. For one river, albeit a major one, that is an incredible number of poachers. It is right that the Government should take as tough a line as possible to stamp out something that has become intolerable. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, either in Committee later or when replying tonight, will spell out with the greatest clarity where we stand under the new provisions. The new provisions are particularly complicated and I have read contradictory views from the Lord Denning, and the Lord Advocate. I would like to know exactly what a bailiff, the police and the courts can do when dealing with the issue of poaching.

I would also like clarification about the position of the receiver, who is now likely to be prosecuted under the "suspicion clause". I am wholly in favour of the toughest possible line but I would like to have clarified exactly what that line is.

I am glad that the other place and the Government have brought in dealer licensing throughout England and Wales as well as in Scotland. As I have a constituency on the Border, I can see tremendous problems ahead if that provision remained for Scotland alone.

I believe that the heart of the Bill is conservation, although I believe that the Government are perhaps not taking a tough enough line on this issue. If we do not ensure that sufficient salmon come up to spawn, there will not be many salmon left in a few years' time. I am sure that the Government are well aware that there has been a drop in salmon stocks of nearly 50 per cent. over the past 25 years. If my hon. Friend the Minister of State examines any of the books of statistics on the subject, he will see that over the past 10 years in particular there has been a very considerable drop in the salmon catch. If there were no farm salmon, there would be a great scarcity of smoked salmon and other salmon products that are providing so many jobs in the United Kingdom for a saleable product.

It is vital that we get conservation right. We must examine conservation not only from the domestic aspect but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Corrie) said, from the international aspect. We have heard reports from the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organisation and we know from the last conference that Denmark will not do anything about Greenland or the Faroes and America will not do anything about Canada or vice versa until we set our house in order and show a greater interest in genuine conservation.

We must take a serious look at conservation. That will certainly mean—and I know that this will not be widely accepted in some parts of the House—that we must over a period of years, with compensation, phase out drift netting around the English coast. We have done that in Scotland although I accept that we still have fixed nets and stake nets and other forms of netting in Scotland. In terms of proportion, my hon. Friend the Minister of State said that 35 per cent. of the nets were drift nets, but the percentage of catch from that 35 per cent. is very high indeed. I hope that we will examine drift netting in greater depth when we deal with the Bill in Committee.

Many of the other aspects raised by hon. Members this evening, the large number of anglers in the United Kingdom, the attraction of income into the country, the large number of jobs in the fishing and haulage industries, tourism and hotels and the rural economy, all depend to an extent on salmon coming up the rivers of Scotland.

We must re-examine the close time for nets and drift netting. I welcome the Bill as a step forward but if three years elapse after the Bill is enacted it will be 1990 and then perhaps there will be two more years for arguments and discussions on statistics. It will be 1994 or 1995 before any further significant step is taken other than the important action which my right hon. Friend the Minister of State took in November when he announced further restrictions. We must shorten the three-year period and take action quickly. I hope that we shall take into the account the whole coast line, not just that from Yorkshire to Peterhead, as the Bill does at present. I want to consider the west coast as well as the east coast of England and Scotland.

We must not let this opportunity slip further. We must do all we can to combat poaching and phase out drift netting, with compensation in the near future. We can do an immense amount in Committee, but tonight I am glad that we are taking a step forward, and I wish the Bill well.

10.20 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): I have no interest to declare, but I represent people who are involved in every category of salmon fishing that has been mentioned tonight. Drift netting at sea, netting in the rivers and angling are all relevant to my constituency's economy. I feel as passionately about conservation as the hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro), but that does not lead me to conclude that I should put any one of those groups of people out of business. We should find a way to conserve salmon while all those categories of people continue to derive a living from those activities and, in the case of angling, a pleasure.

[Mr. A. J. Beith]

This is not primarily a party political matter. Indeed, it requires considerable effort to work up a party political argument about any of these matters which cut across almost all party issues and party lines. If any area evokes old party controversies, it is the composition of district boards.

I welcome the Bill. It contains a useful collection of provisions to deal with salmon conservation problems. It disproves the theory that a rolling stone gathers no moss, because it has gathered a considerable amount in its extremely lengthy proceedings in another place. An hon. Member suggested that the Bill had gone through the other place expeditiously, but, far from it, their Lordships devoted far more time to this legislation than to almost any other legislation before them. There was a significant parade of interests ownership across the Benches. Obviously, it was a well-informed debate at every stage, although certain interests may have been more numerously represented than others.

A weakness in the Bill has been demonstrated in one of its Scottish aspects, the district boards. The Government's management proposals for Scottish rivers other than the Tweed, which already has its own management structure, cannot be described as a great advance in democracy. The proposals retain heavily weighted voting according to ownership and price, and involve the co-option of angler and tenant netsman representatives, rather than achieveing representation which can be respected by the people involved.

My noble Friend Lord Thurso sought hard to find alternatives based on matching the interests of owners, tenant netsmen and anglers and selecting a chairman without any one group dominating the process. Under existing law, he would be chairman of the Thurso district board in perpetuity, so it is all the better that he put forward better suggestions than those which the Government have so far put forward. That should receive more attention in Committee because it seems that the Government are continuing to give a great deal of support to the land-owning interests of the upper proprietors, and to show insufficient concern for the desires of tenant netsmen and anglers to be directly represented.

I welcome the provisions to tackle poaching in various ways. The problem is massive. Hon. Members who represent the Tweed know how serious the problem is there. An hon. Gentleman suggested that salmon enjoy an uninterrupted course along the Scottish coast until they are suddenly slaughtered in the English nets. There is a curious use of words in which a fish caught by the right hon. Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Mason) with a rod is not killed—mysteriously its life is supposed to be enhanced by its being caught by him—whereas a fish that finds its way into an English net is slaughtered. That is a strange difference in the use of language.

I was digressing, because the point made by the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Corrie) underestimated the serious extent of poaching along some sections of the Scottish coasts and which some of the provisions are intended to deal with. I welcome the attention that the Government have given to that. The provisions will require detailed examination because they represent some curtailment of civil liberty. I have to concede, as a Liberal Member who is extremely concerned about civil liberties, that existing provisions on the Scottish and English side of the border do not appear adequate to secure conviction. It is possible for somebody who, by any layman's assessment, must have been poaching to get off again and again. Clearly, the provisions need to be looked at in some detail.

I particularly welcome the decision of the Ministers, after the debates in another place, to extend the dealer licensing system to England and Wales. It would have been absurd to have dealer licensing only one side of the border. As a noble Lord said in the other place, his first act would have been to set up in Berwick, in my constituency, as an unlicensed salmon dealer with none of the restrictions that would then apply on the other side of the border. Clearly, it is essential to extend that provision to England and Wales.

I am worried about the way in which it is set out in the Bill. I hope that Ministers will look at the provisions of the Bill to see whether they can go a little further. I appreciate that the procedures will be a little slower than in Scotland because of the need to get agreement on how it will be done but I have two grievances about the way it is done in the Bill at present. The Bill gives the powers to the Minister to make orders dealing with absolutely fundamental things. It gives him the power, by order, "to create criminal offences". It also gives him the power to "make provision, . . . for the purpose of facilitating the enforcement of any provision made under this section."

Maximum offences, maximum fines and maximum prison sentences are all set out in the relevant Scottish clause. I think that the Minister must look at what I think is the impropriety of including in the Bill the power to make orders specifying what is or is not a criminal offence and what is or is not a maximum fine or prison sentence. They are fundamental things which should be on the face of the legislation.

I understand that the Minister has brought the clause into the Bill in its present form following discussions in another place, but he should have time, and if there is not time he should give himself time, to see if we can get more of the basic powers on the face of the Bill. We should leave to order some of the mechanics, administration the decisions about which bodies are involved and the time of introducing it, which I hope will be as quickly as possible because I would not want to see a gap open between the Scottish provisions and English provisions. It cannot be right if we create criminal offences by statutory instrument. That is not the way the House proceeds and we should not do so in this case.

My second doubt about the way of introducing the licensing dealer system is my worry about the privatisation of the water authorities. If the authorities are privatised it does not seem right that they should become the body which decides whether somebody should be a salmon dealer. I do not propose to enter into the issue of whether they should be privatised—we all have views on that—but it does not seem appropriate for a private water undertaking, of the kind I have experienced, to make that decision. In my constituency, the water supply is already privatised but the water authority is not. The regulatory body is publicly accountable and that must surely make sense for the dealer licensing system. In fact, I do not see that it makes sense for the functions concerned with the licensing of drift netting to be carried out by private enterprise. I cannot believe that Conservative Members who are concerned about the drift net fishery can believe that it would be right, in the long term, for those powers

to proceed to a private body when it concerns the decision as to whether someone may or may not earn his living by having a salmon licence.

Mr. Cranley Onslow (Woking): Some Conservative Members have anxieties which go further. They are not wholly happy about the prospects of angling interests being preserved if privatisation takes place.

Mr. Beith: I share the hon. Gentleman's concern. It would then be difficult to restrain the amount that would be charged to anglers for their right to fish. Currently, there is a considerable amount of subsidy from the water rate income of the water authorities towards fisheries management and fisheries conservation. My own water authority — the Northumbrian water authority — puts a great deal of money into fishery management and conservation. Indeed, it has been estimated that it puts more money into that than all the Scottish district boards put together. The present system avoids the anglers' licence fees going up to as high a level as they might. Therefore, there are a number of fundamental issues here which I believe are and should remain public regulatory functions. That will have to be considered in Committee.

Although I welcome the dealer licensing scheme, I still think that we could have made a more serious attempt to consider the salmon tagging option as a way of tackling the problem. That view is shared by many people in the fishing industry. I have in my hand a salmon tag which is the essence of the regulatory scheme operated in New Brunswick in Canada. That device could have been tried here. Fishermen in the Northumbrian area have made representations to me about it. Welsh anglers have said that they would welcome it if Wales were used as a pilot area.

Mr. Richard Livsey (Brecon and Radnor): We in Wales would certainly support salmon tagging. We are concerned that we shall not be able to trace poached salmon. I believe that the Bill should be called the salmon conservation Bill. We believe that measures should be undertaken to tag salmon in this way.

Mr. Beith: Obviously, I agree with my hon. Friend and with those hon. Members who at different times have pressed for a tagging experiment.

The Bill now contains, following its progress through the other place, provisions for a three-year review of all net fisheries up the east coast, including the Northumberland sea drift net fishery and all the river net fisheries up the east coast of Scotland. Some of the fishermen in my constituency have been worried about this. They have said, "We had the November measures which the Minister brought forward. We thought that we were then entering a settled period." They feel a sense of insecurity because, after three years, the issue will be brought up again. My argument to them is that I believe that the licensed drift net fishery has nothing to fear from a proper scientific examination of the basis on which net fishing is conducted along the coasts and rivers. That is one of the measures for which we have been crying out for a long time.

All sections of the salmon industry could then be told by the scientists, with some authority, "This is the position. These are the dangers. This is the amount by which the catch needs to be reduced or increased. This is the level at which you can continue to catch. We must now calculate how this can be shared." If we have the scientific basis on which to do that, I think that we can regulate the fisheries properly.

I therefore say to fishermen in my constituency that, worrying as it is always to have new dates and threats hanging over us, I see an alternative prospect. A three-year review could fully vindicate the drift net fishery and prove to be a powerful counter argument to people such as the hon. Member for Dumfries and the right hon. Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Mason) who want to phase it out completely. If we talk about phasing out the drift net fishery, we are talking about phasing out the livelihood of large numbers of people. In my part of the world, Northumbria, we are talking about employment for more then 500 people in the fisheries. We are talking about an essential part of the year-round fishery. The fishermen who go out on the small Northumbrian coble have a balance of activity over the year, fishing for salmon, lobsters and crabs which, between them, provide their fishing livelihood. We cannot ask those men to go back to the hemp nets of past years any more than we can ask the anglers to go back to some of the methods they were using in earlier years. Using hemp nets depended on night work, which the Minister has now, understandably, restricted with his new measures. I do not think that it would be reasonable to expect the type of arduous cleaning operations that went with all the old nets to be part of the present life of a fisherman, which is hazardous enough anyway.

I am convinced that tackling the problem of illegal fishing on the Tweed in Scotland and in England is likely to produce a much more significant improvement in salmon conservation than any restriction imposed on the drift net fishery. Naturally, the drift net fishery must be properly regulated. That has been happening for a number of years. If overall reductions have to be made, the drift net fishery has to take its share in them.

Mr. John MacKay: I have been listening to the hon. Gentleman with interest. He is making some valid points. I have been listening in particular to his remarks about Northumberland drift net fishing. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman must know, if he has ever gone to the Tweed valley to fish, as I have done, that the feeling there, to put it mildly——

Mr. Home Robertson: I hope that the Under-Secretary of State was not fishing in my water.

Mr. MacKay: That sedentary intervention from the hon. Gentleman shows the miserable man he really is, because he has never asked me! When I go to the Tweed valley to fish, I come across people with strong feelings about the interceptory fishery in the constituency of the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith). I wonder, as a gentle chide, what the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Steel) and my hon. Friend the Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) who represent the fishermen who fish on the Tweed, think about his fishing.

Mr. Beith: My right hon. Friend the Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Steel) and my hon. Friend the Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) represent effectively the interests of their constituents. Indeed, we have all found it possible to recognise our common interest in salmon conservation and

[Mr. Beith]

to appreciate that regulation should apply to all fisheries. There is no more emotive an issue in my part of the world than the salmon fisheries, and broadly speaking, all those who fish for salmon think that all other categories of people who fish for salmon should not be doing so. We must achieve a balance that will ensure that salmon are available for all those who earn their living from the salmon fisheries.

Dr. David Clark (South Shields): Did the hon. Gentleman note in yesterday's annual report the statement that most of the 2,300 confiscated nets were taken from the mouth of the Tweed? The report went on to refer to illegal drift net fishing off the Berwickshire coast. Let us not put all the blame on the Northumberland fishermen.

Mr. Beith: I agree. There is a large box around the Tweed which no Northumberland drift net fisher may enter to fish, and in that area we have the most serious poaching problems. A feature of the Northumberland drift net fishery is that it is, to a degree, self-regulatory in that those licensed to engage in it do not want illegal fishing to take place in the area. The report showed that many successful prosecutions had arisen from information obtained from the legal fishery. The drift net fisherman has an interest in ensuring that his fishery is properly conducted.

The Minister has visited the fishery, as did his predecessor, and has seen for himself the way in which it is regulated. The measures that he has introduced will have the effect of decreasing the take from the fishery. The fishermen have themselves asked for some of those measures to be taken. For example, the restriction that the licence-holder must be in the boat—unless he is taken ill—when fishing is taking place was suggested by the representatives of the industry on many occasions.

Some of the Bill's other provisions will cause difficulties for that fishery. For example, the night restrictions will be a problem because of variable tide times. If a boat cannot get to sea over a four or five hour span because of tide conditions, an apparently simple night restriction may extend far into the day as well. Fishermen recognise that they must accept some of these limitations if they are to have a degree of security for their future livelihood.

I remain worried over some of the Minister's powers, not because I believe that Ministers should ignore such things as new provisions affecting fishing methods in Scottish rivers and the Tweed but because the parliamentary negative procedure is an unsatisfactory instrument.

In Clause 3, for example, Ministers are given powers to make changes overnight in what is a permitted fishery. When such powers are used, hon. Members can only pray against the relevant order. The matter will doubtless be debated in Committee upstairs, not on the Floor of the House, and in such a Committee there is no real vote. At the end of the day, one can only vote saying that the Committee has considered the instrument; and if one votes to the contrary, that has no effect and, anyway, even that action is not reported to the House. If Ministers get it wrong, hon. Members will not be able properly to represent the interests of their constituents. I shall, accordingly, table amendments at a later stage to have the affirmative procedure adopted for some matters.

I hope that the Minister recognises our concern in this matter. If not, I trust that he will recognise it by lunchtime tomorrow, by which time we shall have considered in Committee upstairs the problems that have arisen over the Scottish monofilament net ban. That will reveal how frustrated hon. Members and interested parties can feel if they cannot get across their point of view.

The most important objective of the Bill ought to be to exstablish a new impetus for the management and conservation of salmon. We ought to be able to pool our commitment in order to achieve that aim. It will involve a certain amount of expenditure—that is a weakness of the Scottish provisions of the Bill—if we are properly to look after our rivers. The north-east fisheries have demonstrated that expenditure and care can increase river catches. Some of the rivers in Northumberland, like the Coquet, have shown extremely good results. These rivers are within the area affected by drift net fishing, but good management has produced good results. Good management could do a great deal for salmon conservation. I hope that this Bill will help us to achieve that aim.

10.40 pm

Mr. Charles Morrison (Devizes): Having listened to every speech, and having initially assumed that the Committee stage would be short, I now realise that I was completely wrong. The Committee stage will be very long; there will be a great deal to talk about.

I join my hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) in expressing the hope that the Committee stage will not be too rushed. The Bill received its Second Reading in the other place only on 14 January. It is right and proper that legislation should be debated at a measured pace to allow those outside Parliament to express their views on improvements to the Bill.

I agree with the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) that drift net fishing should be properly regulated and that fishermen must accept some limitations upon their activities. It is fairly clear that drift net fishing is not properly regulated and that limitations are not accepted. Lord Home of the Hirsel reminded the other place that the admitted catch in drift nets off the north-east coast of England totals about 77,000 but that it is believed that the actual catch is more than double that figure. There must therefore be scope for proper regulation of drift net fishing.

Mr. Tinn: I am interested in the noble Lord's assertion, but can the hon. Gentleman tell me what evidence the noble Lord or anybody else was able to produce to support the assertion?

Mr. Morrison: No, I cannot, but I suspect that the noble Lord based those figures on certain information. Even if he did not, he reinforced the argument of the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed that it is essential that we should be fully informed and that there should be a proper scientific basis for the review that is provided for in clause 33.

I am surprised that on a Bill that deals with salmon management reference should be made to an increase in democracy. I am not sure that that will help the salmon. It is much more important that we should get on with dealing with salmon management.

Salmon are good to eat and exciting to catch. Thus they are born into a dangerous and unfriendly world. Modern technology is now available to man. Therefore, we must exercise control over our ability to catch salmon, if they are not to go the same way as the dodo or, at best, reach the dangerous state that was once reached by the American buffalo and that now faces the Arabian oryx.

A laissez-faire policy is no option if we are to retain salmon. In fact, such a policy is no option in any sphere. Fortunately, that has been realised for a long time, even though vested interest has often vied with vested interest about how and when man-made laws should intervene to protect what has been called the king of fish. Of course, it is not with man alone that the salmon has to cope. At every stage of its development in the river it is subject to predation from different types of bird and from other fish. The salmon has naturally learnt to cope with all of that. It is only when it has been in the sea for some time that the odds become stacked against it. There it runs into the first triumph or disaster of modern detection and technology.

I have a book entitled "The Salmon", published as recently as 1959, whose chapter on the salmon in the sea starts with the words:

> "Once the smolts leave our rivers, we see little or nothing of them: we do not know where they go to; there is no evidence to show that they stay near our coasts."

The author of that book was described as one of the world's greatest experts on the salmon. That was in 1959. Would that his words were still so, but they are not. Maturing salmon have been discovered in the north Atlantic where 30 years ago no salmon were netted. In 1985 the Greenlanders had a quota of 852 tonnes—a quota which I believe they did not achieve—and the Faroese fishery yields an estimated 120,000 fish. Small wonder, therefore, that between 1967 and 1984 world catches of Atlantic salmon have declined from 10,400 tonnes to 5,600 tonnes.

The first and possibly the most important consequence of the Bill, when enacted, will be that by demonstrating our concern and action at home we will ensure that the British voice will carry more weight in international councils concerned with the conservation of salmon. Those fish which escape the high seas fisheries must face the offshore nets and, above all, for many salmon the north-east coast fishery. I am delighted that my hon. Friend the Minister of State has announced a weekly 60-hour close time for the north-east drift net fishery and also that the other place has already much improved the Bill by introducing in clause 33 a three-year review of the fishery and the insistence in clause 32 that only a licensee and not his agent may fish or net.

I should like three or possibly four additions to this part of the Bill. I say "possibly four" after considering again clause 33. This is why I was trying to interrupt my hon. Friend when he was introducing the Bill. In the context of the review, the Minister of Agriculture and the Secretary of State for Scotland have to take account of the need to ensure that sufficient salmon return to the river to spawn and that fishing for salmon by means of nets is properly managed.

There is no reference in that clause to rod fishermen. I should have thought that they should be included because, as I understand it, it is not necessary for a huge number of salmon to return to a river to provide as many smolts as the river can carry. So it is not only for spawning purposes that we wish salmon to return to rivers, we also want enough salmon to return to meet the needs of rod fishermen. That point should be taken into account in the three-year review. If I am correct, clause 33 is deficient. But that apart, I should like there to be a phased abolition and prohibition of nylon monofilament nets. I agree with the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed that such nets are much more efficient than their predecessors. However, they do untold damage to untold numbers of salmon, many of which will undoubtedly die in the sea. Although the fishery itself may be traditional, there is nothing traditional about nylon monofilament nets.

I should like to see the extension of all weekend close periods for netting in line with what has been done already with the 60-hour provision. I should like there to be powers in the Bill to control netting when rivers are low, a point which has been made strongly already. There is no doubt that many salmon bide their time in the sea or the estuary when the river is low. The evidence is that the proportion of net-caught salmon to rod-caught increases dramatically in drought years. I do not know why the Government have not yet been prepared to accept the

[Mr. Morrison]

evidence which has been produced by some water authorities and which is now beginning to become available from others.

Before following the salmon out of the sea and, once again, up its river of origin, I wish to refer to another of its predators, the seal. I know that the seal is an emotive animal, but allegedly the United Kingdom grey seal population has increased to about 84,000 from the 24,000 at the time of the heyday of Scottish salmon fishing. Apparently, one seal consumes about 2 tonnes of fish per annum. That fact emerged during debates on the Conservation of Seals Bill of 1970. Obviously not all of that fish is salmon, but the increase in the seal population is bound seriously to affect the stock of salmon. This issue cannot be shirked and seals must be sensibly culled.

I have no doubt that the proposals to deter poaching and the licensing of dealers throughout Great Britain will be beneficial offshore and up river. I think that the other place did a good job by including England and Wales in dealer licensing. Likewise, I believe that the reorganisation of the system and the constitution of district salmon fishery boards are welcome measures, but they would perhaps be more effective if they were grant aided, as the previous Conservative Government suggested in their White Paper of as long ago as 1971.

Salmon fishing is of enormous benefit to the economy of Scotland, and surely that is justification enough for some grant aid. The amount of extra money which salmon fishing can bring into the Scottish economy is enormous and some of that is creamed off in taxation. I should have thought it a reasonable quid pro quo for the Government to provide grant aid for the district salmon fishery boards.

This is a useful and helpful Bill. It was described originally as a "wee. . . tim'rous beastie", but it has been much improved by another place. I hope that the House will improve it a little more. Even then, the Government cannot rest on their laurels. All credit to the Government for introducing the Bill, but the salmon is a resource of such infinite importance for food and sport that constant surveillance of the salmon stock, especially in home waters and in the Atlantic, must continue and action must be taken whenever necessary.

10.54 pm

Mr. Donald Stewart (Western Isles): In the Gracious Speech at the beginning of the Session, about the only reference to Scotland was a commitment by the Government to introduce a Bill to protect salmon. In the light of the problems facing the people of Scotland, that tells us something about the Government's priorities

In the debates on the Bill in another place, the majority of the participants declared their interest. Many of them are involved in salmon fisheries as owners of rivers or estates. The Bill does not deal with the underlying fundamental issue of the feudal system which allows these landowners to claim ownership of wild fish.

It would not be in order for me to develop this point now, but I submit that there ought to be community involvement in the fisheries, which would protect fish and allow more reasonable access for the public.

I have sympathy with people who are stocking their rivers and are facing depredation from poachers. I have no sympathy with poachers who place explosives or poisons in rivers. They deserve everything that is coming to them. That type of poaching is unknown in the salmon rivers of the Western Isles and the north. The references that I have heard have all related to the lowlands.

There have been references to the old "one for the pot" poachers, but nobody known to me can recall such a tolerant attitude on the part of owners. As the hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) said, it is an absolute figment of the imagination that landowners give a benevolent wink when they see a man coming along with a salmon to feed his family.

The Minister said in his opening remarks that this legislation is aimed at those who are getting away with the wholesale poaching of salmon. Perhaps very few of us would take exception to that, but this Bill is aimed at one man and one fish just as much as it is aimed at those who are going in for wholesale salmon poaching.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): I trust that the right hon. Gentleman is not suggesting that poaching is not rife in Scottish salmon fisheries. Certainly on the Tay, which is largely in my constituency, poaching is a great problem.

Mr. Stewart: It would be ridiculous of me to deny that salmon poaching occurs. Of course there is some poaching on the Tay, and probably on every other salmon river in Scotland. I do not deny that for a moment.

The Salmon Conservancy—I do not know what body that is, but presumably with a name like that it has some interest in salmon—says:

> "There are no effective, long-term conservation measures such as increased weekly and annual close times for the nets, restrictions on all types of salmon fishing in times of crisis such as drought".

Of course not. This Bill is not about conservation. It is to protect — if that is the right word — the rights of landowners. That is what it is all about.

Netting is one of the obsessions of the landlords, although they do not mind netting their waters when they want a fast buck. I have seen them at it. They have induced the Government to introduce a prohibition on monofilament gill nets, although many Scottish fishermen are using such nets for legitimate fishing of flatfish and crayfish. That is the problem with which the Government will be faced. Despite what the Minister said earlier, fishermen's organisations in Scotland complain that they were not consulted before the ban on monofilament nets was introduced.

The clauses dealing with the district salmon boards are totally unsatisfactory. To quote the Salmon Conservancy again:

> "The balance of influence on the boards still remains in the hands of the major proprietorial interests whose eligibility for election to the board is determined by the value of the fishery. Co-opted anglers and tenant netsmen have restricted powers only."

In no circumstances can the co-opted members outnumber the proprietors.

There are clauses in the Bill that would be repugnant to natural justice and subversive of the long-standing legal axiom that one is innocent until proved guilty. In another place the noble Lord Grimond warned against departing any further than necessary from what he referred to as established principles of "British law."

I know about Scottish and English law, although I do not know of British law. However, I know what point he was trying to make. Clause 21(3) provides:

> "It shall be lawful to convict a person . . . on the evidence of one witness."

I submit that that is a change in Scottish law. Clause 22 says that if:

"the court is not satisfied that the accused is guilty of the offence charged but is satisfied that he is guilty of another of these offences, it may acquit him of the offence charged but find him guilty of the other offence and he shall then be liable to the same punishment as for that other offence."

I should like to hear the Secretary of State's view on that as a lawyer. No wonder Lord Gray of Contin said that it was "a useful provision". The Salmon Conservancy says:

"the reversal of the onus of proof in the new regulations relating to possession has implications which go considerably beyond the salmon world".

The House should bear that in mind.

There is nothing in the Bill about the new powers for water bailiffs. Clause 19(1)(*f*) refers to powers of entry and search. There are grave concerns about those powers. I warn the Government that if water bailiffs are to have more powers than the police, who are trained in adherence to legal measures and at least have been approved of as respectable before entering the force, the Government are concocting a recipe for real trouble. Some of the estates have been far from particular in their recruitment of water bailiffs. Clause 19(1)(*f*) provides that an order may

"provide as to the exercise of powers of entry and search by water bailiffs and persons appointed by the Secretary of State under section 10(5) of the Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries (Protection) (Scotland) Act 1951."

It seems to me that we are being sold a pig in a poke. Although the Minister said that there would be no change, the Secretary of State will give water bailiffs draconian powers.

This Bill is tailored for a sectional interest. The owners of the estates have real power. No marches or demonstrations for them — they intercede with the Government to defend their interests, and a Bill is provided for them. The Bill has nothing to do with conservation. It is offensive to natural justice. It is a landlords' charter with oppressive and despotic connotations.

11.1 pm

Mr. Cranley Onslow (Woking): I shall be brief, as much of what I wanted to say has been said. I, too, welcome the Bill, and especially the improvements made in another place.

It would be unfair to ignore the contribution made by the briefing and discussion organised by bodies representative of anglers rather than proprietors, such as the Salmon and Trout Association and the British Field Sports Society. It would be quite wrong to suppose that the Bill is a landlords' charter. It sets out to protect, and does protect, the interests of ordinary anglers as well as riparian proprietors.

I am grateful to the Government Front Bench in another place for the concessions that it made, although I hope that the Front Bench here will not think me churlish if I say that there is still room for improvement. There is no evident need to rush the Bill into Committee. It is clear that some of the insertions made with the Government's agreement lack the polish which a Committee would expect. If the Government's business managers feel no compelling need to take the Bill into Committee for one month, I do not think that any hon. Member would complain.

There is room for improvement in the extent to which the Bill contributes to conservation. I hope that we shall be able to establish that it is — for it is — a major contribution in the war against poaching north and south of the border. That is good, but the Bill does not yet carry the seal of approval of those who want Britain to make a positive and conscious contribution to conserving the north Atlantic salmon. I hope that Ministers can remedy that deficiency at later stages of the Bill. Difficult as it may be to apply quotas to a mixed fishery such as we have in the United Kingdom, we must go a good deal further if we are to convince our partners in the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organisation. The Bill must deal with poaching in England and Wales as well as in Scotland.

In Committee it must be shown to be a workable Bill, and clause 28 will need some fairly close attention, because it is merely sketched out at present. We do not know what machinery there is to be to operate a dealer licensing system in England and Wales, especially in those areas where the water authorities are not used to running game fisheries and where there is the additional complication of the ultimate prospect of privatisation, which raises in dealer licensing and in the operation of an effective bailiffing system all sorts of problems, about which we shall need to ask Ministers some fairly searching questions, and on which I must say we shall expect some fairly convincing answers.

Although it may be true that the Welsh water authority, for instance, would like to run a tagging scheme, which most of us would regard as impractical in any other part of the country, if it feels that it needs powers to operate that scheme, I hope that it will not hesitate to come to some member of the Committee with an amendment that can be tested in debate. A tagging scheme elsewhere in the United Kingdom will never be practical, for reasons that are fairly well established. Therefore, we must have a workable dealer licensing scheme. We must also have a system which ensures that magistrates courts understand the consequences of changing the onus of proof and will apply it fairly and effectively.

Other parts of the Bill need improvement with regard to England and Wales. The restriction on the use of nets by endorsees is something that might be usefully extended to the coastal areas of Wales, around the Towy, Usk and Dee. The Dee is one big fish trap nowadays. I am sure that the Welsh water authority would like to be able to do something about it. It needs powers to enable it to act. It could be given power to restrict the use of licensed nets. That is something that we can discuss in Committee.

Not surprisingly, the hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) said very little in his speech on the amendment. It is all very well to complain that a salmon Bill is not an appropriate measure for dealing with the problems of the sea bass. I am glad that he has a grasp of that fact, but when he talks about adequate provision for anglers or for the wider public interest, I think he should tell the House what he means by referring to the urgent need to conserve salmon and other fish species. If the hon. Gentleman thinks that the Bill is insufficient, he should say what more he wants done. In particular, when he talks about protecting the environment of rivers and estuaries for the benefit of the whole nation's sporting, recreation and environmental interests, he should say whether those words mean anything or whether they are just waffle and padding.

Having listened to the hon. Gentleman, I acquit him of knowing anything about angling. His words merely raise the spectre of the professional recreation propagandist. They bring to mind the study which the Middlesex polytechnic did for the Welsh water authority, where 49

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per cent. of those interviewed were canoeists, who are by no means friends of the angler or likely to be interested in conserving salmon. That sort of waffle and the meaningless verbiage of the Opposition amendment would be best not pressed to a Division, and I hope that the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends will not do so.

I would rather see the right hon. Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Mason), who understands these matters and would make a useful contribution to the debate, serving on the Committee and making a constructive and non-political approach to the problem, which is what I can promise will happen from these Benches, than have an ignorant absentee landlord on the Committee.

11.9 pm

Mr. James Tinn (Redcar): One thing that should and I hope does unite us all is concern for the conservation of salmon. I know that that concern is shared by my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark), with whom I have discussed my contribution this evening, and I am glad to see him with us. It is particularly shared by the north-east drift net fishermen, with whom I have discussed these matters and who have been so much maligned, perhaps not this evening but certainly in the other place.

In the course of a speech which was otherwise moderate and unexceptionable, my eyebrows rose more than slightly when the noble Lord Gray, on moving the Second Reading in another place, spoke about falling stocks, poaching and so on. He defended the Government against accusations of not doing sufficient in the Bill and pointed out that existing legislation had largely been ineffective. He said that it had stood the test of time.

"despite the effects of such activities as high seas fishing and large-scale poaching".—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 14 January 1986; Vol. 469, c. 991.]

To lump together those two activities, one entirely illegal and the other a historical and legal pastime, as though they were equally worthy of condemnation caused my eyebrows, and perhaps my blood pressure, to rise.

No one is more aware of the need for restrictions on poaching than the sea fishermen of the north-east coast. They brought home to me the point that simply banning night fishing would do nothing other than assist the poachers. Legitimate fishing can be stopped, but, without spending a great deal more on policing and protection, sea poachers will not be stopped.

Concern for the fishermen of the north-east emerged even more clearly from the speech—the first of many that touched on this—of the noble Lord Home of the Hirsel. He said——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ernest Armstrong): Order. Only Ministers in the House of Lords can be quoted here.

Mr. Tinn: I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In the other place the point was explicitly made that north-east drift net fishing should be modified and phased out. Indeed, we heard that from the Labour Benches tonight. That justifies the concern that has been expressed to me.

The fishermen of the north-east coast accept the need for restrictions. They observe them and carry them out, but they want them to be effective and fair. Above all, they do not want them to be based on some assumption that salmon have a nationality and carry passports, that because they happen to be born in a river north of the border they are Scottish, although they may then leave, swim halfway across the world seas and spend most of their life off Greenland or wherever before they come back. It must not be thought that if some English fisherman then dares to catch them he should look at their passport and pass them on with the best of good wishes to the Tweed, or wherever.

Accusations about the harmful effects on the North sea fisheries on the Scottish stocks do not seem to be based on any evidence. Dr. Derek Mills of the fishing and forestry department of Edinburgh university was until recently a critic of English fishermen, holding them responsible for declining stocks. Now he exonerates them and attributes declining stocks to a natural change in the fishing cycle. The fishermen south of the border accept the need for restrictions and will go along with them if they are equitable and fairly based. They should not be biased against those whose living and the living of their families over generations have depended on the fish and in favour of those who may have bought only time-sharing rights to Scottish rivers. The fishermen south of the border would not regard that as equitable.

I suggest to my Scottish colleagues, in all frankness and kindness, that, while they are entitled to look for ways of conserving the stocks, further action needs to be taken north of the border. They need to spend more than £400,000—I believe that that is a niggardly sum—on policing and protecting their own fish. A shoestring budget of £400,000 is totally inadequate to prevent the widespread netting of fish at night.

The towing of nets along the river is illegal, but two years ago when evidence in the form of a television video film was presented to a previous Minister, no action was taken. Something should be done about that sort of practice. I understand that the Scottish licence fee varies with the catch. This should be studied because, without wishing to be cynical, it encourages people to understate the size of their catch.

I draw the House's attention to the fact that the stock of salmon in English rivers is increasing and that of Scottish rivers is declining. Perhaps the fault lies with malpractice on Scottish rivers, and perhaps something more could be done—as we do at Kilder hatchery—to restock the rivers, which benefits all rivers.

It seems to me that the accusations against the north-east fishermen, where they are not based on pure self-interest, are due to the fact that the fishermen are too effective. They are effective, and that is what they are in the business for. The same accusation could be levelled against the West Indians, Australians or New Zealanders, yet nobody has proposed that we should phase them out of cricket because they are too effective.

Conservation should be the responsibility of us all. It should be continuing practice running from Greenland, the breeding place, and back to the birth place, the Scottish rivers and the English rivers in which many salmon are born. This is the problem, and it should be tackled. I am afraid that, if the views of many noble Lords in another place were given effect to, it would be the north-east fishermen who would be the endangered species and not the salmon.

11.20 pm

Mr. Neville Trotter (Tynemouth): I shall also concentrate on commercial fishing on the north-east coast.

I remind the House that this is a long-established industry that goes back for at least a century. It is legitimate, wellregulated and one of the best controlled of all fisheries. It makes an important contribution to the livelihood of the coastal areas in the north east, represented by the hon. Member for Redcar (Mr. Tinn), myself and other hon. Members who may wish to take part in the debate. In North Shields and Cullercoats in my constituency employment in this industry is important. It is not just salmon fishing but fishing in general with which we are concerned, because the former cannot be taken out of context with the rest of the industry. It is a seasonal activity, and it would be ruinous for the other stocks in the area if the fishermen could not fish for salmon at that time of the year.

Ours is a much maligned industry that is unjustly blamed for anything that seems to go wrong in the rivers, especially in Scotland. It was blamed by Scottish speaker after speaker in the other place who was seeking to cut down on our fishing for the benefit of their anglers. I cannot see, if I were a salmon, why it would be any better to be caught by a hook than by the net. A salmon caught is a salmon out of the stock.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): is not the difference that in Scotland the rivers are being restocked in the hope that the salmon will come back, but someone else is ensuring that they do not come back, and there is constant restocking without contribution from the north east?

Mr. Trotter: I am glad that my hon. Friend raised that point. I intended to mention the question of stocking on Northumbrian rivers and will now do so. In 1980, 252,000 new fish were put into the Northumbrian rivers, in 1981, 400,000, in 1982, 250,000, in 1983, 290,000, and in 1984, 286,500, which is a total of some one a half million over that four-year period. A large amount of new stock was put into the rivers in the north-east of England.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Is not the difference between catching fish by net and catching them by rod that there must be a way to tell where they have come from? If fish are caught in a river, it makes the management of stocks in that river easier. Therefore, the conservation of the species is more possible.

Mr. Trotter: My point is that, in looking at the future of the salmon fishing stocks, we should look at all aspects of it, and that includes the numbers that are caught and killed on the rivers by line and rod fishermen. One noble lord said in debate that after 50 years' experience of fishing in over 50 rivers, he had noticed that the deadliness of the line and rod was a great deal more than it used to be. He referred to much more clever baits, and from what he said monofilament is as deadly when used by rod fishermen as it is when used by net fishermen.

We already have considerable restrictions on commercial fishing on the north-east coast. The number of licences has fallen from 200 in 1970 to 120. We have already heard that restrictions are to be placed on who can operate the boats—no longer will the endorsee of a licence be able to go out on his own without the licensee. There has long been a closed season, and now the restrictions on weekend fishing are to be tightened up and there is to be a significant eight-hour ban at night. A great deal is being asked of the north-east coast fishermen, and I believe that they will accept the restrictions—reluctantly, but as something with which they will have to put up. Enough is enough, and we should not further penalise those carrying on a legitimate and important commercial activity.

The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) said that the poaching in the Tweed may be due to the fact that no legalised fishing is taking place there, and there are no legalised fishermen to report poachers. On the rest of the north-east coast the licences certainly act as very effective policemen in the prevention of illegal fishing. Nobody knows how many fish are caught illegally off the Scottish coast, but it is clear that poaching there is very great. Indeed, it has been said that the poaching in Scotland is on a systematic, continuous and massive scale. It is estimated that the illegal catch in Scottish waters is twice as great as the whole of the licensed catch in the north-east. That certainly needs further inquiry, investigation and action.

I find it hard to understand how it was that in the lengthy debate in the other place there was no reference to the number of fish being caught by the commercial fishermen in Scotland. When I look at the figures for the relative catches, as an accountant, that seems to me to be an astonishing omission. There has been a tremendous amount of comment about the amount of salmon caught off the north-east coast of England, but we hear nothing about the far greater amount caught off the north-east coast of Scotland. They do not catch the fish in the same way there, as they do not go out in boats like our English fishermen. They catch the salmon in nets set out from the shore, but the effect is just the same for the salmon. Indeed, it is a great deal worse for the salmon, as many of these nets are set not in the sea but across the mouths of the rivers and the estuaries; and the fish have far less chance of escaping from that form of netting than they do in the North sea.

The figures for this shore-based commercial fishing on the east coast of Scotland make very interesting reading. The rod and line fishermen in Scotland caught 65,000 salmon in 1982 and in that year the north-east commercial fishermen caught 50,000 salmon. The interesting point is that the Scottish commercial fishermen caught no fewer than 271,000 salmon. We heard nothing about this huge catch from the Scotsmen in the other place, who were so keen to attack the English fishermen, yet it is clearly by far the biggest problem facing the river fishermen in Scotland. How can they overlook that activity in their own area when they complain all the time about ours?

I welcome an inquiry into the salmon industry's future and it is sensible that the proposal in clause 33 to prepare such a report includes the activity off the north-east coast of Scotland. I will in due course read the conclusions of that report with a great deal of interest.

Reference has been made to the effect that seals have on salmon fishing. Of course, it is difficult to estimate how much fish is poached, and it is even more difficult to estimate how much salmon is eaten by the seals. One can estimate what an average seal eats in total fish in a year, but it must be hard to analyse its diet between the different types of fish that it eats. It must, however, be true that many salmon end their days as a meal, not as a tasty dish on a table, but inside a seal. The seal population is very large. There is an estimate that the seal population off the Farne Islands off the Northumbrian coast is some 8,010. That seems to be a remarkably precise estimate. Perhaps we might settle for an estimate of 8,000. It has been estimated that those 8,000 seals eat 15,930 tons of fish in

[Mr. Trotter]

a year—again surprisingly accurate—let us say 16,000 tons is consumed. That figure ties up with the estimate made by the hon. Member for Redcar of two tons of fish a year per seal. That is a very large amount of fish, when we bear in mind that the total salmon catch in a year in Scotland, by all means, is about 1,000 tons. We should not overlook the effect that the large number of seals has on the salmon fishing and the Government must give attention to this problem.

I have referred to the annual stocking of the rivers in the north-east of England with large numbers of fish. Hundreds of thousands of fish have been added to those rivers each year and many have been the contributions made by the north-east fishermen.

In conclusion, I should like to refer to comments made to me in correspondence by my right hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, South (Mr. MacGregor) when he was the Minister responsible for fisheries in England and Wales. Last year my right hon. Friend said in a letter to me that a report prepared for his Department showed that—

"the total effect on Scottish East Coast catches in 1977 was only about 6·4 per cent. . . . the effect on total spawning stocks in these Scottish waters would probably be even less than this figure."

In another letter sent to me at about the same time, my right hon. Friend said he had

"seen nothing to support the statement that the North East drift net fishery is putting at risk the survival of the Scottish East-coast salmon industry or of the salmon themselves."

In my judgment, there is a real threat facing the commercial salmon fisherman as a result of the dramatic explosion in the production of salmon by fish farming. Obviously, if the price of salmon at the counter goes down that will effect the livelihood of the commercial fishermen and the huge increases in production are only likely to reduce the price. In 1985, 7,000 tonnes of salmon were produced by fish farming, whereas in Scotland the whole catch that year was about 1,000 tonnes. In other words, seven times as much was produced from fish farming, and that was twice as much as was produced the previous year. Estimates made by one of my noble Friends in his ministerial capacity show that that figure could double again in the next two years to 14,000 tonnes. That will pose a considerable problem for the Northumbrian commercial salmon fishermen, who do not need in addition to be unfairly treated as a result of pressure from Scotland.

There is a great tradition of commercial salmon fishing on the north-east coast, and the hardy fishermen there earn their living by their hard work often in atrocious conditions. These hardworking men deserve to be allowed to continue in that tradition.

11.30 pm

Mr. Martin J. O'Neill (Clackmannan): The debate has been busier and longer tha most hon. Members expected. I have spent several days recently sitting through debates about the defence of the realm, but it seems that more interest is generated in the defence of the salmon and salmon fishing interests than in our national defence. Certainly the time that the debates took in the other place suggests that it is a major preoccupation there.

The Minister said that the Bill had three aims: the modernisation and improvement of administrative arrangements, the introduction of greater flexibility into salmon fishing regulations, and the inclusion of further measures to combat poaching. I have had representations from the Forth district board in Scotland, and I know that they have been made on an all-party basis to the hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth), who has the upper reaches of the river in his constituency.

The board's fundamental misgiving is the glaring omission from the Bill of adequate financial provision to secure its objectives. Certainly the imposition on all management boards of new responsibilities without adequate funding will place further burdens on ratepayers who must meet the cost of the boards. In this case the ratepayers are the licensees—the people who own the fishing rights. Some of them are not landlords but merely tenants and people of modest means who find it increasingly difficult to meet the demands, especially after the revaluation botch-up which has created considerable difficulties for some of my constituents who are working fishermen, not landed aristocrats.

Some misgivings have been expressed about the lack of definition of the right to participate in the boards. There is no qualification for those with previous convictions. They are not debarred from participating in the fishing management boards. There is no scrutiny. Providing an individual owns the land or is a tenant, he can, by one of the means identified by the Minister, achieve membership of a board. I hope that that matter will be examined in Committee. I doubt whether I can participate in the Committee debates, and I wish to make it clear, in case any Labour Whips are around, that I am not interested in attending that stage of the proceedings. I take the point of my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley, South (Mr. Buchan) that once the Whips are on the move it is difficult to get them off one's back.

I do not propose to offer the Whips the flexibility which the Bill hopes to achieve on the issue of the seasons. It has been put to me by fishermen in my constituency that the opportunity to fish for salmon in February 1986 has been rather empty because of the inclemency of the weather. It may be that on the basis of experience this year we shall be able to move the dates from February to March and from August to September. I do not know how that would meet the demands of conservation, but some of the fisherman of my area feel that it would certainly be of assistance for fishing on the Forth.

Much has been made of the matter of poaching. The quotation from *The Guardian* today has been amply used concerning the tremendous level of poaching on the Tweed and the evidence that the poaching is organised crime with large sums involved. As I have said, it seems that the attention of the authorities has been directed towards the large poacher and is moving away from the small poacher. If that is the case, we shall have to wait and see. However, many of us feel that the enthusiasm and tenacity of the bailiffs in pursuing all poachers has been such that any small-time poacher who thinks that he will have an easy ride in the future is probably kidding himself and will have an unhappy awakening, no matter how sentimentally or affectionately we may view them.

We have had a discussion on nets, and a point which may be for the consideration of the Committee is the sale of nets. Much is made of the type of net, but I should have thought that a closer examination could be made of the people who seek to purchase nets. The display of a licence or the exposure of some form of bona fides should be made

to the seller or manufacturer of nets. That would go some way towards preventing nets from getting into the hands of poachers.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way, because it will save me making a contribution. Does the hon. Gentleman share my concern that there have been instances in the Stirling area of nets which have been confiscated by the sheriff court from poachers being resold by the sheriff clerk at a discount price although they were illegal drift nets?

Mr. O'Neill: There is a case in that instance for the destruction of the nets. I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's enthusiasm for the defrayal of any tax imposition, but we must welcome small conversions, whatever form they take and on whatever occasions they arise. We must be grateful for the small mercy that we have seen a change in the hon. Gentleman's attitude at least on this form of privatisation. There ought to be closer scrutiny of the sale and destruction of confiscated nets. It would be helpful if that matter was explored in Committee.

Anxieties have been expressed on both sides of the House about many of the powers which have been vested not only in the Secretary of State but in the bailiffs. The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) developed that helpfully for all concerned. It is important that, if we are to increase the rights and responsibilities of bailiffs, we should make provision for better training for them. If they are to appear in court and their testimony is to be afforded greater weight than in the past, those individuals should be adequately equipped and trained to state their case. If their evidence is based on what can only be regarded in Scottish terms as minimal corroboration, even greater responsibility must rest on them. The authority with which they speak can only be enhanced if they have adequate training. A policeman who goes into the witness box to give evidence is better trained and equipped for his responsibilities than many of the bailiffs in Scotland. In some areas, bailiffs have been appointed simply because no one else would do the job. Their payment is not adequate. All in all, it is a very casual arrangement.

The Bill is viewed by the Opposition with some suspicion. We recognise the need for it, but we are always suspicious when the vested interests which the Government nakedly and openly represent greet legislation with the enthusiasm that this legislation received in the other place. We should remind ourselves that the main purpose of the Bill is to arrest the decline in stock and to ensure that we can prove to other countries where we are seeking quotas that we can allow the fish to swim to our waters and then can apply effective conservation methods. If we can ensure that this legislation achieves those aims, we shall have gone some way towards helping those people such as my constituents who eke out a modest income by catching fish in rivers such as the Forth.

Many of us still have some misgivings about the nature of the organisation, the unrepresentative arrangements for the fishing boards and the possible threats posed to civil liberties if the full powers afforded by the Bill are exercised in other than a sparing and sensitive way.

It is 21 years since Hunter was asked to examine this matter. A considerable time has elapsed before the legislation reached this stage. Even if we have to wait another 100 years, I extend my good will to Committee members. I hope that they ensure that the improvements I have suggested are embodied in the form which I think everyone wants.

11.42 pm

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith (Wealden): I am glad that the hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) has given a cautious welcome to the Bill. I assume that the Labour Front Bench will now drop its opposition. [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] I am sorry that the reason that persuaded the hon. Member for Clackmannan has not yet affected his colleagues on the Labour Front Bench. What a shame.

In contrast, I should like to congratulate my colleagues on the Front Bench on the way in which they have presented the Bill. I congratulate the Government on the fact that they have agreed to a number of amendments in another place which have strengthened the Bill. However, I should like to emphasise strongly that there is a great deal of hostility to the idea that the Bill should be considered in Committee before the many people outside the House and hon. Members have time to consider the amendments made by the other place.

As many of us have said, this is possibly the last occasion on which we shall be able to consider a Bill of this kind. It would be a shame to dissipate the good will which my hon. Friends have acquired merely to suit the convenience of the party managers. I suspect that, if any people are pressing for early consideration of the legislation, it is them.

I particularly welcome the Government's decision to review the effects of north-east coast drift netting and netting in Scottish and estuarial waters. The more I listen to the debate the more I realise how wise the Government are to take those two controversial issues together and so, I hope, avoid a clash between north and south of the border.

I also hope that the evidence that we shall amass will make us realise that there must be give in the north-east and in the estuarial waters. We cannot go on in the way we have been, in the light of the figures that have been given. It is clear that action must be taken, but it must be taken on a fair basis, and I welcome, for example, the extension of dealer licensing to England and Wales. While it may be said that the Bill does not go far enough, what has been done is based on common sense principles.

I was concerned when the Minister referred—such references have been made in the past—to what he believed to be facts which, in his judgment, did not support the view expressed by hon. Members on both sides that a serious problem existed with Atlantic salmon.

The Minister argued that compared with statistics of 30 years ago, there were probably no fewer salmon in our waters today. He said that we were merely in a cyclical situation. One can play with the figures, and one must examine closely what proportion is salmon and what proportion is grilse. No ghillie I have met would subscribe to the view that things have not changed. Most believe that the situation has deteriorated.

Mr. Bill Walker: More people are fishing.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: My hon. Friend is right, but world catches of Atlantic salmon, as the Salmon and Trout Association reports, have declined—from 10,400 tonnes in 1967 to 5,400 tonnes in 1984—and Scottish

[Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith]

catches have dropped by 50 per cent. in the last 25 years. That, according to the salmon conservancy experts, clearly shows a crisis of stock decline.

We are not the sole judges of the situation. There is worldwide concern. Hence the setting up of NASCO, the North Atlantic Salmon Conservancy Organisation, and the attitude of the Americans and Canadians to what they believe to be a serious situation. Little wonder that the Atlantic Salmon Trust, which is not prone to exaggeration, said:

"It is not at all clear that Whitehall fully understands the new dimensions of the world salmon situation yet . . . through the EEC being a signatory . . . the United Kingdom has a clear responsibility."

The Canadian publication of 1984, "Atlantic Salmon Management Plan: Major Elements", stated:

"The Department of Fisheries and Oceans will continue to seek a reduction in the quota for the West Greenland salmon fishery . . . Canada will not reduce its interception of salmon bound for United States waters unless of course Greenland reduces the amount of salmon reaching Canadian waters."

The Danes have said that they will not reduce Greenland fishing quotas, which have already been reduced, until the United Kingdom reduces its drift netting in England and Wales and its activities in the estuarial waters of Scotland.

For those reasons, the Minister's remark that we should not exaggerate these matters was not convincing. Even if we found it convincing, no other country would. We are all very concerned. It is little wonder, therefore, that people ask the Government to make more radical proposals.

I shall make a few suggestions which ought to convince the British people and the people of other countries that we are serious about salmon conservation. If there is to be a review of north-east drift netting and Scottish estuarial netting, why cannot it be extended to a review of the whole of British waters? It is not just a north-east or a Scottish estuarial matter. If one of the hon. Members with a Welsh constituency catches your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, he will probably emphasise that point.

If we cannot persuade the Government to extend the review, I hope that the wording of the clause which provides for a limited review will be extended to take into account the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Morrison): that we are not just concerned with reviewing whether a sufficient number of salmon return to spawn in rivers, although that is fundamental to the Bill, but that note should be taken of the suggestion that was made in another place that "sufficient" is too vague a word and that we must be much more concerned about ensuring that the optimum number of salmon return to the rivers to spawn.

My right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food announced, much to our pleasure, on 7 November 1985 the standardisation of a weekly close for nets of 60 hours in the north-east drift net fishery. That standardisation ought to be extended throughout Great Britain. The Scottish close time is now from midday on Saturday to 6 am on Monday, a total of only 42 hours. Many hon. Members wish that period to be further extended. The Salmon Conservation Group argues that the weekly close time for nets must be increased to 72 hours and that the annual close time for nets must be increased to 212 days. I think that a total of 168 days is provided for in the Bill. The group makes the point that reduced netting would leave more salmon in the rivers. That is true, but it is no part of my case to try to put rods men against nets men. If we are to have a national salmon conservation policy, we must extend the closed periods and make them applicable throughout the length and breadth of the United Kingdom.

There is also the question of netting at low water or in periods of drought. I hope that the Government will take powers to allow the restriction of netting in periods of drought. I have spoken to people who have personal experience of it and I saw the effects of netting last year in very poor drought conditions. It puts the salmon at tremendous risk.

The Government say that the water authorities have provided no evidence and that they have not yet approached the Government. That may be so, but that is not the same as saying that the evidence does not exist. We know that estuarial conditions vary, as do the conditions in one river compared with another. The Spey, for example, has no estuary. There is a hole in the shingle; that is where the fish go. When the water is low, the fish are not vulnerable to netting.

I hope that the Government will ask the water authorities to co-operate and tell us what is the effect of low water in their estuaries. The Salmon and Trout Association informs us that at least one water authority has been able to show a relationship between catches by rod and nets over a 30-year period. It informs us that in normal times it is of the order of one rod-caught salmon to three net-caught salmon. In drought years the ratio went up to between six and 11 net-caught salmon for each salmon caught by rod. I am glad to note that the association will be seeking further data. If it is proved, as I believe it will be, that persistent drought conditions have a serious effect on salmon stocks, the Government should have ready in hand in the legislation power to lay before Parliament measures which will permit water authorities or district salmon fishing boards to introduce restrictions on salmon netting operations in periods of low water flow in rivers and estuaries.

I could make other points, but those are the ones that particularly concern me. If the Government give enough time to collect the voices before going into Committee and pay heed to some of the points that have been made on both sides of the House, we can expect the Bill to be substantially improved.

11.55 pm

Mr. Norman Buchan (Paisley, South): The desire to speak diminishes as the hour approaches midnight, so I shall be brief. I virtually took a degree on the Hunter report. I came into office about a year and half after it had been published. Nothing had been done about it, and my first task was to spend a long time on it. I produced two solutions, one of which did not get past my immediate lord and master; the other was thrown out by a Cabinet Sub-Committee. I might have rescued it had we not lost the election in 1970, but that is by the way.

My solutions had very little connection with what is propounded in the Bill. Furthermore, there is very little in the Bill that will be of lasting benefit to the salmon fisheries. There is little in it about an analysis of and a response to the problems which the salmon fishing industry faces on the netting side or on the angling side. There is no sense of a scientific approach on conservation or anything like that.

The Bill will give further powers to water bailiffs. As the right hon. Member for the Western Isles (Mr. Stewart) said, it is a Bill to give fresh reasons for sending people to Botany Bay. The proposals are a major backward step. I am delighted that my party has put forward a reasoned amendment. I regret that we did not simply oppose the Bill.

The legal implications of the Bill are curious. It is not guilt, or suspicion of guilt, that leads to an offence, but it is the fact of suspicion that is of itself the offence. That has been referred to by Lord Denning among others. In another place Lord Mishcon described what might happen to a commercial traveller who in good faith bought three salmon on a quayside at Lochinver. He said that the salmon might have gill marks which would not be recognised by the commercial traveller, who would not know whether they had been taken illegally. All that he could do would be to go into the witness box to show that the circumstances did not give rise to suspicion. It will be a new offence.

I am told that in the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 there is a similar offence in relation to badgers, but that is different. In that case, at least one has to be seen in the act of digging. In this Bill, one does not have to be seen in the act of fishing. New section 7A in clause 21 says:

"(1) A person who—

(a) is in possession of salmon and believes; or

(b) is in possession of salmon in circumstances in which it would be reasonable for him to suspect,

that a relevant offence has at any time been committed in relation to the salmon shall be guilty of an offence"

If someone felt that circumstances in which he procured the salmon involved an offence, that in itself would be the guilt. It is an extraordinary proposition, especially in Scotland, where the basic security of corroboration that we have had under Scottish law is being thrown out of the window. Without corroboration, and in the light of suspicious circumstances, a man is ipso facto found guilty. It is extraordinary that such a provision should be passing through the House at the witching hour of 11.59 pm. As if that were not bad enough in Scotland, the provision has been extended to England. Clause 29 applies to England and it reads:

"a person shall be guilty of an offence"—

it reads like the address of a 17th century Scottish preacher—

"if, at a time when he believes or it would be reasonable for him to suspect"—

not that he suspects, for it is deemed that he should have been reasonable enough to have suspected—

"that a relevant offence has at any time been committed"—

no particular offence is specified; there is no objectivity and no precision. There is no specificity about the charge—

"in relation to any salmon, he receives the salmon"

he is guilty.

There is the lovely provision in subsection (3), which reads:

"It shall be immaterial for the purposes of subsection (1) that a person's belief or the grounds for suspicion relate neither specifically to a particular offence that has been committed nor exclusively to a relevant offence or to relevant offences".

There is nothing that is particular. However,

"it shall be a defence in proceedings for an offence under this section to show that no relevant offence had in fact been committed in relation to the salmon in question."

What kind of law is it that provides that if a man is proved to be innocent he shall be deemed to be innocent? We are faced with an incredible proposition, and yet it has been placed solemnly before us.

We know what the salmon means in Scotland, and especially in the highlands. The salmon means privilege. It has meant privilege, and it has been maintained for the purpose of privilege, and the purpose of the Bill is to maintain that privilege. That is what it is all about in the highlands, where King Salmon still rules. There is more power applied to, more prosecution of and more time spent on the odd fellow who picks the odd salmon out of a local river than there is in trying to create jobs for our people in the highlands.

It is a bad Bill and if we cannot see our way to voting against it, at least we shall vote for the reasoned amendment. I was born on the banks of the Helmsdale river, one of the best salmon rivers in Scotland. I was born alongside crofters who had been pushed down the glen in the clearances. They were not allowed to fish the river. If they had done so, we know what would have happened to them.

We know about the problems that arise from the existence of new gangs, which have been described by my right hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Mason). We know that they possess dynamite and cyanide, and my right hon. Friend suggested that they are involved in drug abuse. If that is so, these matters should not be left to a private security force. We have a police force to deal with that sort of crime. The community interest has not featured on one page of the Bill. Instead, the Bill has been designed to meet private interests. I believe that it will fail. The right solution is to take the waters under community control and community direction, in the interests of the community. That is the answer.

Mr. Bill Walker: What about poaching?

Mr. Buchan: We shall prevent poaching by community action. Legislation of this sort almost turns a national pastime into a national duty. There is a difference between that and the sort of poaching that should be prevented by community control. I wish that the Bill were being opposed, but at least we shall have the opportunity of voting for the reasoned amendment.

12.4 am

Sir Michael Shaw (Scarborough): I am chairing a Committee and I had not expected to be able to participate in the debate. I am rather surprised but grateful to have the opportunity to do so. My local fishermen, with whom I spoke over the weekend, asked me to voice their views. They feel that they are being oppressed and that the drift netters, along with others in the north-east, are being gradually squeezed out. I am glad that my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, an English Minister—I trust that an English shadow Minister will reply to the debate from the Opposition Front Bench, as English matters are involved —gave an assurance that that is not so.

The Minister has visited Scarborough and Whitby in the past 10 days. I know that his visit was much appreciated. He will have learned from my drift netters their deep concern about the legislation.

I want to deal with just two points. I shall deal first of all with the drift netters, and then with poaching.

[Sir Michael Shaw]

The right hon. Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Mason) talked much about the river Esk, which is virtually all in my constituency. He was very inaccurate in one respect. I am sorry that he is not here, but he has taken part in the debate so I feel justified in saying this. He claims that the drift netters as well as poachers off the mouth of the river Esk, have caused the great scarcity of salmon in that river.

I spoke of this matter in some detail in the debate on 28 October last. I shall not go over it all again, save to say this. The Yorkshire river Esk is a real example of what I believe is happening in the rest of the rivers, especially in Scottish rivers.

The management of the river Esk, the riparian owners, the harbour authorities and the drift netters themselves are organised to keep the salmon stocks high. They are all making a contribution. There is no rivalry. The riparian owners accept the fact that salmon caught by the drift netters are not going into the river Esk.

What does this mean? It means that the salmon are not reaching the higher reaches of the river Esk. They are disappearing lower down towards the mouth, for the very reason mentioned by the right hon. Member for Barnsley, Central. They are being poached commercially by professional gangs. Large numbers are being taken. That is the source of the problem. I am convinced that the same circumstances apply to the Scottish rivers.

It is said that there will be a review in three years' time. If that review takes place I hope that all the facts will be brought out, but I fear that the main fact will not be brought out. How many fish have been poached at the source of the rivers? That is the key question. I do not know how my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food will get this information, but those figures are vital so that we may make a meaningful comparison.

I believe that my own drift netters are justified in their fears. They need to have those fears allayed. Poaching is done in rivers, estuaries and seas. Often, the netters pay large sums in licence fees. They go fishing, and alongside them are people who have not paid anything. The netters go off to other fishing areas because their time is up. There, they see illegal fishing. Apparently, nothing is being done. I believe that if we are not careful we shall see the demise of drift netting and then the continuing run-down of salmon stocks. We must tackle the real problem of poaching.

I believe that if, in order to home in on the poachers, we have first quite unnecessarily to get rid of the licensed net fishers, that would be a tragedy and a gross injustice to those small fishermen who have been fishing for generations.

It would be tragic if a drift netter were not allowed to pass on his rights to the crew man whom he had brought up almost as his own child. I ask my right hon. and hon. Friends to consider the matter carefully, to go for the poaching and to uphold the rights of licensed drift net fishermen.

12.10 am

Mr. Richard Livsey (Brecon and Radnor): I wish to speak briefly and mainly about Welsh interests.

I was brought up on a tributary of the River Wye which has been a playground of the privileged. It has been extremely difficult for people who live in the area to get access to the river. One of the problems that we are grappling with tonight is that many fishermen would like to fish our rivers, but cannot get access to them. If they could gain access, I believe that there would be far less poaching. We cannot achieve absolute access for everyone as that would defeat conservation measures, but there should be more access for ordinary people in the area. I have had the privilege to fish the Wye only twice, although I was brought up in the area and am a keen fisherman.

I declare an interest as a member of Aberystwyth angling association, which owns 12 miles of river. Many people gain access to the river, which is run in the best interest of the fishery. There is quite effective poacher control by members of the association. That is the way forward. Access has not been discussed adequately today.

Conservation of salmon stocks is extremely important. More resources must be devoted to increasing fish stocks by water authorities, even if they are privatised. The problem of poaching varies between different parts of the country. There is fairly innocent poaching in some parts of the country, but in others, such as my part of Wales, there is organised poaching on what I would describe as an industrial scale. It is almost impossible for water bailiffs to tackle the gangs involved. We must, however, protect our fisheries from this assault which depletes our salmon stocks.

I should have liked to have discussed many other matters such as control of netting, especially around Greenland, on an international scale. I do not want to prolong the debate, but there are insufficient conservation measures in the Bill and access is not dealt with properly. Control of the disposal of salmon has, however, been improved in England and Wales.

We in Wales regard salmon tagging as extremely important and I hope that we can show a lead to the rest of Britain in that respect.

12.14 am

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): That I am last to speak in the debate I suppose is to be expected because the largest and longest river for salmon fishing in Scotland is in my constituency. Indeed, it is probably one of the most important rivers in the world for salmon fishing.

It is not the fact that salmon does not come up the river but what happens if the salmon does not come up the river that is important. I was interested in what was said by the right hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Stewart) and the hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson). They seemed to suggest that salmon fishing was the sport of the gentry, the well-off and the privileged. That is nonsense. If they come to the river Tay, to any of the fishing fleets on the Tay or to any of the hotels in which fishermen are to be found, they will find miners and people from all walks of life because fishing is one of the most popular sports. That is what makes it important to Scotland —the fact that it is popular and that it is worth between £150 million and £200 million to the Scottish economy.

More importantly, directly and indirectly it employs about 30,000 people. If we were debating a matter to do with an industry where 30,000 jobs were at risk, we would quite happily be prepared to sit until 12.15 in the morning. That is what we should be doing this evening. That is what the debate is about—what is happening to the rural economy in Scotland.

To find out why the salmon are not coming up the rivers in the numbers that they previously did, we have to bear in mind that there are many more people now fishing for salmon in all areas—drift netting, estuarial netting and the rod fishermen. There are many more rod fishermen fishing Scotland's rivers today. That is certainly true of the Tay, although many of the best rod fishing fleets on the Tay are unlet for the spring season thus far. I find that very worrying. Many jobs in my constituency are at risk. Tourism is the largest employer in north Tayside. If, indeed, there is another season when the fishing is not successful, there will be many fewer jobs in north Tayside. We have to find the answers.

I welcome the Bill. I believe that it does not go far enough, but that will not surprise my hon. Friends on the Front Bench. For any hon. Member who is interested, may I say that I have never fished for salmon in my life. I know nothing about it other than what I have been told by those in my constituency who are concerned about the impact on jobs. I am surprised to observe that Opposition Members find it fascinating and funny that I have not fished. They have a habit of thinking that if one represents a Conservative constituency one is part of an elite which enjoys all these different activities. Unlike the hon. Member for East Lothian, I was not born into that privilege. I won the privilege in an election—indeed, in two elections. I have not yet taken the opportunity to indulge in fishing for salmon.

My concern is that in the north-east of England it is not a question of fishermen fishing by the traditional methods; they are not. If they were, the probability is that their catches would be the same as they were by the old traditional methods.

We have banned monofilament nets, properly, in my view. I should like this ban to be extended to England. This is equally true in the case of estuarial netting. *[Interruption.]* Again, Opposition Front Bench Members find that funny. Thirty thousands jobs are not funny. I think that this is one of the most important debates we have had this year on the subject of jobs. It is more important than many of our other debates because these are real jobs that could go on for ever if we look after the resource that provide them—the salmon.

The debate is about looking after, caring for and protecting that resource to make sure that it continues. Nature has provided it; man is destroying it. We must consider how to deal with it.

It is also important that we should examine estuarial netting as carefully as we intend to examine north-east coast netting. I welcome the provisions in the Bill that take care of that. However, the period that we are looking at is a bit too long. I should like to see that shortened so that some decisions could be made earlier.

I welcome the Bill and the fact that rod fishing should be incorporated into any estimate of the river resources and just how many salmon are being caught legitimately.

I also welcome the measures to deal in some respects —it is only in some respects—with poaching. Poaching is a real problem. I was surprised to hear the right hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Stewart) say that poaching did not occur in his constituency. I have heard it spoken about there, so I can only presume that either those who speak about it do not know what they are talking about or that the right hon. Gentleman does not know what he is talking about. I shall leave it to the House to decide who is right about that.

The Bill is long overdue. We in Scotland welcome it. Those of us who are concerned with jobs in Scotland hope that my right hon. and hon. Friends will accept some more reasoned amendments, just as they have done in the other place, because the Bill could be improved substantially so that when it becomes an Act it will make a positive contribution to the continuation of the salmon in Scottish rivers.

12.22 am

Mr. Home Robertson: With the leave of the House, I should like to reply briefly to the debate. It is a bit rich for the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) to go on about employment in Scotland so soon after his extraordinary antics on the subject of employment in the steel industry in Scotland.

I want to stress to those hon. Members who have suggested that it is the Opposition's intention to vote against the Bill on Second Reading that that is not so, because we do not want to obstruct the genuine conservation elements within the Bill. Nevertheless, it is our intention to seek to divide the House on our reasoned amendment and I have explained the reason for that. We have serious misgivings about the constitution of the district salmon boards in Scotland and about the manner of appointment of water bailiffs in Scotland. The fundamental flaw in the Bill is that it is a landlords' Bill. That is why it will fail, and that is why we intend to press our amendment to a Division.

Many interesting, detailed points have been raised, many of which involve complicated issues. The Standing Committee which considers the Bill could perhaps do with some specialist advice on the detailed points that have been referred to, and I wonder what the Minister of State's reaction would be to the suggestion that the Special Standing Committee procedure should be applied to the Bill.

12.23 am

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) is fond of the expression "It is a bit rich". It is a bit rich that a Bill which deals with a great deal of interest in the north-east of England should have been treated by the Opposition to a monopoly by Scottish shadow Ministers. We have heard tonight an attitude towards the Bill which is frivolous and peculiar. It is peculiar that twice we have heard a representative of a particular group in Scotland attack a Bill as if it were concerned only to entrench present rights. The purpose of the Bill is to extend and improve the conservation measures with which we all ought to be concerned.

It was odd that the hon. Member for East Lothian managed to turn something which ought to have had all-party support into a party political debate. The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) did this, too, although it was quite difficult to do so. The speech of the hon. Member for East Lothian was typical of him, and he again raised all the old arguments about landlordism. We know why he did it—it is his annual speech of re-selection. Every year the hon. Member has to come up with something to show the selectors that he is not what he seems to be, and he chose today to do his Militant rain dance.

The hon. Member for East Lothian moved what he delicately refers to as a reasoned amendment. If it is a reasoned amendment, his explanation of logic leaves most

[Mr. Gummer]

of us cold. He has put forward views about the Bill but has not dealt with the central part. The central part of the Bill is to make it possible so to regulate the taking of salmon as to enable us to protect the species for the benefit of all who have a right to them. Dealing with poachers is central to the whole issue. As has been said by many of my right hon. and hon. Friends, unless one can control the poaching of salmon one is not able to have a conservation policy. We have shown that it is impossible, under the present structure of the law, to control poachers. For that reason, we have changed the basis upon which prosecutions may be brought.

I listened carefully to the comments of the hon. Member for Paisley, South (Mr. Buchan), who suggested that people would be arrested on suspicion. There is no question of being arrested on suspicion. It is rather a question of being brought into court in such circumstances that any reasonable person would realise that the salmon which had been taken was likely to have been poached. The hon. Member's example gave his case away. Of course it is true that a man who has no knowledge of the effect of a gill net would not be brought into court because he would not be able, reasonably, to have suspected that a particular salmon had been taken in that way. If the man was regularly dealing in salmon and therefore knew a great deal about salmon, it might be reasonable to suggest that he ought to know that salmon bearing particular marks had been taken in that way and would have been taken illegally. In that case he ought to be taken to court.

If Opposition Members do not like that, perhaps they can find an alternative way of dealing with the problem. Some of them cast aside poaching as if it were unimportant when they know that it is now a major industry and a professional activity carried out by people who are not averse to using extreme forms of violence. These people are constantly destroying a resource which ought to be available to a range of people, both netsmen and rodsmen. The Opposition do their case no good by pretending that one can merely cast poaching aside.

I agreed heartily with my hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) when he pointed out the importance of the employment issues. It is not for Opposition Members to suggest that we should not be spending this time on a matter which affects the livelihood of many people. I must say to my hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) that to suggest that it affects people employed in Scotland is not a proper answer. He said that the Bill was bad for the Scottish people, but there are many other people in this industry and many of them are in the north-east of England and elsewhere. The Bill ought to meet the needs of everyone. That is why we are seeking to ensure that the measures that we take are fair to all the legitimate interests.

We have been tough on the north-east drift fisheries. From now on, those who have a licence will have to be present in the boat while the fishing is taking place. The longest period of weekend closing—longer than is the case in estuarial netting—will now take place. There will not be drift net fishing at night, and all ways of further controlling what is an already controlled fishery will be insisted on. All this will be brought into play, and we shall be able to see at the end of three years whether it has had an effect.

However, all this is not possible if we look only at part of the pattern—say, 35 per cent. We must look at the whole of the netting pattern, and it would be wrong to avoid doing so. That is why we are reviewing the whole lot. Thereafter, we can make reasonable decisions about what to do.

The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed kindly gave way to me when he was speaking about the Government's intentions. As I pointed out then, it would be preposterous to say in advance of the review that we would phase out the north-east fishery, just as it would be if we said that we wanted to phase out the estuarial netsmen or the rodsmen. It would be improper to do so, because the purpose of the review is to assess how best to protect this resource for all those who have a historic and reasonable right of access to a legitimate employment, or connection with it.

We shall not prejudge what will happen in the review. The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed was fair to say that the review will suggest that some of the more extreme attacks on the north-east will probably be shown to be without foundation. However, we must take this matter seriously, which is possible only if we are able to deal with the problem of poaching at the same time. I agree with many of my right hon. and hon. Friends who represent Scottish constituencies that there is a problem in being able to check the amount of fish that are taken, because if so much is taken by poaching the figures will not tie up. Goods arrive in Billingsgate that do not fit in with the figures of what is produced legally. Therefore, the control of the poacher is crucial to the success of what we are trying to do.

It is not good enough for Labour Members to have a so-called reasoned amendment and not face the issue. We cannot deal with this matter unless we are prepared to deal with poaching. We cannot deal with poaching unless we change the nature of the evidence. I hope that some of the right hon. and hon. Friends of the right hon. Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Mason) will remind him that he has a responsibility to the jobs of the people of the north-east as well as to those whose case he put forward. I am impressed by the way that Members who represent Scottish interests are prepared to watch the work and to take the evidence of the review.

My hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Morrison) suggested that we should include rodsmen in the review, but he will, I think, agree that we are asking for a major investigation of the netting in both Scotland and England. That is a sufficiently large task to do effectively, and I wonder whether it would be sensible to extend it, although we could look at this matter.

Like others, my hon. Friend spoke about seals, which is now a matter at which it is almost impossible to look objectively because of the pressure outside. We cannot ignore it, but I hope that the investigation being carried out by my Department and the Scottish Office will soon produce an outcome.

I must take issue with the right hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Stewart) on his endorsement of poaching. His view of the structure of Scotland is somewhat out of date. The right hon. Member spoke about an attitude to Scotland which might have been acceptable in a barn-storming meeting 50 years ago. The right hon. Gentleman's comments about poaching, as if it was a vague thing committed by a nice chap who did not take more than one salmon from time to time, were part of the

fairy tales which are so much a part of Scottish nationalism. My hon. Friend the Member for Woking (Mr. Onslow) rightly suggested that we must look at the situation most carefully. He related the problems of the machinery and the way that the water authorities will deal with the problem if those bodies take over that responsibility.

I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Woking would expect me to say a few words about dealer licensing. Dealer licensing in England and Wales is more difficult than it is in Scotland because we do not have the means that exist in Scotland under the Scottish form of local government. We are discussing with the water authorities whether they would be the right means of enforcement and licensing. They would obviously be the most sensible bodies to carry out such duties and they have said that they are willing to consider it.

We would envisage the licensing scheme in England and Wales as being extensive and it would deal with the vast majority of transactions. That would mean that many people who are now used to buying their salmon perfectly legally—perhaps at the back door of a hotel—will in future have to buy from a licensed dealer. That is necessary if we are to deal with poaching. We cannot have a half-baked scheme, and one of the reasons why we took some time to agree to have a scheme at all is that it looked initially as if we could not have a scheme that was honest. There is no point in having a cosmetic scheme, one which we merely put over to show that there is the same position south of the border as there is north of the border.

We now have the making of a scheme, but my hon. Friend the Member for Woking is correct to say that the matter will have to be examined very carefully in Committee. We will not have the full details, but we will have to address ourselves precisely to the way that it will be implemented.

I must tell my hon. Friends the Members for Tynemouth (Mr. Trotter) and for Scarborough (Sir M. Shaw) that their views of the north-east fisheries are exactly as I witnessed them when I visited the area and what my predecessor saw when he visited the area before he prepared that part of the Bill. I believe that fishermen in the north-east understand that these new regulations must work if they are to be able to stand up honestly and say that they must have the same acceptance and respect that any other users of this resource have. The proposal must work and we must enforce it.

That is why I have refused to accept the pressures that suggested that there ought to be other reasons why the licensee ought not be in the boat for reasons other than illness or accident. We cannot extend that because, if we do, it will become the excuse for others to point the finger at the north-east fishery. We must make sure that the proposal works and that the three-year investigation takes place on what is known to be a properly regulated fishery. Then if it seems that the fishery needs further restriction or if there were real reasons for it, we would know that they existed, and we would not have the kind of dispute that we have had this evening and in the past.

I should like to say a few words about the comments of the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Livsey). I must accuse the hon. Gentleman of having a fairyland view of poaching. He spoke about fairly innocent poaching. That is an interesting phrase to use. Can there be fairly innocent theft? Can there be fairly innocent murder and fairly innocent shoplifting? I wonder whether we are using scrumping language—that is, using words to pretend that one has a middle lane position? I noticed that the hon. Gentleman was working very hard to produce a position between this side of the House and his own side of the House. He was working again towards the traditional alliance position. On the one hand, they are against serious poaching but, on the other, they do not want to condemn fairly innocent poaching. Obviously the odd poacher or two votes in the hon. Gentleman's constituency. There may be the odd voter in Brecon and Radnor whom the hon. Gentleman does not want to put off at the general election.

Salmon tagging is not a possible answer because of the vast number of imported salmon. If the hon. Gentleman wishes to propose a special scheme in Wales which might offer some advantage, I would be happy to look at it and would not dream of casting it aside out of hand. All the investigations that I have seen show that tagging cannot work in a society such as ours where the access of salmon, especially frozen salmon, gives rise to a genuine problem of control over the tags. Once one does not control the tags, the scheme is tailor-made for an extension, rather than a restriction, of poaching.

The Bill is a major step in the control of poaching, the conservation of salmon, and the protection of the proper demands and rights of those who live from and enjoy catching fish, whether by net or rod. I am sad that what could have been a debate in which all sides of the House could have found a joint answer has been destroyed by the petty, old-fashioned, narrow-minded, landlord-bashing of the landlord himself. The hon. Member for East Lothian has committed the closest to trahison des clercs that I know. The landlord attacks a perfectly reasonable conservation measure on the basis that it is landlordism. I hope that will not have the success that the hon. Gentleman seeks during his reselection process.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 43, Noes 125.

Division No. 92] **[12.41 am**

AYES

Bermingham, Gerald
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'mline E)*
Buchan, Norman
Canavan, Dennis
Clay, Robert
Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dubs, Alfred
Eadie, Alex
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Godman, Dr Norman
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Lamont, Norman
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Loyden, Edward
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
McWilliam, John
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Maxton, John
Michie, William
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
O'Neill, Martin
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pike, Peter
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Richardson, Ms Jo
Rowlands, Ted
Skinner, Dennis
Strang, Gavin
Tinn, James
Wigley, Dafydd

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Don Dixon and
Mr. Frank Haynes.

NOES

Alexander, Richard
Alton, David
Ancram, Michael
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Beith, A. J.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Blackburn, John
Boscawen, Hon Robert

Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Bruinvels, Peter
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Colvin, Michael
Cope, John
Corrie, John
Couchman, James
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Emery, Sir Peter
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Galley, Roy
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Gummer, Rt Hon John S
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hayes, J.
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Hicks, Robert
Holt, Richard
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Stratf'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Robert *(Herts W)*
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knowles, Michael
Lamont, Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim
Lilley, Peter
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Nicholas
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
Major, John
Malone, Gerald
Marland, Paul
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mather, Carol
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Miller, Hal *(B'grove)*
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Mitchell, David *(Hants NW)*
Monro, Sir Hector
Morris, M. *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Hon C. *(Devizes)*
Moynihan, Hon C.
Newton, Tony
Normanton, Tom
Onslow, Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Proctor, K. Harvey
Raffan, Keith
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Rowe, Andrew
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Spencer, Derek
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steel, Rt Hon David
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Terlezki, Stefan
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Trotter, Neville
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Waller, Gary
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Watts, John
Wheeler, John
Whitfield, John
Whitney, Raymond
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Michael Neubert and
Mr. Tim Sainsbury.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 41 (Amendment on Second or Third Reading), and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee pursuant to Standing Order No. 42 (Committal of Bills).

Salmon Bill *[Lords]* *[Money]*

Queen's Recommendation having been signified—

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Salmon Bill *[Lords]*, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any expenses incurred by any Minister of the Crown or government department in consequence of any order made under that Act for the purpose of requiring persons dealing in salmon to be licensed.—*[Mr. Malone.]*

WAYS AND MEANS

SALMON BILL *[Lords]* *[Ways and Means]*

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Salmon Bill *[Lords]*, it is expedient to authorise the imposition of a requirement that a sum is to be paid on the making of an application for a licence to deal in salmon—*[Mr. Malone.]*

PROCEDURE

Ordered,

That the Standing Order of 16th March 1984 relating to the appointment of the Select Committee on Procedure be amended, in line 9, by inserting, after the word 'House', the words 'to adjourn from place to place'.—*[Mr. Malone.]*

Ambulance Services (Guisborough)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Malone.]*

12.52 am

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): I welcome this opportunity to speak in an Adjournment debate at an early hour, because on the previous occasion it was at 4 am. My subject matter is much more serious tonight, because this is the last stop for an elected representative to try to redress the position of ambulance services in his constituency.

"Where is Langbaurgh?" is a kind of music hall joke. When I tell people that it is in Cleveland, they ask, "Where is Cleveland?" It is no joke to my constituents to find that the ambulance service which has served the heart of the constituency for many years has been altered by a decision by the area health authority. A couple of years ago the ambulance authorities decided that a report on ambulance services in east Cleveland would be prepared by the health operational research unit. HORU is a respectable and eminent body. It bases its researches on years of study in various parts of Britain. It puts all the information through a computer, which spews out answers at the end. As we all know, computers are capable of producing answers based only on the information put into them. If one fails to put in information about the topography, the weather or the disposition of the population, the answers are liable to be distorted, if they are based on a standard format.

The result of the action of the area health authority, acting on the recommendation of the local ambulance service manager, is that, to all intents and purposes, the Guisborough ambulance station has been closed. It is unusual in political life to find an issue on which all sectors of the community—religious, political and academic—are united. They all say in this case that the area health authority was wrong to make this change. Nobody can deny that the authority's criteria met the specifications of the Department. Indeed, those criteria went beyond the rural and into the metropolitan, specifications. This is a domestic matter affecting the south Cleveland area.

It may be argued that monetary savings are involved and that that must be for the good of the community. In this case, not only is it questionable whether there will be any savings, but I could adduce evidence to show that what is proposed will be more expensive. Either way we need not spend time trying to put a monetary value on people's lives.

The case that I make tonight is based on local knowledge of events in the last 12 months and the strong feeling of the local community that a wrong has been perpetrated. We have nobody but the Government to whom to turn to bring pressure on the area health authority, even at this late stage. to change its mind.

The initial recommendation was that the Guisborough ambulance station should close. That would have meant my constituents living near the north Yorkshire border being denied an important section of emergency ambulance provision. Bowing to public opinion, the local ambulance management had second thoughts and, instead of closing the Guisborough station, kept it open for 22 of every 24 hours by having on hand an ambulance and crew from Redcar.

The result is that there has been no cost saving, and a well-established station, its appliances and crews have been dispersed. Every day an ambulance crew travels half an hour from Redcar to Guisborough. Later, it travels back to Redcar, and then another ambulance does the round journey. Thus, for two hours a day ambulances and crews are travelling between the two areas. For 22 hours a day, a strange crew from Redcar waits in Guisborough to answer emergency calls.

The logic of this has been lost on everyone, apart from the management and the area health authority. The service that is provided to my constituents has been diminished. That diminution goes beyond my constituency, into those of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Brittan) and of my hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough (Sir. M. Shaw), for the ambulance services go to many of the small and outpost villages in the north Yorkshire area that are frequently cut off by adverse weather conditions, when the roads are impassable. These are the people who are most likely to be at risk.

An analysis of accident statistics in the area shows that the vast majority of road accidents occur on the fast moors road between Guisborough and Whitby. By definition, it will take longer for an ambulance crew to arrive at the scene of an accident than has hitherto been the case. There can be no justification for this.

Worse still is an analysis of the actions of the area health authority. It produced a plan to close the station, which it then amended. Although the area health authority was supposed to take into consideration the views of all the people in the area, it admitted to what it called "a word processing error." The views of three of the parish and town councils adjacent to Guisborough were not presented at the meeting when the decision was taken. The voices of three important local community councils were not heard.

If there is a case for the alterations which have been made, it centres on a new ambulance station at Coulby Newham, at the western end of my constituency. This was commissioned and built at a time when the extrapolation of population growth was greater than that which has come about. The ambulance authorities were therefore faced with the embarrassment of a new building for which they had no use. They have justified its use by making it operational and by closing down, to all intents and purposes, the emergency service and cover in Guisborough.

Why is Guisborough so special? With a population of just under 20,000 it is the major town in my constituency. If one visited Guisborough, one would see, standing in a row in the same road, the police station, the fire station, the hospital, the Territorial Army barracks and the ambulance station, all within 200 yds of each other. What have the authorities done? They have closed the ambulance station. If there is an accident to which the fire engines and the police are called, they look around to see whether an ambulance will join them, or they hope that an ambulance will come to join them from Redcar or Carlin How. This cannot be right.

All my constituents have been to see me and have prevailed upon me to raise this matter in Parliament. It is their last hope that common sense and pressure can be brought to bear upon those who were responsible for making this decision. The shop stewards at the ambulance station are concerned. In case there are those who might suggest that this is a political intrigue, I must advise everyone that the ambulance service in Guisborough includes a Conservative councillor whose mother is also

[Mr. Richard Holt]

a Conservative councillor for the town of Guisborough. In the political context, therefore, there is no divide. The new management of the ambulance authority is determined to make the change and to implement the health operational research unit recommendations, irrespective of the views and wishes of the populace.

Public meetings have been held, at the end of which no one was satisfied with the explanations given by the chief ambulance officer to justify the proposed changes. There have also been private meetings of the chambers of trade, Rotary and others concerned in the town. No one is in favour of the alteration, other than the management. Management admits that when it reached its conclusions it did not have all the evidence. It did not have the information which had been missed by the word processor and/or the computer. There is great strength of feeling that the very latest that could be done is for the Govenrment to write to the area health authority asking it to reconsider the view that has prevailed so far.

Some may ask why I have not been supported in my endeavours by other hon. Members in the Cleveland area. They are not supporting me because all of them are getting a better deal out of what the area health authority is bringing into practice. Therefore, I do not blame them for not supporting me. If I were the Member of Parliament for an area that was getting improved ambulance cover I would be grateful. But when one is left on one's own, one's resolve and strength of feeling become greater. It would have been more honest if other hon. Members from the Cleveland area had had the courage to support me in my long and sustained battle over the past 12 months against the area health authority.

There is no element of cost saving or of a cutting exercise. All too frequently people claim erroneously that the reason for Government action is that cuts are being made. That is not the case with the ambulance services in east Cleveland. The alteration is intended to improve the service. For one third of the area that will be the case, but for two thirds of the area—the larger geographical but the smaller numerically—that will be far from true.

I hope my hon. Friend will accept that there is no criticism of the Government and no intention to make play of cost cutting. The decision is wrong. It was made on ill-founded theoretical grounds. I do not want to be responsible for anyone having to tell a newly bereaved widow or mother that her husband or child has died because the ambulance service they had enjoyed has been taken away. That is what we are facing in east Cleveland. There can be no solace in that for anybody.

It is all very well to say that one is arguing about a difference of seven, eight, 10 or 11 minutes, but one is also arguing about a lost camaraderie which had been engendered within the ambulance station. In the community sense, the ambulance service is responsible not only for emergency cover, but for transporting patients to and from hospitals and homes for the elderly. All of that has been dissipated for no justifiable and logical reason, but because of an administrative managerial change. It is incumbent upon the Government to write a very strong letter to the area health authority venting these views so that the authority can reconsider and alter its decision and restore the position that we had before the changes. If it is necessary to justify the opening of Coulby Newham on any other grounds, and if there is not the money for that, the case should be argued for Coulby Newham, but not at the expense of the ambulance station at Guisborough and my constituents.

1.10 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security (Mr. Ray Whitney): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Holt) for giving me the opportunity to pay a brief but sincere tribute to the general contribution which the ambulance service makes to the Health Service and to the population, to the skill which it demonstrates and to the response that it shows in dealing with emergencies and caring for its patients.

I know that my hon. Friend will accept that a great deal of effort goes into ensuring that services are able to respond as efficiently as they do. It is essential that local managers of the services must plan carefully the way in which the services operate to ensure that the best quality of service in provided. There is no point in having ambulance stations running a full 24-hour emergency service if there is not a demand for that level of cover in that particular area. To do so means that an ambulance may not be available in other areas where the demand is greater. I hope that my hon. Friend will accept that set of principles.

As my hon. Friend knows, the South Tees health authority is responsible for the management of the Cleveland ambulance service. As he has said, in co-operation with an independent survey conducted by the health operational research unit—HORU—which had studied emergency ambulance cover in about 20 other services in the country since 1974, the decision was taken to embark on a careful examination of the way in which emergency ambulance services were provided. Account was taken of the sort of factors to which my hon. Friend has referred, such as new roads, population changes and other developments. There was no rush to draw up proposals for future organisation of the service. A careful look was taken at the existing patterns of demand to ascertain where the relative demands of the different areas were and the times of the day when demand was greatest.

I understand that the district health authority was mindful of the fact that the Guisborough ambulance station had only a small emergency work load which, on average, amounted to less than one emergency call each night, two emergency calls each day and between one and two calls each evening. It judged that such a small work load could not justify emergency cover at that ambulance station on a full 24-hour basis, especially when other areas placed higher demands on the service. Instead, it proposed that between 8 am and 12 midnight emergency ambulance cover would be provided by outstationed ambulance crews allocated to the area.

The health authority was satisfied that under this arrangement the national standards for response time would continue to be met in Guisborough. It should be emphasised, as my hon. Friend has said, that the national standards for non-metropolitan areas such as Guisborough are lower than those for built-up areas. The health authority decided to aim for the higher metropolitan standard for Guisborough and for the entire Cleveland area. I suggest that that is a clear sign of the authority's wish to provide the best possible service to all the patients within its area.

But that was not the end of the story. The authority issued a full consultation document on its proposals and invited comments from a wide range of groups and individuals. We shall consider his argument about the failure to register or receive some of the comments. During the consultation period, officers of the authority attended over 30 gatherings throughout the area to explain the proposals and to answer questions. Written comments were received from a wide range of organisations, including neighbouring health authorities, community health councils, local authorities at various levels, trade unions, the staff of the ambulance service and individuals, including parliamentary colleagues.

The health authority considered carefully each and every comment received. On one particular aspect — namely, whether the proposed arrangements for emergency ambulance cover in Guisborough would result in a satisfactory level of cover — some concern was expressed. Although the health authority was satisfied that such cover would be satisfactory, it recognised the strength of feeling within the local community with regard to the proposal. My hon. Friend has reflected that concern again tonight.

The health authority decided to increase ambulance cover by providing a vehicle additional to the original proposals, between the hours of 10 pm and 6 am. That would mean that Guisborough would still have one emergency ambulance allocated to the area. The only difference is that the vehicles will not be based at the Guisborough ambulance station—this was the matter to which my hon. Friend referred—but the arrangement would enable a satisfactory level of cover for my hon. Friend's constituents.

Mr. Holt: Would the Minister kindly note that none of the representations that he has mentioned were in favour of the alterations.

Mr. Whitney: That may not be surprising in relation to proposals of this nature. Those who tended to accept them would not on the whole make representations.

The Health Service has said that the service will be closely monitored in the future. I assure my hon. Friend that there is no question of this being offered as a sop to those who question the new arrangements. It is a clear demonstration of the commitment of the health authority to ensuring that a safe and efficient service is provided. The Department is satisfied that this monitoring will be carried out properly. Certainly, if difficulties occur, which my hon. Friend fears, changes will be considered.

Clearly, what my hon. Friend has said tonight will be taken into account carefully by the health authority. I have no doubt at all that my hon. Friend will be watching the situation closely and will continue to draw any difficulties that he sees to the attention of the health authority I, too, shall follow the situation closely. I hope that this high level of cover in Guisborough will continue.

I understand the sense of loss for the vehicle, but I also understand that much work has gone into these arrangements. The cover for my hon. Friend's constituents is at a very high level.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at seventeen minutes past One o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 5 March 1986

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

DEATH OF A MEMBER

Mr. Speaker: I regret to have to inform the House of the death of John Deane Spence, esquire, Member for Ryedale, and I desire, on behalf of the House, to express our sense of the loss we have sustained and our sympathy with the relatives of the hon. Member.

Oral Answers to Questions

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Human Rights

1. **Mr. David Atkinson** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth to discuss the human rights situation in member states.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Tim Eggar): My right hon. and learned Friend has not met the Commonwealth Secretary-General specifically to discuss the human rights situation in member states and has no present plans to do so.

Mr. Atkinson: Can my hon. Friend confirm that at least a third of the member states of the Commonwealth do not satisfy the human rights criteria of the United Nations' declaration? If so, will he suggest to Sir Shridath Ramphal that the team of eminent persons currently investigating human rights in South Africa should also investigate and report on the situation in the member states of the Commonwealth?

Mr. Eggar: At Nassau, we and other Governments welcomed the recent establishment of the human rights unit in the Commonwealth secretariat. We believe that this is the best instrument to assist in promoting understanding of and respect for human rights within the Commonwealth. Where specific human rights issues arise and have come to our attention, we have made representations, where appropriate, to the Government concerned.

Mr. Tom Clarke: Does the Government's concern for human rights extend to Pakistan?

Mr. Eggar: As the hon. Gentleman knows, Pakistan is not part of the Commonwealth.

Mr. Sims: Is my hon. Friend aware that 12 months have elapsed since I visited Sri Lanka on behalf of the parliamentary human rights group, together with the hon. Member for Knowsley, North (Mr. Kilroy-Silk)? Our report on our visit listed a number of ways in which human rights are violated in respect of many members of all the communities in Sri Lanka. As the efforts of the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth and the Prime Minister of India to resolve the problems in Sri Lanka do not seem to have borne fruit, are Her Majesty's Government, who are held in high regard in that country, prepared to offer their services as a mediator?

Mr. Eggar: We see our role as continuing to support efforts by India and others to encourage direct talks between the Sri Lankan Government and Tamil representatives. India's contribution to the peace process is valuable and positive, and we believe that a negotiated settlement is the best route to a lasting peace.

Mr. Nellist: As one who, with the hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway), was not acceptable to the Sri Lankan Government to make such a trip on behalf of the parliamentary human rights group, unlike the hon. Member for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims), may I ask the Minister whether, if he is so concerned about the abrogation of human rights in Sri Lanka, he will break off military and police training, economic links and the support that the Government continue to give to a Government who, on any examination of the facts, are clearly guilty of a serious attack on human rights in that country?

Mr. Eggar: As we have repeatedly said, we deplore the continued violence within Sri Lanka. The Sri Lankan Government have taken steps to prevent undisciplined action by their security forces and have assured us that they continue to further those efforts.

South Africa

2. **Mr. Litherland** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will give examples of specific responses made by the South African Government to Britain's diplomatic pressure over the past three years.

10. **Mr. Nellist** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about Her Majesty's Government's latest representations to the Government of South Africa.

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Sir Geoffrey Howe): The full details of our representations and of the specific South African responses must naturally remain confidential. However, we believe that the many representations made during the past three years have helped in modifying actions and encouraging reforms. On 25 February Her Majesty's ambassador raised the enlargement and projected "independence" of KwaNdebele homeland; the shootings in Alexandra; the detentions of Venda community leaders and the case of the Sharpeville Six.

Mr. Litherland: Has the right hon. and learned Gentleman seen the article in *The Guardian* today which states that the Prime Minister has personally blocked a move by the Bermudan Government to introduce limited sanctions against South Africa, even with respect to the import and sale of krugerrands? At the moment, our Government are considering barring the import and sale of

krugerrands. Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman not agree that that smacks of double standards and is a sop to apartheid?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: No. It smacks of precisely the opposite — the perfectly rational conclusion that the Government's decisions on measures taken in relation to South Africa should be uniform not only in the United Kingdom but in colonial territories. That is why the position of krugerrands is under consideration in relation to Bermuda as with the United Kingdom.

Mr. Nellist: Are not the attitude and reply of the right hon. and learned Gentleman to these questions mere finger wagging at apartheid? In view of the £11 billion of British investment in South Africa, do not the objections of the right hon. and learned Gentleman and the Prime Minister have more to do with the profits made by British firms because of apartheid than with these latecomers moralising about apartheid? When will Britain take serious economic action against a system that degrades the people over which it rules?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: If it were left to the hon. Gentleman to judge these matters, the result would be more likely to promote the destruction of the South African economy and of the British economy, to the disadvantage of all the peoples living in both countries. I assure the hon. Gentleman that the balanced policy adopted by the Government of making it plain that we wish apartheid to be brought to an end quickly and of supporting that aim by policies and representations is far more likely to be effective in pursuit of the objectives shared by hon. Members on both sides of the House.

Sir Peter Blaker: Is it not clear that many of those who call for a policy of serious economic sanctions have not thought through the implications? For example, would not a policy of compulsory divestment, for which I understand the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist) is calling, in practice involve the confiscation of part of the property owned by British subjects and its free handover to South Africans?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: That would be one of the many perverse effects of the measures advocated by the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist). I entirely agree with the point made by my right hon. Friend.

Dr. Owen: Has the right hon. and learned Gentleman made representations against the selective ban on television reporting? Does he accept that many of us find that quite unacceptable?

Has the right hon. and learned Gentleman made representations about the decision to go ahead with United Nations supervised elections in Namibia in August and the fact that they should not be dependent upon and linked to the withdrawal of Cuban forces? Such action would be welcomed by both sides of the House, but I believe that the United Nations resolution should be undertaken anyhow.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: We have already made representations expressing our regret at the curtailment of the rights of television and other reporters in South Africa. We have welcomed the reaffirmation by the South African Government of their commitment to implement Security Council resolution 435, because we believe that that would offer an opportunity to make early progress on the whole Namibian question and would reduce tension throughout the region. The right hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that we do not recognise any formal linkage with any requirement for Cuban withdrawal as part of that settlement. South Africa has made it clear, not only in yesterday's announcement, but many times in the past, that it will not agree to implementation of resolution 435 unless a satisfactory arrangement is found with respect to the Cubans. It is my judgment, having talked about this matter to a large number of people in that part of Africa, that the practical opportunity to implement resolution 435 is most likely to be fulfilled on the basis of United States-led negotiations in the context of the announcement which we now welcome.

Mr. George Gardiner: Will my right hon. and learned Friend, in his dealings with the South African Government, bear in mind the wisdom of encouraging as well as censuring—using a carrot as well as a stick? To that end, would there not be some value in saying that steps to broaden the base of government in South Africa might be reflected in an early relaxation of some of the provisions of the Gleneagles agreement on boycotting sporting contacts?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I do not immediately see the connection between my hon. Friend's specific point, which is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, and his more general point. However, I agree that we should be ready, not only to criticise where criticism is due, but to offer encouragement where that is due.

In addition to welcoming the announcement about the implementation of resolution 435, I am also glad to welcome the announcement about the lifting of the state of emergency, which is a matter that has been addressed by hon. Members on both sides of the House. I hope that that action will help to ease the tension and assist the promotion of dialogue, which is so urgently needed. That is what we must all hope for.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Has the Foreign Secretary read the remarks of Chief Johnathan, in which he makes it clear that it was the refusal of the British Government either to offer proper support to the state of Lesotho or to make adequate representations to the South African Government that led to the downfall of an elected Government in that state?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I have seen reports of certain remarks made by the deposed Prime Minister of Lesotho, Chief Johnathan. It is not true that Britain was in any way involved in his overthrow. In response to Chief Johnathan's request for assistance, we immediately asked the South Africans to lift border restrictions and to talk to Lesotho.

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that British diplomats attended the funerals in Alexandra today? Will he also say whether diplomats have been similarly instructed to attend the funerals of black policemen murdered by fellow blacks?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I shall bear in mind the points made in the last part of my hon. Friend's question. It is true that our diplomatic post, together with the posts of other Western Governments, was represented at the funerals today.

Mr. Healey: Will the Foreign Secretary tell the House why Her Majesty's Government have failed to carry out

the undertaking they gave nearly five months ago at the Commonwealth summit to ban the import of krugerrands, especially as the United States Administration have found no difficulty with the general agreement on tariffs and trade in banning krugerrands, even before the Commonwealth summit?

Does the Foreign Secretary believe that there is something lacking in British influence when, according to Amnesty International, 8,000 persons have been detained —many of whom have been tortured and murdered in prison—and nearly 800 people have been murdered by the police as a result of South African policy? Of those detained and murdered, a quarter were children. How can the Foreign Secretary excuse breaking his commitment at the Commonwealth summit in the face of those facts?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The right hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that one of the many reasons why we wish to see an end to apartheid is that that would help us to reduce the adverse impact on human rights in South Africa. The United Kingdom is not the only country that has found it necessary to consider the general agreement on tariffs and trade implications on the proposed ban of krugerrands.

Sir Anthony Grant: Has it occurred to my right hon. and learned Friend that our relations with South Africa might perhaps have been much better, and certainly the whole beastly business of apartheid, which we all deplore, would perhaps have been avoided, if power had not been handed over to the Afrikaners in 1907 by the Liberal Government?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: My hon. Friend has brought his characteristically penetrating rhetorical insight to the subject.

3. **Mr. Lofthouse** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the Council of Ministers will next discuss progress in South Africa on ending apartheid.

11. **Mr. Loyden** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the European Economic Community Council will next disucuss its policy towards South Africa.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mrs. Lynda Chalker): Foreign Ministers of the Twelve have had frequent discussions about South Africa both in the Council of Ministers and in political co-operation. No date has been set for their next discussion.

Mr. Lofthouse: Will the Minister of State make it clear to the South African authorities that the lifting of the state of emergency will be meaningless if all the detainees are not released and if the restrictions on media coverage and political meetings are not lifted?

Mrs. Chalker: The hon. Gentleman heard the remarks of my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary on the subject of the media refusals. He knows full well that we are opposed to detention without trial. We shall remind the South African Government of that when and as it becomes necessary to do so.

Mr. Loyden: In September the Council of Ministers agreed to sanctions on oil exports to South Africa. When will it consider the regulations necessary to impose those sanctions?

Mrs. Chalker: The question of oil was considered at a recent meeting. I cannot from memory say whether it was on 27 January or the following week. The United Kingdom has never sold oil to South Africa. Under the 1979 guidelines, the sale of North sea oil is confined to the European Community and certain other countries. The measure does not apply to petroleum products. The guidelines apply to indirect as well as to direct exports, so, in relation to this country and our partners, the hon. Gentleman need have no worries.

Mr. Ian Lloyd: Will the Government seek to persuade the Council of Ministers, which has great influence in these matters, to distance itself from the anti-apartheid movement whose regard for the truth is becoming of almost legendary inaccuracy? Does my hon. Friend agree that the approach to apartheid should discriminate and distinguish between those features which are unique to aparthied and those, perhaps of an illiberal regime, which are shared by some 90 other member countries of the United Nations? Is there not a great danger that in relation to South Africa our attitude tends to sweep both aspects together so that we expect to impose standards of achievement in public life which in a sense are almost unattainable, or at least have not been attained, in 90 other countries of the United Nations?

Mrs. Chalker: I think that my hon. Friend forgets why we totally oppose apartheid and favour its total elimination in that country. Many people there have no vote, and all black people are unfairly treated. I do not seek to teach my hon. Friend, but our concern about the denial of human rights is clearly shared by every one of the Twelve, and we must stand against that denial. In that situation, there is no way in which we can differentiate, as my hon. Friend seeks.

Mr. Dykes: As a large number of South African citizens have been murdered by the South African police and army and the number of such murders is growing, will my hon. Friend make representations to her colleagues in the Council of Ministers to ensure that the Council repeatedly emphasises to the South African Government the need to discontinue that murderous policy and to release the detainees forthwith?

Mrs. Chalker: That has already happened, and I assume that it will come up again next time we discuss the matter.

Mr. Anderson: On 1 July this country assumes the presidency of the Council of Ministers. Previous Presidents have met the African National Council at ministerial level. Will the Government, consistent with their present policy, continue to refuse to meet the ANC at that level after 1 July?

Mrs. Chalker: We expect to maintain contact at official level at all times. We shall have to see what progress has been made before reaching a decision when we assume the presidency of the European Community.

Nelson Mandela

4. **Mr. Alton** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made to the Government of South Africa concerning the release of Nelson Mandela.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: Our views about the release of Mr. Mandela are well known to the South African Government. I last raised Mr. Mandela's case when I saw the South African ambassador on 13 February.

Mr. Alton: Will the Foreign Secretary take every opportunity to make it clear to the South African Government that the continued incarceration of Nelson Mandela is an affront to the people of South Africa and that his release is a prerequisite to reconciliation between black and white people there? Will he instruct our ambassador in South Africa to visit Nelson Mandela and to seek an interview to establish the present state of his health and wellbeing?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: We have made clear on many occasions our belief that the unconditional release of Mr. Mandela would constitute a major act of reconciliation in South Africa and could provide the impetus for genuine dialogue and a peaceful settlement. We have stressed, and will continue to stress, the importance of that point to the South African Government.

Mr. John Carlile: Does my right hon. and learned Friend accept that the prerequisite of the South African Government for the release of Nelson Madela, that he should renounce the use of violence, is reasonable? It is in the interests of the ANC that he remains incarcerated while it performs its own acts of violence in South Africa and outside.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I cannot accept my hon. Friend's conclusions about the situation, although I join him—and I am sure the whole House will join him—in condemning violence from any quarter. The ANC is clearly an important focus of black opinion in South Africa. Nevertheless, we thought it right to establish official contact with the ANC specifically to stress our commitment to dialogue and to impress upon it the need to bring an end to all violence in South Africa.

Falkland Islands

5. **Mr. McKelvey** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the current position with Argentina over the Falkland Islands.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: We continue to stand by our commitments to the Falkland Islanders. At the same time, we are working for better relations between the United Kingdom and Argentina. The expressed wish of my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary to meet the Argentine parliamentarians who visited London was only the latest in a series of initiatives which we have taken since 1982. We were disappointed that they did not take up the offer, but we shall continue our efforts to promote better bilateral relations.

Mr. McKelvey: Does the Secretary of State agree that it is now time to re-establish full diplomatic relations with Argentina and to discuss sovereignty with a view to reaching an honourable settlement? We could then reduce the staggering £654 million which is the average cost of maintaining Fortress Falklands at the moment.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am afraid the hon. Gentleman offers a misguidedly simple insight into this problem. We want—and I emphasise it yet again—to move towards more normal relations with Argentina. It was for that reason that my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State offered to meet the Argentine parliamentarians when they were here. My hon. Friend would have explained to them why we are unprepared to negotiate on sovereignty. My hon. Friend would have been prepared to listen to the Argentinians' position. He would also have made clear our wish to see more normal relations, towards which we have taken step after step, none of which has been met with a parallel response.

Sir Anthony Meyer: Does my right hon. and learned Friend accept that the visit by the Argentine parliamentarians should be seen as part of a long, slow and necessarily patient progress towards the gradual normalisation of relations? Does he further accept that neither the expectation of the Argentine visitors nor the intention of Her Majesty's Government was that this visit should be used as an occasion for initiating negotiations of any kind?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I accept precisely the two points made by my hon. Friend. The intention of the meeting offered by my hon. Friend was not to undertake, launch or conduct negotiations, but to explain our position on sovereignty. That has been well and often stated to Argentina. My hon. Friend wished also to impress upon them the sincerity of our wishes in other respects to move towards more normal relations with Argentina. That is and must be a sensible position.

Mr. Beith: Does the Secretary of State accept that many of us who met the Argentine delegation found them to be a constructive and courageous group of people? Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman recognise that their unwillingness to have a meeting with Ministers during their visit was quite understandable, considering the view that would have been taken in Argentina of accepting British terms as the basis on which such a meeting would be conducted? Will the Secretary of State recognise that he is dealing with a democracy, not a dictatorship? When the Government were dealing with a dictatorship, they were prepared to give away sovereignty. The Government should at least be prepared to have sovereignty on the agenda and not feel that their ability to negotiate is inhibited by opening the discussions.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The hon. Gentleman has not got it right. There were no strings attached to the offer made by my hon. Friend to meet the Argentine parliamentarians. He was prepared to meet them to explain why we will not negotiate sovereignty and to listen to their statement of their position on that matter.

We have expressly welcomed the restoration of democracy in Argentina. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister sent a message about that as soon as it happened. We have taken steps to support the Argentine economy and to help that democracy. It would be unhelpful to that democracy, however, to offer unrealistic goals on negotiations about sovereignty. Although, since 1982, democracy has returned to Argentina, the fact which makes a fundamental difference to the question is the invasion of the Falkland Islands by a main force at that time. Therefore, it is quite unreasonable to expect us to put the clock back to before the invasion, as though it had not happened.

Mr. Key: Will my right hon. and learned Friend be certain to pursue current Government policy with regard to the Falklands and reject the calls made from a sedentary

position by Opposition Members to buy out the Falkland Islanders? Will he further ensure that hon. Members know that the major stumbling block in the gradual long-term solution to the problem is that Argentina has forfeited the trust of the Falkland Islanders and has to start building relations with them?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is most important, as a matter of common humanity and democratic principle, that respect be paid to the wishes of the Falkland Islanders by this Parliament and by the democratic Parliament of Argentina.

Mr. Foulkes: Does the Secretary of State not understand that all of us who were able to meet the Argentine delegation, as the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) said, found them extremely reasonable people and willing to talk positively about the guarantees that their Government will give the islanders about their way of life? In view of the crippling cost of Fortress Falklands and the lost opportunities in trade with the whole of Latin America, surely everything is to be gained and nothing to be lost by entering into direct discussions with the Argentine Government about all aspects of the future of the islands to try to find a solution which is acceptable to Britain and Argentina, and which protects the interests of the islanders?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The hon. Gentleman should not imagine that the fact that there is a difference between us and Argentina is now a significant factor affecting our trade with Latin America, or the rest of our relations. Of course we wish to go further to establish more normal relations with Argentina. We have taken step after step in that direction. It is simply not sensible to deceive ourselves into thinking that the issue of sovereignty can be disposed of as the hon. Gentleman suggests. The Argentine Government's stance was restated only a month or two ago. They reaffirmed their unswerving determination to re-establishing the territorial integrity of the republic. They are determined to do that regardless of the wishes of the people who live in those islands. That is not a basis that can sensibly commend itself to the House.

Mr. Shersby: Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that there is very strong support on the Tory Benches for the Government's unwillingness to consider negotiating the sovereignty of the Falkland Islands? Is he further aware that the people of the Falkland Islands pay great regard to their freedom and believe that the British Government will support it? What are the Government doing to normalise relations with Argentina with a view to their taking back their war dead? What discussions have there been with Argentina about that problem?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's support. We have made clear to the Argentine Government more than once our willingness to accept a suitably prepared visit to the Falkland Islands under International Red Cross auspices by close relatives of Argentine service men who are buried there, and our willingness to consider any other sensible arrangements that might be proposed. It is one of the many human proposals that we have put forward. We are genuinely anxious to move towards the gradual restoration of normal relations between the people of this country and the people of Argentina.

South Africa

6. **Mr. Fatchett** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's policy on South Africa following the speech of President Botha to the South African Parliament in January.

Mrs. Chalker: We welcome the positive proposals in President Botha's speech and hope that they will be speedily implemented. We now wish to see further movement towards the fundamental elimination of apartheid and the beginning of peaceful dialogue between the South African Government and genuine representatives of the black community.

Mr. Fatchett: In that speech, President Botha once again made acceptance of resolution 435 conditional on the withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola. In an earlier reply the Foreign Secretary seemed to acquiesce in that stance. Why? Would it not be in the interests of the Namibian people for the British Government to demand South Africa's unequivocal acceptance of United Nations' resolutions?

Mrs. Chalker: I do not think that it would. We must ensure that the United States-led negotiations can continue and that the formal talks that were held earlier this year in Luanda continue. That is why we believe that the South African Government's reaffirmation of their formal commitment to Security Council resolution 435 is right. It could offer the opportunity to make the early progress that we all want. We want a reduction of tension in the region. I sincerely hope that the United States-led negotiations will now be intensified and that all parties will show flexibility and realism.

Mr. Adley: Does my hon. Friend agree that the sporadic violence of the ANC is as nothing compared to the permanent state of attrition practised by the South African Government on the black and non-white population of South Africa? Is she aware that there is, albeit not always vocal, widespread support on the Tory Benches for the Government's determination to establish relations with the ANC? Will she please continue with the policy of "jaw-jaw", in the interests of trying to bring some influence to bear from Europe on the problems in South Africa?

Mrs. Chalker: We know, sadly, that violence is not confined to one group. It happens on both sides of the border in Southern Africa and it also happens as a result of some activity by the South African Government. However, wherever violence occurs, whether it be from the ANC, the South African Government or any other body, we deplore it and we shall work to see that those who promote violence are dissuaded from doing so in whatever way we possibly can.

Mr. Flannery: Is it not a fact that where there is no democracy in a country and where the officially enshrined policy of the Government is racialism and apartheid, there is bound to be, at some stage, a fight back from those who are being oppressed? In view of a question asked earlier by a well known racist on the Back Benches of the Tory party—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. First, that is not parliamentary. Secondly, we cannot deal with questions that have been asked earlier.

Mr. Flannery: I am sorry that this Chamber will not allow me to tell the truth but in view of that fact——

Hon. Members: Withdraw.

Mr. Speaker: I think that the hon. Gentleman, who is an experienced parliamentarian, is withdrawing that allegation.

Mr. Flannery: In view of the fact that I am being forced to withdraw it, in order to continue with the rest of my question, I shall do so. Will the Minister make it clear, as the Foreign Secretary does not, that the policy of brutality against the vast democratic majority of the African people in South Africa is being maintained, and that we, as a Chamber, are totally opposed to the official violence of the South African Government against the vast majority of its people?

Mrs. Chalker: The hon. Gentleman does my right hon. and learned Friend a gross disservice. He and this Government have consistently impressed upon South Africa the need fully to respect the independence and the territorial integrity of its neighbours, and we shall continue to do so.

Middle East

7. **Sir John Biggs-Davison** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what part Her Majesty's Government are playing in international efforts to bring about pacification in the middle east.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: We shall continue to support all realistic initiatives for peaceful solutions of the region's conflicts. I discussed the situation in the middle east with my European colleagues on 25 February and with the Syrian Foreign Minister on 3 March.

Sir John Biggs-Davison: Did my right hon. and learned Friend discuss with the Syrian Foreign Minister the danger of conflict between Syria and Israel? Did he ask him to use his good offices for the release of British citizens imprisoned in Syria and in Lebanon, where Syria has so much influence?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I certainly impressed upon Mr. Shara the need for both sides, Syria as well as Israel, and the other states in the region, to sustain the search for a basis for long-term peace. I also raised with Mr. Shara, specifically, the case of Mr. Alec Collett, and enlisted his continuing help in trying to secure the release of that British citizen along with other hostages held in that country.

Mr. Faulds: In view of the recent re-invasion of Lebanon by Israel—*[Interruption.]* It would be a benefit to the House if occasionally questions could be asked without interventions persistently made from a sedentary position.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am here to look after the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Faulds: Thank you, Sir. Elder statesmen should be treated with respect.

In view of the recent re-invasion of Lebanon by Israel, which uses international terrorism as a continuing policy of state, is it not time that the Government took the initiative in the EEC to get it to abrogate, or at least suspend, its trading and financial agreements with Israel?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman was able to make himself heard. I do not think that, even at his invitation, it would be right to take that step, but I join him in deploring the continuing residual presence of Israeli defence forces, and the security zone, in Lebanon, which is provocative and without justification. I agree that the recent Israeli incursion into Lebanon will not help to meet the legitimate concern expressed on both sides of the House about border security.

Mr. Walters: While it is generally agreed that the failure of King Hussein's courageous initiative has been a grave setback to progress towards peace in the middle east, does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that as the essence of the conflict is about Palestine and Palestinian rights, it would be absurd to try to exclude the legitimate representatives of the Palestinians from any future negotiations?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I join my hon. Friend in regretting the fact that the initiative taken by King Hussein has, so far, led only to the statements that he made about it—quite understandably—in the past week or two. I agree that we must continue to support the Palestinians' right to self-determination. It is not for us to say by whom they should be represented. We do not accept that the Palestine Liberation Organisation is the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, but it should play a part in negotiations. It is above all important—this is the point that King Hussein was pressing—that it should make plain its recognition of the importance of Security Council resolutions 242 and 338, and renounce violence.

Mr. Janner: In talking to the Syrian Foreign Minister, did the right hon. and learned Gentleman raise with him the murder of the mayor of Nablus, for which credit was claimed by two Syrian-backed terrorist organisations? If so, what response did he receive?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I had already made plain—and I make plain again today—the serious view that we take of the tragic death of the mayor of Nablus, Mr. Zafer al-Masri. That brutal murder of a moderate, courageous Palestinian must be seen as a setback to hopes of a just and lasting peace in the middle east. Of course we raised and discussed that matter with Mr. Shara and made plain our abhorrence of that act, which can only damage Palestinian interests. We urged him in that context, and more widely, to end Syrian support to terrorist groups. He made plain his Government's position of opposition to terrorism.

Dr. Blackburn: Will my right hon. and learned Friend kindly take note of the historic, forthcoming Israeli visit of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, who will be the first British Prime Minister in office to visit Israel? Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the future key to peace in that part of the middle east lies in the full implementation and acceptance of the Camp David agreement?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am glad to welcome what my hon. Friend has said about the forthcoming visit of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to Israel, which I know will be welcomed there and supported in this country. I do not think that it would be helpful at this point for me to support this, that or the other of the many principled plans put forward for the solution of the main Arab-Israel problem. The problem is not to define or

redefine principles, but to find effective representation that will bring both sides together in meaningful negotiations to that end.

Mr. Donald Stewart: Is the Foreign Secretary aware that it is unrealistic to demand the renunciation of violence prior to any discussions with the PLO, because if they do that, there is not the slightest chance of getting the Israeli Government to pay any attention to the PLO's legitimate demands?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The right hon. Gentleman is entitled to take that view if he wishes. It is certainly necessary to acknowledge that the renunciation of violence in the context of seeking an end to a dispute of this kind cannot be secured easily. It is necessary to go on pressing the case for violence to be renounced and for the parties to come together on the basis of agreed objectives and principles.

Mr. Cyril D. Townsend: In view of the Prime Minister's forthcoming visit to Israel, may I ask what arrangements will be made for her to be brought into contact with Palestinian viewpoints? What plans are there for her to visit the occupied territories? Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that many people regard it as most important that the visit should be seen to be balanced in its approach?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: Obviously I cannot comment at this stage on the precise details of the plans for my right hon. Friend's visit. I acknowledge, as does my right hon. Friend, the importance for our interest in the problems of the region to be balanced, not only in regard to the visit, but more widely. I remind my hon. Friend that it is only some six months since my right hon. Friend made a visit to Jordan and there saw another aspect of the same question.

Mr. Ernie Ross: Will the Foreign Secretary take the opportunity of the visit of the Prime Minister to Israel to encourage the Palestinians to believe that Britain wants to play a role by ensuring that the Prime Minister makes it clear that when the Foreign Secretary assumes the presidency of the European Council on 1 July, he will continue the long-standing arrangement, which we broke in 1980, of meeting the chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organisation, Yasser Arafat?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I think I am right in saying that since 1976 there has been contact at official level with the Palestine Liberation Organisation. As I have already made clear, we recognise that it will have to be associated with any peace negotiations. Of course, the Palestinians and their interests will have to be taken account of at each stage of all our consideration of the question. That will not be absent from the mind of my right hon. Friend when she goes to Israel.

Mr. Deakins: What views did the Syrian Foreign Minister express to the right hon. and learned Gentleman about the way forward in resolving the Palestinian problem? Did the right hon. and learned Gentleman agree with those views?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I do not think that I am in a position to offer a long exposition of the views of the Syrian Foreign Minister. He gave a long talk yesterday at Chatham House about the matter. The point that I sought to impress upon him is the need on the Arab side to try to secure the involvement of all those countries which in different ways and at different times have expressed an interest in a peaceful solution. That is why we have given encouragement, not merely to the initiative of King Hussein, but to a possible and constructive interest by Israel and have also noted the important initiative by President Mubarak the other day. All the initiatives have to come together and meet a corresponding disposition from the Israeli side. Our effort is to try to promote all those things.

Mr. Anderson: President Assad has recently again called for the tearing up of the Camp David accord and showed himself fundamentally opposed to the Hussein-Mubarak initiative. In view of that, and of the fact that it now seems certain that there will be a change of Prime Minister in Israel, does the Foreign Secretary realistically see any life left in the Hussein initiative? Does he not see the looming confrontation between Syria and Israel on the Golan as the major point of tension in the middle east?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am not seeking from the Dispatch Box to give the impression that all is, or is about to be, sweetness and light. Of course, the House acknowledges, as does King Hussein himself, that his determined efforts to carry forward the peace process with Arafat and the PLO have received a setback. But he remains determined to continue his search for a peaceful settlement. I accept the point made by the hon. Gentleman that some of the observations of President Assad in his recent speech about the need for confrontation and a continued arms struggle are not likely to help that peace process forward. There are plenty of hazards in sight. Without unduly raising expectations, it must be our task to continue to encourage all those who are trying genuinely to advance the peace process.

Mr. Beith: Did the Foreign Secretary find at his meeting with the Syrian Foreign Minister that the Syrians are keen to see British involvement in the peace process? Is that not a particularly useful context in which to stress again the need for Syria to play an active part in stamping out the terrorism which led to Mr. Zafer al-Masri's death, which was greeted with universal grief in the Palestinian community?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: It is absolutely right that we should take this opportunity of stressing to the Syrian Government and the Syrian Foreign Minister not just our abhorrence of that senseless murder but our opposition to terrorism of all kinds from whichever quarter it may come in the Arab-Israeli dispute. We took the opportunity of pressing that point very clearly. The hon. Gentleman, like everyone else concerned, stresses the British role in helping to promote a solution to this problem. I must continually remind people that although we have a real interest, and are willing to play as full a part as we can, it must be essentially for the parties involved in the region to take the crucial steps that are necessary to bring about a solution.

ANC and SWAPO

8 **Mr. Cohen** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what arrangements he has made for the free passage into the United Kingdom of members of the African National Congress and the South-West Africa Peoples' Organisation conducting their business in the United Kingdom.

Mrs. Chalker: Entry clearance visas are issued to representatives of the African National Congress and the South-West Africa Peoples's Organisation in accordance with the terms of the current immigration rules.

Mr. Cohen: Will the Minister undertake to have talks with the Home Secretary to ensure that the Prevention of Terrorism Act is not abused, as it was on 22 September last year when the chief representative of SWAPO sought to enter Britain at Heathrow? Surely we should be supporting the ANC and SWAPO in their struggle against racist domination rather than putting spurious blocks in their way.

Mrs. Chalker: I am aware of the difficulties that Mr. Shapua Kaukungua had in September last year, but what happened then was something that could happen under the prevention of terrorism order to anyone passing through that airport—*[Interruption.]* Hon. Members may laugh, but on one of my recent visits overseas I had all my baggage opened under the terms of that Act.

Mr. Wilkinson: If the Government are sincere in their laudable determination to help to prevent terrorism, could they, as part of the five-nation Contact Group, do everything within their power to ensure that there is not free passage of SWAPO guerrillas—trained, supported and supplied by Cubans in Angola—into South-West Africa?

Mrs. Chalker: We do our best to bring to bear all those influences that would avoid just the situation described by my hon. Friend.

Mr. Meadowcroft: Is the Minister aware that the long progress of African countries towards freedom from white minority rule has often been impeded by the reluctance of the British Government to encourage representatives of the liberation movements to come here for talks on the diplomatic circuit? Will the Minister ensure that this mistake does not occur again in respect of the last remaining white-dominated countries such as Namibia and South Africa? Indeed, will the Government assist their representatives to come here so that they can make proper contacts to help in the process?

Mrs. Chalker: As both my right hon. and learned Friend and I have said, on every occasion when we can promote dialogue we shall do so, but part of that process is the renunciation of violence by whosoever commits it. That is the other part of the balance that we are trying to create. I am quite determined that the dialogue shall continue wherever it can bring about peace.

Human Rights (CSCE)

9. **Mr. David Sumberg** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the United Kingdom delegation to the conference on security and co-operation in Europe meeting in Berne in April will raise the issue of the freedom of individuals to practise their chosen profession without being subjected to religious or racial discrimination.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Tim Renton): Although strictly speaking this issue is outside the mandate for the meeting, we are opposed to discrimination on the grounds of religion and race and will continue to raise this issue on all suitable occasions.

Mr. Sumberg: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his reply and also for the constant pressure that he and his colleagues in the Foreign Office have put on the Soviet Union, which has indirectly contributed to the release of Mr. Shcharansky. Will he make it clear to Mr. Gorbachev on as many occasions as possible that until the Soviet Union can be seen to be observing its own constitution on non-discrimination, it will be difficult for the West to believe that it will honour the agreements that it must enter into for real détente to come about?

Mr. Renton: I thank my hon. Friend for what he has just said. Unfortunately, in the case of Mr. Shchransky, one swallow does not make a summer, and there is as yet very little sign that in its treatment of human rights the new Soviet leadership will be very different from the previous one. But we shall certainly continue to raise this issue on every possible occasion, and the Berne meeting gives us another opportunity to do so.

Mr. James Lamond: If the Minister believes that our record is clean on this matter, will he raise with the West German Government the long-standing question of the berufsverbot—the law under which civil servants are prevented from holding professional positions because of what are usually Left-wing views—which is in my view a sign of Fascism creeping back into West Germany?

Mr. Renton: That seems to be above all a matter for the German Government. However, the Berne meeting, to which the question refers, is specifically concerned with human contacts and such matters as family re-unification, about which we shall wish to raise some serious cases.

Mr. Dickens: When my hon. Friend talks about racial and religious matters at the meeting, will he be sure to point out that where there are religious differences and customs, people will be expected to observe the laws of the country in which they reside?

Mr. Renton: I return to the fact that the Berne meeting, about which the question is concerned, is about such matters as travel, emigration and family re-unification. It does not cover a wide area, but I hope that there will be useful contacts on the issues that are covered by basket 3 of the Helsinki final act.

Mr. George Robertson: On the subject of the Berne meeting, may I draw the Minister's attention to the speech made by Mr. Gorbachev in Moscow last week—I had the distinction, and stamina, of listening to all five hours of it—and particularly the part about the interdependence of the world, which abandons the Soviet Government's previous position of irreconcilable camps in the world? Does he agree that that augurs well for continuing dialogue and discussion in the CSCE process? May we have some news about any progress that is being made in those talks?

Mr. Renton: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his patience and ability to listen to all five hours of Mr. Gorbachev's speech at the party congress. There is often a sense of frustration about the CSCE process, but it is worth reminding the House that it is a forum at which the important question of human rights can be discussed. I often think that it is interesting that Labour Members, who are so trusting of the Soviet Government regarding arms control, put down early-day motions about Soviet abuse of human rights, although the same Soviet leaders are involved in both issues.

African National Congress

12. **Mr. Caborn** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will give an account of the circumstances appertaining to, and the discussion during recent meetings between, the African National Congress and representatives of Her Majesty's Government.

Mrs. Chalker: We arranged the meeting in Lusaka on 3 February between a senior official of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and representatives of the African National Congress to reinforce the urgent need for dialogue within South Africa, and the general suspension of violence called for in the Commonwealth accord.

Mr. Caborn: I welcome that statement. I also welcome the hon. Lady's recent speech in which she called for the unconditional release of Nelson Mandela and said that that would show to the world that South Africa meant business. Does she not find a twinge of inconsistency in calling for that release, but being unwilling to meet representatives of the African National Congress in London?

Mrs. Chalker: There is absolutely no inconsistency. We have always said that we believe that the unconditional release of Nelson Mandela would constitute a major act of national reconciliation in South Africa, and could provide the impetus for genuine dialogue for a peaceful settlement. We have stressed the importance of that move to the South African Government. In the same way, the official level contacts with the ANC are also to promote dialogue and to get it to renounce violence, and so to bring a peaceful end to the present awful position in South Africa.

Mr. Forth: Will my hon. Friend confirm that meeting ANC representatives in no way condones or supports the techniques of terror that they are prone to use in South Africa? What would be her reaction if a foreign country approached Her Majesty's Government to make representations on the legitimate imprisonment of one of our citizens?

Mrs. Chalker: My hon. Friend is right. In no way do we condone violent behaviour. However, I must tell him that when a foreign Government approach us, we consider each approach on the facts as they are known to us. One cannot give a blanket response to cover the wide variety of approaches with which we must deal from many different countries.

Falkland Islands

13. **Dr. Marek** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with European Economic Community partners concerning the United Kingdom's attitude to negotiations with Argentina over the Falkland Islands; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: As I explained to the House on 18 December 1985, our EC partners are briefed, as appropriate, on the international aspects of our Falklands policy, bilaterally and within the framework of European political co-operation. We have ensured that they are aware of our commitment to the Falkland Islanders, and of our desire for better relations with Argentina.

Dr. Marek: Is the Minister aware that one step along the path towards normalising relations with Argentina would be to end the unprincipled and extremely damaging fishing free-for-all in the waters round the Falkland Islands? Is he aware that many hon. Members, the islanders and Argentina want it ended? If he cannot get anywhere at the Food and Agriculture Organisation talks in Rome, will he do something himself quickly?

Mr. Eggar: We share the hon. Gentleman's anxiety about fishing off the Falklands. As he knows, we are actively pursuing efforts to achieve agreement on multilateral arrangements for fisheries under the auspices of the FAO. We have urged other Governments to co-operate with the FAO, and we were heartened by the signs that Argentina is ready to support the FAO initiative.

British Leyland

3.31 pm

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and President of the Board of Trade (Mr. Paul Channon): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I wish to make a statement.

As I informed the House on 19 February, an invitation was extended to interested parties to declare by 4 March a firm intention to make a bid for one or more of the Land Rover, Freight Rover, Leyland Trucks and related businesses.

I can now report to the House that appropriate declarations have been made to BL's bankers by Schroder Ventures on behalf of some institutions and some members of BL management in respect of Land Rover, Range Rover and Freight Rover; by Lonrho in respect of Land Rover and Range Rover; and by Aveling Barford in respect of Land Rover only. General Motors has also confirmed its intention to make a bid for Land Rover, Range Rover, Freight Rover and Leyland Trucks.

The Laird Group and Aveling Barford are each in discussion with BL regarding the acquisition of Leyland Bus, for which proposals on behalf of some members of the management are also expected. Discussions in relation to Leyland Bus are taking place over a slightly different timescale from those concerning other Land Rover-Leyland businesses. I shall make a further statement to the House on these in due course.

The BL board is giving careful consideration to all the proposals received on or before 4 March and I hope to have its recommendations shortly. The board and the Government remain anxious to end the present uncertainty surrounding the businesses as soon as possible in the interests of the companies, management and work force and dealers and suppliers.

I take the opportunity to inform the House of a forthcoming change in the chairmanship of BL. Sir Austin Bide's appointment as chairman of BL was extended in late 1984 on the basis that he would continue as chairman until a convenient moment for his retirement was reached. Sir Austin has kindly agreed to remain as chairman until decisions have been made on the future of the main Land Rover-Leyland businesses. That will represent the start of a new phase in the development of BL and, on my nomination, the BL board proposes to invite Mr. Graham Day, at present chairman of British Shipbuilders, to join the board and to become full-time chairman of BL at a date to be determined. I express the Government's thanks, and add my warmest personal tribute, to Sir Austin, under whose leadership BL has achieved notable progress.

I am appointing Mr. Phillip Hares, the present deputy chief executive and board member for finance of the corporation, to succeed Mr. Graham Day as chairman of British Shipbuilders.

Mr. John Smith (Monklands, East): As this tangled web becomes more and more confusing and complex, is it not clear that the Government should never have departed from the concept of British Leyland remaining a integrated and public sector operation strongly supported by the British Government?

Will the Secretary of State confirm that the Government approached General Motors as long ago as April 1984, and for 18 months General Motors has been able to consider and negotiate its position, while all other bidders have been given little more than 20 days? Does that not show that the Government were already predisposed to sell the lot to General Motors? In view of the representations made to the Minister of State by my right hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) and my hon. Friends the Members for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) and for Preston (Mr. Thorne), why is it that Lancashire Enterprises Ltd. does not appear in the list of those permitted to make a bid for parts of the operation?

What will the time scale be? Is it correct, as is widely rumoured, that the Government will impose a time scale whereby the whole operation has to be completed by the end of this month? Given the fact that the Secretary of State confirms that the only bidder for Leyland Vehicles is General Motors, has that not put the Government in a hopeless position whereby General Motors will be able to insist on acquiring Land Rover as a condition for acquiring Leyland Vehicles? How do any sensible Government put themselves in such a hopeless bargaining position?

After this asset-stripping operation is completed, what will the new chairman be chairman of? Should he not be called chairman of Austin Rover? The Secretary of State will have seen a report on the back page of the *Financial Times* today, of a speech by Mr. Bob Lutz, chairman of Ford of Geneva. The article says:

> "Ford was willing to restart talks about a possible takeover of Austin Rover . . . He said the Government had panicked recently when it told Ford to end the talks".

What is the Secretary of State's comment on that? In view of that ominous statement, will he give us a crystal-clear guarantee that, throughout the lifetime of this Government, there will be no talks by the Government, or by British Leyland at their instructions, with Ford about the Austin Rover Group?

Mr. Channon: I shall try to deal with the points that the right hon. and learned Gentleman has raised. What he said about selling is unreasonable. It has been known for many years that the Government had every intention of privatising British Leyland and its component parts. That has been known ever since the last general election. There is no question of reopening talks with Ford or Austin Rover; and any rumours to that effect I disown and reject. I am satisfied that bidders had adequate time to put in a firm indication of interests. We shall study them carefully on their merits, and there is no question of any member of the Government having made up their minds before these careful considerations have taken place. I assure the House that that is the case. [HON. MEMBERS: "That is not what the Prime Minister said."] That is indeed what my right hon. Friend said.

We shall consider carefully the indications of interest that have come in. As to Lancashire Enterprises Ltd., people from it had meetings with my hon. Friend the Minister of State early yesterday, and every assistance was given to it to try to get it into a position to make a firm indication of interest, but I understand that by last night it had not given any such indications.

Mr. Michael Grylls (Surrey, North-West): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, whatever the outcome of the consideration of these different bids, parts of BL are now desirable packages and it is a good thing to have several different bidders so that one can choose from them? Does he accept that the Government are no longer a good owner because these businesses need considerable sums of capital

investment if they are to keep up with the international market, and the Government will always have more pressing demands on their money for things such as schools and hospitals, and industries in which they have an interest will always come bottom of the list? The sooner these firms are returned to the private sector, the better for the firms, the better for production and the better for the people who work in those firms.

Mr. Channon: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. He has made three very important points. First, he draws attention to the fact that, under this Government, British Leyland is in a much better state than it was when the Opposition had control of it. Secondly, it is quite true that large sums of capital investment are required in various parts of British Leyland if they are to be in a position to compete in the long term. Thirdly, what we are trying to do and what we shall continue to try to do is to secure the long-term commercial future of these industries and the jobs of the people who work in them.

Mr. David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): Having talked yesterday to both the management and the shop stewards at Land Rover, may I put a question to the Secretary of State that I have asked repeatedly both of him and of the Prime Minister? What formal consultations will there be with the 8,000 employees of Land Rover about their future before decisions are made? We appreciate that in terms of making a fast buck or short-term employment the case for selling the whole organisation to General Motors must seem attractive to the Government, but in terms of the long run—the design, manufacturing and engineering capacity of this country—surely it is worth while to take a little longer and to try to find British-based solutions for each division of the company?

Mr. Channon: On the right hon. Gentleman's last question, I think I am right in saying that Mr. Andrews makes it clear in his letter that he is anxious for a quick solution because he thinks that it is very damaging if this uncertainty drags on. I cannot therefore agree with the right hon. Gentleman that we should take a long time. We want to have a reasonable period in which to consider the indications of interest that have been expressed and to put forward proposals that meet the best long-term interests of the companies concerned. There the right hon. Gentleman and I are at one. Consultation with the work force is a matter for the companies concerned. They tell me that they are keeping their work force informed continually and that they will continue to do so. My hon. Friend the Minister for Industry has received deputations from the work force and from the trade unions, and we shall be delighted to continue to do so.

Mr. Hal Miller (Bromsgrove): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that not only was it the long-standing policy of the Government to return these businesses to private ownership once they were profitable but that that was also the declared policy of the British Leyland board and of the subsidiary boards? Will he also confirm that we should welcome the fact that these enterprises have become successful, that a return to the private sector is now possible and that the Government's decision will be based upon the best interests of those who work for and supply those companies?

Mr. Channon: My hon. Friend is entirely right. As I have explained to the House on a number of occasions, the BL board agrees with that policy. It is entirely right that these subsidiaries should be returned to the private sector. If the Opposition had been in power, the companies certainly would not be in a profitable state.

Mr. Terry Davis (Birmingham, Hodge Hill): Will the Secretary of State confirm that Freight Rover has consistently made a profit on the manufacture and sale of Sherpa vans in this country, whereas General Motors is making a loss on its van operations in this country? Will he also confirm that Freight Rover is now selling more vans than General Motors is selling in this country? Does he agree that for General Motors to take over Freight Rover would be for a loser to take over a winner?

Mr. Channon: I had better give the hon. Gentleman the figures for 1983 and 1984 for Land Rover (UK) Ltd. I can give him the published figures for the first half of 1985; I do not have the later figures. In 1983, Land Rover (UK) Ltd.—which includes Land Rover, Freight Rover and parts and equipment—made a loss of £14·5 million. In 1984 there was a small profit of £2·4 million. In the first half of 1985 the profit, before interest and tax, was £5·7 million.

Mr. Davis: Freight Rover.

Mr. Channon: Of course, one has to split the figures between Freight Rover and Land Rover. I agree with the hon. Gentleman to the extent that, in so far as one can appropriately work out the interest payments and apportion them correctly, Freight Rover is more profitable than Land Rover.

Mr. John Mark Taylor (Solihull): In considering the options for the future of Land Rover, will my right hon. Friend take all factors into account and not merely the biggest bid?

Mr. Channon: Yes, I have explained to the House that we are trying to seek the best long-term future for the companies and, as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said yesterday, for the jobs of those concerned.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): May I ask the Secretary of State about the interests of the American Government in this sale? Have the Government been in touch with the United States Government and is it a fact that General Motors has been able to say to the British Government that, if it is allowed to acquire parts of British Leyland, the United States will place orders with British Leyland following the sale and that that is the real reason why the sale is going through?

Mr. Channon: No, Sir; I repudiate what the right hon. Gentleman says.

Mr. David Madel (Bedfordshire, South-West): In relation to the bid from General Motors, can my right hon. Friend assure me that the Government will be seeking clear and firm assurances from General Motors on the future of jobs and investment in the Bedford truck plant in Dunstable before deciding whether to accept GM's bid? There is great anxiety in Dunstable, for obvious reasons.

Mr. Channon: Yes, I understand my hon. Friend's concern, and naturally I shall want to discuss that matter before coming to any decision. Indeed, we should discuss what will happen in either eventuality — whether the General Motors bid goes through or whether it does not.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Is it true that the chief executive of the Laird Group has written to

[Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours]

the chairman of British Leyland saying that the only basis on which Laird is willing to take over Leyland Bus is if the two plants at Workington and Lowestoft are closed and the Farington plant reduced but retained? Will the Secretary of State rule out that option today at the Dispatch Box? Will he also give me the assurance that in the event that the management buy-out is submitted and is fully funded, it will be given the maximum consideration by the Department, but that if it is not fully funded it will still be treated as a new corporate plan and an alternative option for a Leyland Bus reporting direct to the Leyland board and being retained in public ownership?

Mr. Channon: On the hon. Gentleman's last point, we shall naturally consider any properly funded management buy-out proposals from the management of Leyland Bus. Indeed, I say in my statement that we expect that proposals may come. We shall naturally consider them carefully.

I understand that Laird has given a preliminary view of its proposals to British Leyland. Nothing final has been proposed and we shall consider that on its merit on the same criteria — what will be best for the long-term commercial future of the company.

Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Will my right hon. Friend accept that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Solihull (Mr. Taylor) said, when we come to a solution as to how the Land Rover problem in particular is to be dealt with, we shall not be preoccupied with making a quick buck—the best sum—but what is in the best long-term interests of the motor manufacturing companies of Britain?

Bearing in mind the Government's preoccupation with those over the other side of the Atlantic solving our problems, was there no British industrialist who would have had the confidence of the manufacturing entities in Britain who could have been appointed instead of yet another person from across the Atlantic? There are good people in Britain who have the confidence of the manufacturing companies in the west midlands and the whole of Britain. Why always overseas?

Mr. Channon: I am rather surprised by my hon. Friend's last point. Mr. Day is a British citizen and he comes from Canada. That has not usually debarred people from appointment in Britain. As to my hon. Friend's first point, I can confirm that we are looking at the long-term interests of the companies concerned.

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): As to the work forces and the managements of the various parts of BL, is it a question of management informing the work forces about developments or consulting the work forces about developments?

Mr. Channon: The management and the work force must carry out the normal procedures in cases of this kind. I am extremely anxious, as my hon. Friend the Minister of State has shown, to receive deputations, if they are appropriate, from any of the trade unions that wish to come and see me and make their case direct to the Government.

Mr. Richard Page (Hertfordshire, South-West): May I endorse the calls by my hon. Friends for a long-term solution and ask my right hon. Friend to ignore the siren voices for short-term expediency? Has not the way in which the Opposition have tangled the publicity on this matter added to the time constraints faced by my right hon. Friend in finding the right solution and restoring market confidence to British Leyland as soon as possible?

Mr. Channon: My hon. Friend is entirely right. It is essential to bring these talks to a reasonably early conclusion after full consideration has been given to these matters. I repeat what I have told other hon. Members: we are anxious to achieve the solution that is best in the long-term interests of those in the company.

Mr. Stan Thorne (Preston): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware, following the meeting yesterday morning with the Minister, that Lancashire Enterprises Ltd. sent a telex to Hill Samuel stating its intention to make a bid? Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that that has not happened?

Mr. Channon: My information is that the company had not, by the close of play, expressed a firm indication

Hon. Members: Play?

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Public schools coming out now.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Secretary of State.

Mr. Skinner: The right hon. Gentleman should declare his innings.

Mr. Channon: I shall answer the question if I am allowed to do so. My hon. Friend the Minister saw a deputation yesterday led by the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw). The deputation was given a full opportunity to declare a firm indication of interest but it did not do so.

Mr. John Carlisle (Luton, North): Will my right hon. Friend accept that there is some significance in the fact that only General Motors has bid for the whole package, including the loss-making aspect of Leyland Trucks? Will my right hon. Friend refute the allegations by the Opposition and by my right hon. Friends the Members for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) and for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) that General Motors is not a good employer? We in Luton refute those allegations and look forward to the amalgamation of the two companies.

Mr. Channon: I am sure that General Motors has been an excellent employer in the Bedford region. I think that that is well recognised.

Mr. Skinner: What is the right hon. Gentleman's average?

Mr. Channon: Very bad, I would say. My hon. Friend the Member for Luton, North (Mr. Carlisle) is quite right. We must consider what will be best in the long-term interests of the truck industry.

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware of the overwhelming opposition of trade unionists inside Leyland and of working people in Coventry, the midlands and elsewhere to selling off to private profiteers, whether American or British, any part or all of Leyland? Will the right hon. Gentleman get in touch with the Leyland board and condemn its actions in the past two weeks in attempting to soften up the work force by dismissing two Transport and General Workers Union conveners at Land Rover, Solihull and Unipart, Coventry for their stated opposition to privatisation?

Mr. Channon: I regret that I am unlikely to be able to please the hon. Gentleman in conducting these negotiations. I think that an early-day motion has been tabled about the point he raised. That is another matter.

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): Can my right hon. Friend give the House an unequivocal assurance that the Government would prefer a British solution?

Mr. Channon: We want a solution that is in the best long-term interests of those involved.

Mr. Norman Atkinson (Tottenham): If the bid from General Motors for the Leyland heavy vehicle division is rejected, what contingency plans have the Government made for heavy vehicle manufacture?

Mr. Channon: We must first of all consider all the indications of interest that have come in, and then decide what to do.

Mr. Den Dover (Chorley): Will my right hon. Friend pay particular attention, if the truck division is separated from the bus division, to the 2,000 workers at Multipart, Chorley, which is a highly computerised, extremely efficient and profitable operation? The workers want to ensure that they can service both Leyland Bus and Leyland Trucks and other manufacturers in future.

Mr. Channon: I will certainly bear in mind what my hon. Friend has said in his important intervention.

Mr. Doug Hoyle (Warrington, North): Will the Secretary of State accept that he is not playing a cricket match and that this matter affects people's livelihoods? The hon. Gentleman said that he wants a quick decision, so will he give us the actual timetable as that is very important? Will the right hon. Gentleman bear in mind that the employees of British Leyland have no confidence in being informed by a management that previously denied that any talks were taking place? It is not information but consultation that is needed. Can he say what wages will be paid to the employees? The employees should have a say in the matter when their jobs are at risk.

Mr. Channon: I have already answered the hon. Gentleman's last point in the reply that I gave to his hon. Friend the Member for Warley, East (Mr. Faulds). In reply to his point about the speed of the decision, I have tried to explain to the House on a number of occasions that we want the quickest conclusion possible that is consistent with arriving at a decision after a detailed examination of the indications of interest that have been put forward. It is in no one's interest that the matter should be dragged out. I cannot today say what the timetable is, as a detailed study has not yet been made of the indications that have come forward.

Mr. John Stokes (Halesowen and Stourbridge): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the main concern among the hard-headed workers in BL is the security of their jobs? They do not like the politicking on the Opposition benches. Is my right hon. Friend further aware that not all BL employees and BL suppliers wish to remain pensioners of the taxpayer?

Mr. Channon: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's comments, and I agree with them.

Mr. Robin Corbett (Birmingham, Erdington): What time scale has the Secretary of State given to the British Leyland board? Is the Secretary of State aware of the complaints from bodies such as the West Midlands enterprise board that they were denied access to information from British Leyland? Will he ensure that all those who need information to which General Motors has had access for about 18 months, will now get that information?

Mr. Channon: I am assured that anyone who has asked for information has received it. I have already tried several times to answer the question about the time scale. We shall be as quick as we can but the matter will require some study and the House would expect that proper study would be made before proposals were put forward.

Mr. Robert Adley (Christchurch): On that last point, is my right hon. Friend aware that I was informed this morning that Lonhro was unable to have meetings with the management of BL, was unable to meet the work force and was not supplied with the information which it would have normally have expected to receive if it was to put in a bid? Will my right hon. Friend give the House a simple, straightforward assurance that what I have just said is wrong and that all the bidders were provided with precisely the same information as was available to General Motors?

Mr. Channon: Lonhro, and everyone else who asked, was given a packet of information which I am assured by my advisers, as well as by the advisers to BL, was normal practice. Lonhro has made a firm indication of interest and we shall treat that seriously and consider the proposals.

Mr. Ian Wrigglesworth (Stockton, South): Does the Secretary of State accept that the motor industry plays a central and strategic role in manufacturing industry in any country in the western world? Will he therefore give us an assurance that at least one motor manufacturer in this country will remain under the control of people in this country so that that strategic role can be properly performed?

Mr. Channon: I have already told the House, in answer to the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), that there is no question of any talks going on in connection, for example, with Ausin Rover. I think that that answers the hon. Gentleman's point.

Mr. Alan Howarth (Stratford-upon-Avon): Does my right hon. Friend accept that those who are prepared to be rational on this subject are actually much more numerous than he may have supposed at times in recent weeks and today, that they agree with him that British Leyland ought to be in the private sector and that, if it is to be successful there, it will need access to substantial capital and to major markets? If British participants are credibly able to offer those benefits, so much the better. Would my right hon. Friend agree that last-ditch little Englander attitudes threaten jobs and the future prosperity of British Leyland?

Mr. Channon: I am sure that my hon. Friend is right. We must have a solution that takes account of the points that he has made and one that is in the interests of those who will work in the industries and so keep a viable industry in this country.

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): Is the Secretary of State aware that, under the chairmanship of Graham Day, more than 20,000 employees of British Shipbuilders lost their jobs and that, far from giving BL employees confidence in the future, Graham Day's appointment alone will strike fear into their hearts? Will the Secretary of State

[Mr. Harry Ewing]

confirm that the bid from General Motors includes a substantial sum for the immediate declaration of 1,000 redundancies in BL and that GM is on public record as saying that 1,000 people will lose their jobs almost on the day that it takes over BL?

Mr. Channon: None of the indications of interest have been examined in detail, but that is clearly a point that one would wish to consider in detail with anyone who comes forward with suggestions. I am surprised at the hon. Gentleman's comments about Graham Day, as he was appointed by the Labour Government in the mid-1970s. The hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer) said of Graham Day:

"He was well thought of on Merseyside, particularly in Cammell Laird. He did a first-class job."—[*Official Report*, 9 December 1976; Vol. 923, c. 629.]

I can give quotations from any number of Labour Members if the House wishes.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: I will call those hon. Members who have been rising in their places.

Mr. Tony Favell (Stockport): If the talks between Austin Rover and Ford are truly dead, will my right hon. Friend tell the board and workers of Austin Rover to get their fingers out because in the past 25 years British car manufacturers' share of the home market has dropped from 90 per cent. to 34 per cent.? Does he agree that if yesterday's prophecy by the chairman of Ford (UK) turns out to be right and the abandonment of the talks turns out to be a tragedy for Britain leading to widespread job losses and Austin Rover ends up in the lap of Honda of Japan, a lot of people will have a lot to answer for, including Members of Parliament who blocked that deal?

Mr. Channon: I agree to some extent with my hon. Friend—at least to the extent that it is exceedingly important for Austin Rover to increase its share of the United Kingdom and European car markets. It has under 4 per cent. of the European car market. I very much hope that it will achieve that increase. It has already made some improvement and I hope that that will continue.

Mr. Eddie Loyden (Liverpool, Garston): Will the Secretary of State resist making quick decisions on this matter and give careful consideration to the long-term future of the British car manufacturing industry? Will he now respond to the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington, North (Mr. Hoyle) and say what weight he believes should be given to the opinion of the work force about the future of the industry in which they work?

Mr. Channon: We will, of course, give careful consideration. We must try to achieve reasonably speedy but careful consideration. The House must understand that the two aspects are not necessarily inconsistent. I hope that the closest talks will take place with the work force. Indeed, the companies concerned tell me that they are engaged in talking to the work force, and my colleagues and I are very happy to receive any further deputations.

Sir Paul Bryan (Boothferry): Can my right hon. Friend explain why Labour Members are happy to implore the Japanese Nissan company to set up in this country but will have nothing to do with co-operation with American companies which have already supplied far greater and better employment than BL in the past 20 years?

Mr. Channon: It is impossible for me to explain the workings of Labour Members' minds.

Mr. Bill Michie (Sheffield, Heeley): Have BL workers and ex-BL workers who have a share interest in BL been properly and legally consulted in this matter?

Mr. Channon: I understand that all legal requirements are taking place. Now that the indications of interest are in, it is essential that the usual procedures be followed.

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): What interest has Aveling Barford shown in Leyland Bus and how is that company's interest connected with the Laird bid?

Mr. Channon: So far, we have had only preliminary indications from Aveling Barford. Subject to correction, I do not think that there is any connection with the Laird Group. I will certainly take advice on that, but I am not making a statement about Leyland Bus today.

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): Just as BL came into the public sector largely by accident, are we not in danger of getting rid of it by accident? Is the Secretary of State bound to accept the views of the BL board, as he said in his statement? What is wrong with workers having a vote in their own and their families' future?

Lastly, will the Secretary of State place in the Library a copy of every statement made by Ministers since the last general election which could be taken by business men outside as an invitation to the effect that BL or parts of it were up for auction? Where is the evidence for that and can it be placed in the Library?

Mr. Channon: My own statements in the past month would fill a book, so anxious has the House been to hear from me in the past few weeks. The House knows that we have always made it clear that in our view the best future for the car industry and other industries is a return to the private sector, which is far better for them than the public sector.

Rate Support Grant

4.5 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mrs. Angela Rumbold): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement.

The House will be pleased to know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment was yesterday able to tell the local authority associations that he could guarantee that £500 million of grant would be available to be recycled in 1986-87 and that authorities would be able to take this into account in fixing lower precepts and rates.

As the House will recall, in the rate support grant debate on 20 January my right hon. Friend explained that if local authorities budgeted to spend more next year than we allowed for in the RSG settlement the grant forfeited by overspenders would go into a pool which would then be recycled to all authorities. He illustrated the grant gains to authorities if the pool were £400 million. Those figures could only be illustrative at that stage, because they depended on authorities' budget decisions.

This week, in the light of the latest figures available, we are in a position to go much firmer than that. It is clear that the pool of grant to be recycled will be some £500 million. This means that the grant gains will be bigger than those illustrated in January and that authorities will get more grant than they have assumed. Moreover, to avoid all doubts the Government are prepared formally to guarantee that £500 million of grant will be recycled. My Department has written to all authorities telling them the amount of extra grant that they will receive from that amount of recycling in addition to their grant entitlement under the RSG settlement announced in December. I am placing a copy of the table in the Library.

Councils will now know the size of their grant entitlement more clearly and this will allow them to make a lower call on their ratepayers. Where the rate making has not been completed, I hope that hon. Members will urge their local authorities to revise their rating plans in the light of these figures.

My right hon. Friend wrote to the local authority associations as soon as he was in a position to confirm the level of recycled grant that would be available. Local authorities are now making their rating and precepting decisions, and it was essential to provide them with this information immediately. I am sure that all hon. Members will agree that rate increases should be no higher than absolutely necessary.

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): Will the Minister confirm that no new extra money is involved in the statement, and that since the abolition of targets last July every local authority treasurer has been aware that a sum of this size would be available for recycling? If there is any substance in the statement, why have the Government waited until most shire counties have set rates for 1986-87?

Is the Minister aware that, so far, Conservative shire counties have increased their rates by far more than Labour shires have done? Is she aware that Kent is raising its rates by 13 per cent., East Sussex by 19·9 per cent., Dorset by 20 per cent., and Buckinghamshire by 30 per cent.? Does she expect any shire authority which has set its rate to change its decision now, and, if so, by how much?

As this is supposed to help lower spending authorities, will the Minister explain why, of the 21 authorities shown in the tables to receive absolutely nothing, nine are Conservative-controlled, including authorities such as Hillingdon, Westminster, South Bucks, Chiltern, Elmbridge, and Epsom and Ewell? Why are those authorities to receive nothing?

Will the Minister confirm that the sums specified in the tables are gross figures and take no account of what has already been lost? As the sums are supposed to be guaranteed, what happens if the authorities spend over the budget assumptions on which they are made? Will they get the money anyway?

Lastly, is the Minister aware that yesterday's announcement and today's statement are no more than a cheap and highly misleading public relations stunt by Ministers who have been panicked by high rate rises in Tory shires and by the financial uncertainty and chaos that they have created in Labour and Conservative authorities alike?

Mrs. Rumbold: I am surprised to hear the hon. Member speaking in such terms. I should have thought that he would have the grace to welcome the new announcement simply because it gives local authorities a greater certainty. That is a rather poor way to respond to news which is important to local councils, especially when they are about to go before their ratepayers to make this announcement.

The answer to the hon. Gentleman's question about the shire counties is that there is still time for them to reconsider their rate levels. In the light of this new information, one hopes that those shire counties which have taken a pessimistic view on what their grant entitlement, through recycling, might have been will reconsider the submissions that they have made. There is still time for the shire counties to do that.

I believe that many local authorities will welcome today's statement, and I trust that most will not share the pessimistic and uncharitable view of the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw).

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I propose to give preference to those Members who were not called on 28 January. I said that I would do this.

Mr. Allan Roberts (Bootle): Is the Minister aware that not only have some of the Tory shire counties set their rates without taking account of this flowback money, but that some local authorities decided to organise their budgets to take account of moneys which they thought they might get?

The Government have just come to the rescue of local authorities such as Sefton, which, until today's statement, have made a deficit budget. Sefton was set to "do a Liverpool" and break the law. Is the Minister aware that this miserly amount of money will not make a significant difference, because Sefton will still have a 26 to 30 per cent. rate increase? All the rates will go up by massive amounts on Merseyside, and that is a direct consequence of the cost of abolishing Merseyside county council.

Mrs. Rumbold: I am aware, and I think my right hon. Friend is aware, that some local authorities' treasurers were advising considerable caution about the money which my right hon. Friend said was recycled money. That is one

[Mrs. Rumbold]

reason why some local authorities were taking a slightly pessimistic view. For those local authorities which were proposing to make a higher rate than they had hoped to make this announcement will make all the difference to what they do, and indeed it has been greatly welcomed by them.

Mr. Ian Gow (Eastbourne): Is my hon. Friend aware that her statement will be widely welcomed on these Benches? The warm welcome that I give to her statement is coupled with a question: what will happen next year? The way in which the announcement has been made and the timing of it—the fact that we are told on 5 March that there is to be a change in the settlement for the coming year—is the reverse of perfect.

Mrs. Rumbold: I understand the difficulties with which some councils have been presented. My right hon. Friend had a greater awareness of the amount of money that he hoped to find in the recycling pool because of information sent in daily of budgets set and estimates announced. That is why we have been a little late. However, I understand the point that my hon. Friend has made. I shall relay that message and take note of it in the future.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): First, will the Minister explain why the announcement was made outside the House before being made in the Chamber? Secondly, will the Minister explain how it is possible for those counties which have already set their rates to do anything to take into account the figures announced today? Thirdly, will the Minister explain how it is possible to justify the decision by her right hon. Friend only two months ago that the average rate increase would be 7 to 9 per cent. when we now know that many Conservative-controlled counties have set rate increases of 30 per cent.?

Lastly, will the Minister explain why the Government believe that they can change the rules of the game at this late stage? In January the Government did not suggest with any certainty that they would so so. Are the Government fully aware that it takes more than a matter of minutes for local authorities to recast their budgets, even if they have not set their rates by today?

Mrs. Rumbold: It was regarded as important that local authorities, many of which were last night in the process of starting to make their rate settlements, should have the information as quickly as possible. That was my right hon. Friend's decision. The information was given to the local authorities because of that decision, and was brought to the House as quickly as possible.

A number of shire counties are setting their rates to spend 10 per cent. more. That is not welcomed by my right hon. Friend or, indeed, by his colleagues. It is sad, and it is to be deprecated that these local authorities are setting their rates quite so high. As the deadline for authorities to set their precept is Monday, we hope that those authorities which have already set their rates will take the opportunity to reopen negotiations when they learn of the substantial sums of money that will come to them in grant. It is possible for them to do that.

I must reiterate to the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) that this is information that local authorities will welcome. If the information is a little late the Government regret that, but it is better for the local authorities to have this information at this stage than not at all.

Sir Ian Gilmour (Chesham and Amersham): Any increase in money is welcome, but will my hon. Friend clarify her statement? Will she confirm that the difference between what she has said today and what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said in January is £100 million? That will make a difference in Buckinghamshire of about £1 million, but, compared with the £26 million which the Government have already robbed from Buckinghamshire, that is not a large sum. As the shire counties must increase their rates because of Government policies, does not my hon. Friend think it wrong for her not to regret that?

Mrs. Rumbold: Buckinghamshire is now certain to receive £7,403,000, which will make a difference to the county's rate making. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has always taken the view that local authorities should take care to study the hopes and expectations of central Government expenditure plans when setting their rates. We had hoped that local authorities would be careful to ensure that they did not exceed the Government's expenditure plans.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels (Leicester, East): I welcome the news that £8·5 million extra recycled grant will be given to the county of Leicestershire and hope that Leicestershire county council will reduce the 27 per cent. increase in its rate, but will my hon. Friend explain why Leicester city, which has increased its rates by 80 per cent., will be given an additional £431,000? It is the greatest candidate for being rate-capped.

Mrs. Rumbold: I understand my hon. Friend's position on his local authority of Leicester city. However, recycled grant has to be given even-handedly across the country, otherwise the system will collapse. I sympathise with my hon. Friend, but I hope that he will go back to his constituency and beseech the council to be far more responsible in its attitude towards its ratepayers. It is the business ratepayer who will suffer most because of the exorbitant 80 per cent. rate increase.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith (Wealden): I join my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow) in welcoming the Minister's statement. Will she tell us how much East Sussex will gain? What advice will she offer to the leader of the East Sussex county council, which has already made its budget?

Mrs. Rumbold: East Sussex will get £7·432 million. My advice to the leader of the East Sussex council, who is a friend and a well respected council leader, is that if he is so minded, he may like to call a council meeting before Monday and adjust the precept. That is perfectly possible.

Sir Peter Hordern (Horsham): Does my hon. Friend agree that, although what she has announced is an improvement, there must be a better way in which to handle our rate support grant system? Would it not be a much better system if it allowed local authorities which spend less than their grant-related expenditure assessments to get more, and those who spend more than the Goverment think they should to get less grant?

Mrs. Rumbold: I understand the logic of what my hon. Friend says, but the system by which we allocate grant is national. GREAs are made on national expenditure notions, so it is rather difficult to adjust the figures as I suspect my hon. Friend would like, which is in essence to play balances against and for in such a way as would be inequitable across the country. We have to allocate grant as fairly as possible. We all agree that that is right.

Mr. Clement Freud (Cambridgeshire, North-East): Does the Minister agree that, although she regrets the rate increases in the shire counties, it was the rate support grant legislation which caused an increase of more than 15 per cent. in Cambridgeshire? Is she aware that if one quantifies her statement, one finds that the Cambridgeshire rate, which is £1·94, can now go down to £1·92½—or could do had it not set a precept last week? Does she agree that good management in local government depends on planning, and that that is impossible if the goal posts are moved while the game is in action? Will she at least give the House a promise that West Derbyshire and Ryedale will not have an extra rate support change before the by-elections?

Mrs. Rumbold: I prefer to ignore the hon. Gentleman's latter remark, as I do not think that it is worth answering. Cambridgeshire is a Liberal-Social Democratic alliance-controlled council, and it has chosen to raise its rate by a disgraceful 33 per cent. this year. That is unnecessary. If the council had examined its expenditure carefully rather than played with figures and toyed with ratepayers, it could have kept its rates far lower. It has set a very high rate. I hope that it will take this opportunity to rethink the position, for the sake of all of its ratepayers.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I said earlier that I would try to call those hon. Members who had been rising regularly. I shall do my best to get everybody in.

Mr. Colin Shepherd (Hereford): Does my hon. Friend agree that there will be a temptation for authorities which have set their precepts without taking account of the possibility of a recycling grant? For example, Liberal-SDP-led shire counties such as Cambridgeshire, might be tempted to put that grant in the bank in balances and not reflect it in a reduction in the rate precept this year. Will my hon. Friend publish a list for each local authority which has set a precept showing what would be possible if it recycled the grant all the way into a reduced rate precept?

Mrs. Rumbold: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. There is likely to be a temptation for authorities which have already set the precept to bank the money. The information in the Library will enable my hon. Friend to see what the reduction could have been if authorities had taken a responsible attitude to their ratepayers and reduced their rates according to the amounts of money that are now guaranteed.

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): My hon. Friend knows that Cleveland is the second smallest county, but that it is the second highest rated county, at 235p in the pound. Does she agree that it is highly unlikely that there will be any reduction for ratepayers, but that there will be a huge temptation for the Labour-controlled authority to spend the money without any regard for the national economy?

Mrs. Rumbold: I hope and trust that my hon. Friend will do his best to ensure that his constituents and others in Cleveland are well aware of the amount of money available to the local authority, so that they will be able to draw their own conclusions should the council's expenditure rise.

Sir Ian Percival (Southport): Is my hon. Friend aware that, despite the sour grapes of the hon. Member for Bootle (Mr. Roberts), what she said will be very welcome to the ratepayers of Sefton?

Mr. Allan Roberts: It will not make any difference.

Sir Ian Percival: The guarantee that she has given, together with other things in the pipeline, could enable Sefton council to fix a rate increase at a figure about 5 per cent. lower. That is to say that, instead of looking at an increase of 25 per cent.—or even 30 per cent. and upwards if the Labour and Liberal parties had had their way over increased spending by the passenger transport authority—we may now hope to be looking at 20 per cent. or less. Is my hon. Friend aware that, contrary to what the hon. Member for Bootle said, this is nothing to do with abolition, but that the main increase is due to the excessive spending of a body that is not abolished—the passenger transport authority? Is she aware that my constituents and I are conscious of the fact that only the efforts of the Government, in curbing the excesses of that authority and then guaranteeing this extra money, have saved us from a really high increase?

Mrs. Rumbold: I am delighted that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has been able to help my right hon. and learned Friend. I am also delighted to learn that Sefton council now feels much more able to set a reasonable rate.

Mr. Charles Morrison (Devizes): Although I welcome the improvement in the grant, is my hon. Friend aware that the real solution lies in rather more generous treatment of shire counties right from the beginning? In that regard, is she aware that she would have full support for her arguments in trying to persuade a mean-minded, parsimonious and apolitical Treasury to be more generous with shire counties in future?

Mrs. Rumbold: I am certain that the Government's overall expenditure plans for the country are right. I am glad that Wiltshire will be a happy beneficiary of my right hon. Friend's guaranteeing the £500 million, but I believe that shire counties, like all other local authorities, should be exhorted to try to contain their expenditure in the interests of the national economy.

Mr. Michael Marshall (Arundel): Will my hon. Friend give the figure for West Sussex? Will she confirm that, because of the scale that she has announced, the fact of West Sussex being the lowest-rating precept authority in the country cannot be taken into account? Will she reaffirm that she looks to fundamental changes in the system to begin to address the problem in the future?

Mrs. Rumbold: The figure for West Sussex is £7·656 million. I hope that that will be of some advantage to the council. The Green Paper "Paying for Local Government" is, we hope, the basis for a completely different way of paying for local government which I hope all hon. Members will consider.

Mr. Robin Squire (Hornchurch): May I, on behalf of Havering, welcome my hon. Friend's announcement, believing that even the whisper of virtue being its own reward is welcome in the light of recent years' experience? Will she undertake to give the widest publicity to the comments of the hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Freud) about the two areas that he mentioned, as the Liberals seem reluctant to see any support going to those areas?

Mrs. Rumbold: My hon. Friend knows that London as a whole has greatly welcomed my right hon. Friend's announcement, because most local authorities are about to make their rates. I note what my hon. Friend said, especially about Cambridgeshire and elsewhere.

Mr. David Sumberg (Bury, South): The metropolitan authority of Bury, which is by no means a rolling and wealthy shire county, will be extremely grateful for the announcement, which means nearly £1·5 million of additional resources. Does my hon. Friend agree that that Conservative-controlled authority has loyally followed the Government's plans for controlling local government expenditure, and that its ability to go further is now severely limited?

Mrs. Rumbold: I hope my hon. Friend will recognise that this announcement will greatly benefit the prudent and sensible authority in Bury, and I trust that this will serve to show that the Government recognise the difficulties under which the authority may have been labouring until now.

Mr. Robert C. Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne, North): Will the Minister concede that every prudent treasurer, including the city treasurer of Newcastle upon Tyne, will have already anticipated this recycling and built it into a recommendation for the finance committee? Is this not simply a vicious confidence trick on ratepayers up and down the country? Would she care to let the House know what percentage the £2·894 million which Newcastle is supposed to be getting back is of the money that the Government have pinched this year from the ratepayers of Newcastle upon Tyne?

Mrs. Rumbold: I think that that is rather a cheap remark. The treasurer of Newcastle upon Tyne and other treasurers may well have been cautious, but they did not need to be quite as cautious as they have been, because my right hon. Friend told them clearly in January that the money would be available. Although those treasurers may have prayed caution in aid and wanted to maintain their position, it is the councillors who should determine what a rate should be or should not be. It is the councillors who have been fully aware of the sums that have been available to them.

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): Does my hon. Friend agree that the £3·665 million which is being given to Cornwall under these arrangements makes nonsense of the pathetic propaganda attempt by the Liberals on that council to put the whole of the blame for an unnecessary 20 per cent. increase in rates on the Government?

Mrs. Rumbold: I support what my hon. Friend has said, and I agree with his sentiments.

Mr. George Gardiner (Reigate): Will my hon. Friend accept that her statement is good news to all those who have always supported prudent spending councils, as in Surrey, and who resented it when they appeared to be penalised for so doing? Is it not obvious that there must be a better system for apportioning central Government funds among local authorities, which avoids taking with one hand and giving back with the other?

Mrs. Rumbold: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, and I am glad to know that the authorities which felt that they had not been as well served as they should have been feel much more secure in their position now. I refer my hon. Friend to the proposals which my right hon. Friend has made in his Green Paper, "Paying for Local Government".

Mr. Patrick Thompson (Norwich, North): Will my hon. Friend be able to clarify what this statement means for a low-spending shire county such as Norfolk, which has followed careful budgeting over many years? Will she be able to explain to the leader of Norfolk county council, when she meets him later this week, what he will be able to advise for a change in the rate precept or spending levels?

Mrs. Rumbold: I have been trying to explain to the House that for Norfolk the amount that is now guaranteed as recycled money is £7·2 million. If the leader of Norfolk council is minded to look again at the precept that he is levying, he will see that it is possible for him to make adjustments accordingly to save money for the ratepayers.

Mr. Timothy Wood (Stevenage): I was one of those who were deeply disappointed in the reduction of rate support grant for the home counties in particular, and I am relieved that prudent councils may now get more rate support grant. In Hertfordshire the initial loss of rate support grant was £20 million, and I am not sure whether my hon. Friend is aware that Hertfordshire county council has already set a rate precept increase of 21 per cent. How will the proposals that we have heard today help Hertfordshire?

Mrs. Rumbold: The proposals will help Hertfordshire in that it is now assured of receiving almost £12 million of recycled money. Perhaps that will be of some assistance to it in looking at its rates.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Is the Minister aware that when the Conservatives on the Conservative-controlled Cumbria county council were trying to fix a rate some weeks ago and realised the implications of the rate support grant settlement, like a bunch of municipal cowards they ran away because they realised that to set a reasonable rate and maintain services was impossible? Is it not equally fair to say that today's statement will effectively mean no more money? I have just spoken to the treasurer of Cumbria county council, and he says that the proposals will have a negligible effect on the precept. Is that not the truth?

Mrs. Rumbold: I think that it is difficult for someone to say that the proposals will have a negligible effect when it is certain that Cumbria will receive nearly £4 million extra. *[Interruption.]* Of course, it does have some effect. The treasurers who were being prudent and advising their authorities not to take the extra money into account may well have been able to influence the councillors whose decision it is, I have to reiterate, not the treasurers, to take the money into account. One hopes that now that they have a guarantee from the Secretary of State they will think again.

Bates Colliery (Judicial Review)

4.36 pm

Mr. John Ryman (Blyth Valley): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I briefly draw to your attention a matter of which I have given you prior notice? It concerns a difficulty which may occur in relation to the business of the House on Friday, when you have kindly granted me an Adjournment debate on the monstrous decision of the National Coal Board to close Bates colliery. The difficulty has arisen because of a case which is starting in the High Court tomorrow on that matter.

I am instructed that tomorrow morning a High Court judge will begin the substantive hearing of an application for judicial review by the Northumberland area of the National Union of Mineworkers against the National Coal Board. My respectful submission is that on Friday it may arise that the matter will be sub judice because the hearing will still be continuing, the judgment will not have been given or a notice of appeal may have been entered by the party which lost the case. May I draw your attention to your powers in this matter, as set out on page 343 of the current edition of "Erskine May". The relevant portion says that you have a discretion in sub judice matters of this nature and can allow a debate to take place

"provided that there is no real and substantial danger of prejudice to the proceedings."

My respectful submission is that a Friday afternoon Adjournment debate will in no way influence a High Court judge hearing a complicated case for a judicial review on Thursday and Friday.

There are three reasons why the matter is urgent. First, at this colliery—

Mr. Speaker: Order. Is this not hypothetical? The hon. Gentleman gave me notice of his point of order, and I have looked up the reference in "Erskine May" which he has quoted. We do not yet know what the position will be. It would save the time of the House and of the hon. Gentleman if I were to say that I have this matter very much in mind and I shall give my ruling at the appropriate time.

Mr. Ryman: I am grateful, Mr. Speaker. I shall be able to shorten my remarks on the matter. I have to anticipate the events that will happen on Friday because it may be that the debate will not take place and I will then be in difficulty.

There are three reasons why the matter is urgent. The first is that preparatory salvage work is now taking place at that colliery — the seams are being heightened. Secondly, Mr. MacGregor, the chairman of the National Coal Board, is about to step down from his office. He spoke to the Prime Minister yesterday, so his departure is imminent. He conducted a personal vendetta against that colliery. The third and important reason is that this egg is impossible to unscramble. If the colliery closes, 29 million tonnes of workable high quality coal will be buried under the sea and lost for ever. It is on those three grounds that I submit that the matter is urgent. One has to anticipate the events which will take place the day after tomorrow.

Mr. Speaker: I have nothing to add to what I have already said. I shall bear the matter in mind. The hon. Gentleman has made a strong case.

Lambeth and Liverpool (Surcharge of Councillors)

4.39 pm

Mr. John Fraser (Norwood): I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 10, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the upholding of the surcharge on Lambeth and Liverpool councillors".

Just over an hour ago, the High Court upheld the surcharge on over 70 councillors in Lambeth and Liverpool; in consequence, subject to appeal, they could be disqualified from holding office. This latest episode in the Rates Act vendetta has been a sort of political St. Valentine's day massacre, with the possibility not only of 70 Lambeth and Liverpool councillors but of many others being disqualified. I hope that it is self-evident that the matter is specific and important. It means that an unacceptable price will be paid for dissent, and the loss of political rights is alien to our traditions.

The matter is very important because, depending upon the accidents of time, it is possible that the disqualification will take place in the middle of the campaign for the May elections, so it is not simply a matter of a penalty being imposed on those councillors; it also affects the conduct of municipal elections due to take place in May this year. Not only will those councillors be affected, but it is possible that hundreds of other councillors in about a dozen local authorities throughout the country will be similarly affected if the district auditor takes a similar view to them as he has taken to those in Lambeth and Liverpool.

If this were a matter that affected Ministers or civil servants, an Act of indemnity would be presented immediately to the House. The effect on individual councillors and on the conduct of the elections in May is such that the matter should take precedence over the Orders of the Day. I submit my application for your consideration, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser) asks leave to move the Adjournment of the House for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that he believes should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the upholding of the surcharge on Lambeth and Liverpool councillors".

I listened with care to what the hon. Gentleman said, but I regret that I do not consider that the matter that he raised is appropriate for discussion under Standing Order No. 10. I cannot, therefore, submit his application to the House, but I am sure that he will find other parliamentary ways of bringing it into our discussions.

News International (Pensions)

4.42 pm

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 10, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the actions of News International in the current industrial dispute, which have resulted in pensions and other benefits not being paid to retired members of SOGAT '82".

This is a specific matter, because it refers to several retired members of SOGAT '82 and others entitled to benefits provided by that trade union, including an 80-year-old constituent of mine. He, like 1,500 pensioners, should receive payments from the London central branch of SOGAT '82. As a result of the court action brought by the American owners of News International, the sequestrator blocked their pension payments and the payments of pensions to SOGAT '82 pensioners from other branches of the union. He has also blocked payments of lump sums to 120 members of the branch who retired recently. The matter is important for them and their families. It is also important because it reveals how the Government's industrial relations policies are being exploited in every possible way by ruthless employers who in their pursuit of profits do not flinch from harming innocent pensioners. In the words used by the hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Morrison) earlier, it is mean-minded and parsimonious.

The matter is urgent not just because the pensioners need the money but because the sequestrator stopped payments of funeral benefit to 60 widows of SOGAT '82 members. It is an urgent matter that merits consideration.

Therefore I hope, Mr. Speaker, that you will see your way to allowing the matter to be debated.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) asks leave to move the Adjournment of the House for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that he believes should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the actions of News International in the current industrial dispute, which have resulted in pensions and other benefits not being paid to retired members of SOGAT '82".

I regret that I have to give the hon. Gentleman the same answer as I gave to the hon. Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser). I cannot submit his application to the House, but I hope that he will find other ways of bringing the matter before us.

BALLOT FOR NOTICES OF MOTIONS FOR FRIDAY 21 MARCH

Members successful in the ballot were:

Sir Philip Goodhart
Mr. Timothy Wood
Mr. John Watts

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Mr. Speaker: By leave of the House, I shall put together the Questions on the motions relating to Statutory Instruments.

Ordered,

That the draft Professions Supplementary to Medicine (Winding up of Remedial Gymnasts Board) Order of Council 1986 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments &c.

That the Legal Advice and Assistance (Financial Conditions) Regulations 1986 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments &c.—*[Mr. Peter Lloyd.]*

Right to Co-operate

4.45 pm

Mr. David Alton (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to give tenants in the public and private sectors the guaranteed right to establish housing co-operatives.

The House may be tempted to wonder why such a Bill is necessary at all, but, as I described in an Adjournment debate on 20 December, council tenants in my city of Liverpool have been the victim of an interminable offensive calculated to destroy local housing co-operatives initiated there.

Vindictive and spiteful retaliatory measures have been taken against the leaders of the Eldonian co-operative in the Vauxhall area of the city and against other co-operatives. The city council was even prepared to turn away £6 million of public money, and the building jobs and new homes that were part and parcel of the Eldonians' plan for new dream homes on the site of the old Tate and Lyle factory, to support their own brand of dogma, became a nightmare as Labour Militants and fellow travellers such as councillor Tony Byrne set out to crush that group of mainly unemployed council tenants.

Sheer guts and tenacity saw the Eldonians through their fight, but other co-operatives without the determination and the inner strength of that group were ruthlessly smashed. Only today those Labour councillors have been disqualified from public office. For many people in Liverpool it is two years too late. The tragedy is that it has taken so long for the Labour leadership to wake up to the menace of the Militant Tendency. If Labour leaders had listened to the moderates in the Vauxhall ward Labour party, to the Liberals and to the housing co-operative movement, two years of tragedy for Liverpool could have been averted.

If we are to ensure that such things do not happen again, we must have a Bill to give tenants in the public sector the right to form housing co-operatives, a right guaranteed at law. It would also represent a realistic hope for ordinary people of becoming home owners, in a way that the Conservatives' right-to-buy legislation cannot, especially for the unemployed or less well off. The right to buy will never bring the most powerless people into a property-owning democracy, but the right to co-operate will. A Bill giving people the right to co-operate would break asunder the feudal vassal or serf-like status that so many tenants endure today.

However, this is a Bill for private tenants, too. For the Government, the right to become a home owner seems always to be reserved for the buyers' market, and for the sitting council tenant who can afford to buy, yet no such right to buy is given to sitting tenants in private accommodation. My Bill would give tenants in the private sector the right to take control over their homes, too. Far too often, the battle lines in the housing debate are drawn between the tenants' and the owners' camp. My Bill is based on a partnership between the two. It represents a genuine third choice for housing.

The Bill aims to give council and private tenants the automatic right to serve notice on their landlords that they wish to form housing co-operatives. The Bill will define clearly what constitutes a co-operative and what types of dwelling are suitable. It will ensure that landlords cannot unreasonably withhold from tenants permission to form co-operatives where two thirds of the occupants wish to do so.

My Bill will do six specific things. First, it will define the types of tenancy to which the right to co-operate will apply. Secondly, it will identify the dwellings that the right to co-operate will embrace. Thirdly, it will set out the circumstances in which the right to co-operate may arise and certain tests that will have to be satisfied. Fourthly, it will set out the circumstances in which the right to co-operate may be refused by a landlord, but will state that consent to the right to co-operate may not be unreasonably withheld; there might be an appeal mechanism to the Secretary of State for the Environment. Fifthly, the Bill will set out an economic incentive or restrictions that would go hand in hand with the right to co-operate. Lastly, it will establish the means by which the right to co-operate may be promoted. That might take the form of enabling legislation, possibly extending or reinforcing the powers of the Housing Corporation with associated funding or it might establish a new mechanism to promote co-operatives. Present funding for co-operatives is inadequate—in fact, it is derisory—and must be re-examined in the context of the Bill.

My Bill recognises the desire of many ordinary people to take control of their own homes from the planners and from the "we know best" politicians who have maintained a vice-like grip on entire communities. The Bill will encourage and protect those who want to form housing co-operatives from recalcitrant local authorities and unco-operative private landlords alike. It is high time the House recognised that the existing monolithic housing structures no longer meet people's needs and that an entirely new approach is needed. All over Britain council tenants are getting a shocking repairs service. Estates are disintegrating, and public money is being poured away as an Elastoplast solution is administered to the ailing patient.

Commenting on the growth of housing co-operatives in Liverpool, the *Architects' Journal* said that the greatest housing revolution in 60 years had been taking place quietly and unnoticed. The real testimony to the spectacular success of schemes such as Hesketh street housing co-operative in my constituency, which Prince Charles visited last year, and others at Leta street, Claudia street, Prince Alfred gardens and Southern crescent, is that council tenants who moved into those housing co-operatives say that they would never go back to being council tenants. These oases in the middle of so much dereliction, decay and neglect exude pride and confidence.

The story does not end there. Liverpool city council spent over £250,000 last year on a team of glaziers whose entire time was taken up in replacing broken windows in council owned properties. Those windows did not wear out; they were vandalised. In housing co-operatives we do not find broken windows, because people care about the homes they are living in. They have a stake in the community and feel a real sense of responsibility for those areas. Nor would one find the £11 million of rent arrears currently owed on council properties in the city. Nor would one find empty properties, unlike the 6,000 vacant council properties which are boarded up and which are an affront to the thousands on the housing waiting list in Liverpool.

Liverpool tenants get a second-rate service in dreadfully managed estates. That will not improve until

[Mr. David Alton]

the tenants are given responsibility for the ownership and management of their own estates and homes. Far too often the housing department behaves as if it is the master of the people instead of their servant. My Bill sets out to challenge that.

Liberalism is an enabling philosophy. That is why we do not see housing policy as simply a question of bricks and mortar or house building figures. The provision of homes is about so much more. It is the key to many people's aspirations. It is the solid result of years of effort. To have control of their homes rather than being beholden to municipal or private landlords can give people a tremendous boost in self-confidence and can lead to the removal of nagging fears about security. It can be the key to the successful creation of dynamic communities where people care about their neighbours and share in the decision making.

Housing co-operatives based on devolution of power, the creation of self-reliance and common concern and the widest possible extension of ownership are the epitome of all that my party stands for. Conservatives, too, should recognise in housing co-operatives the qualities of self-help which they admire. Socialists should rekindle the sharing spirit of the Rochdale pioneers. Housing co-operatives will enable communities to take power for themselves and to pull themselves up by their bootstraps. That is why I commend my Bill to the whole House and hope that I shall be given leave to bring it in.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. David Alton, Mr. John Cartwright, Mr. Simon Hughes, Mr. A. J. Beith, Mr. David Penhaligon, Mr. Geraint Howells, Mr. Clement Freud and Mr. Archy Kirkwood.

RIGHT TO CO-OPERATE

Mr. David Alton accordingly presented a Bill to give tenants in the public and private sectors the guaranteed right to establish housing co-operatives: And the same was read the First time: and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 2 May and to be printed. [Bill 101.]

Mr. Robert Parry (Liverpool, Riverside): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I seek your guidance because the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) several times mentioned the people in the Vauxhall area of my constituency and also the Eldonians, whom I represent. I support housing co-operatives in principle. The hon. Member is always creeping around other constituencies and breaking the conventions of the House. He has even been to co-operatives in my constituency without giving me advance notice. As the hon. Member is recognised by all hon. Members as a political weasel and a guttersnipe, I seek your advice.

Mr. Alton: Withdraw that.

Mr. Parry: I will not. The hon. Member is a guttersnipe.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. I very much doubt whether I can give the hon. Gentleman the guidance he seeks. I hope that at all times hon. Members will observe the courtesies and conventions of the House.

Mr. Alton: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I should like to know what protection hon. Members can be given from such unparliamentary comments.

Mr. Parry: The hon. Member is a guttersnipe. He admitted that he had been to my constituency.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Discourteous words may have been used, but I have not heard anything that was out of order.

European Community

4.57 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mrs. Lynda Chalker): I beg to move,

That this House takes note of the White Paper on Developments in the European Community January to June 1985 (Cmnd. 9627) and of European Community Document No. 8616/85, the Commission's opinion on the Proposal for Amendments to the EEC Treaty.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): I have to inform the House that Mr. Speaker has selected the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition.

Mrs. Chalker: The period covered by the report saw the conclusion of the accession negotiations with Spain and Portugal, culminating in the signing of the treaty of accession and the start of the process which led to the signing of the Single European Act, whose provisions the House will soon have an opportunity to debate and approve.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): Hon. Members, including some Government Back Benchers, are anxious to know exactly when the House will be given an opportunity to debate the Single European Act. It is important that we have an indication of the time scale.

Mrs. Chalker: The hon. Gentleman knows that the timing of the debate is a matter for discussion within the usual channels, but it will take place as soon as we can bring it forward. I shall write to the hon. Gentleman as soon as I have an indication of the timing. I hope that it will be within the next three months.

It is on the intergovernmental conference, and the changes to which it will lead, that the House will wish to focus this afternoon. Hon. Members will have seen the special report prepared by the Select Committee on European Legislation. The House will be most grateful to the Chairman, the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing), and his Committee for the thoughtful and constructive report. The hon. Gentleman kindly wrote to me to explain that he is chairing a Committee upstairs and that he will join us as soon as he can.

The report of the Select Committee on European Legislation draws some preliminary conclusions about the scrutiny arrangements, which are of great importance to hon. Members. I assure the hon. Member for Newham, South that we shall consider carefully and positively the suggestions made by his Committee. I am glad to tell the House that I am happy, too, to accept the Opposition amendment which will be moved shortly.

The desire for reform which led to the intergovernmental conference set up last June was commonly felt throughout the Community. At Fontainebleau in 1984, we achieved a settlement of the long-standing issue of our contributions to the EC budget. We also set in hand the imposition of budgetary discipline, particularly over the common agricultural policy. After years in which price rises were the norm, we secured two price fixings in a row in which prices fell in real terms.

It was against that background that the Community turned its attention from problems to opportunities: to such pressing questions as how to make Europe competitive in the new technologies; how to create the large market that would give us economies of scale, prosperity and jobs; and how to ensure that decisions were taken more quickly.

As the House will know, we believed that those objectives could be achieved by political agreement. But many other member states argued that it was essential to entrench reforms in amendments to the treaty, both to give them binding effect and as a symbol of the Community's determination to tackle its problems.

In the period covered by the report that we are debating this afternoon, there was intensive discussion of a wide range of proposals which were put forward, including some that would have radically altered the balance of the Community institutions. We tabled ideas of our own, particularly on decision-making procedures, and how the European Parliament might be enabled to contribute more effectively. Our proposals were notable for their severely practical focus, which contrasted sharply with the severely impractical — though no doubt visionary — flavour of some of the other ideas in the field.

Yet as member states focused more and more closely on the implications of the various proposals under discussion, it became clear that there was no widespread support for sweeping changes. There was, however, support for measures which would deal with the Community's most pressing needs.

Sir Russell Johnston (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber): When the Minister refers to impractical and visionary proposals, is she suggesting that the Italians—who were reluctant to sign the Luxembourg agreement unless it was approved by the European Parliament — were being impractical and visionary?

Mrs. Chalker: The hon. Gentleman knows that I meant nothing of the sort. He also knows that at certain stages a number of quite strange ideas appeared. I am glad to say that the view was taken that they would not be right in respect of the writing of the Single European Act.

It was on that basis that the intergovernmental conference, which is dealing with the Community's most pressing needs, was established, and it conducted and completed its work. That is now embodied in the Single European Act which incorporates the changes to the EEC treaty and the new treaty provisions on European co-operation in foreign policy.

The House will have a full opportunity to debate the treaty changes that were agreed at Luxembourg when it considers the forthcoming Bill to incorporate them into the European Communities Act, but it may be helpful if I describe the main features now.

It should be said, by way of preface, that the treaty changes agreed are modest in their legal scope, but they embody a political commitment which is practically significant.

Mr. George Robertson (Hamilton): Why is it called the Single European Act?

Mrs. Chalker: That is a very good question. I do not think that my colleagues have given me any good reason as to why it is called that, but I shall consult and see whether I can come up with the real reason. I think that the hon. Gentleman is having fun at my expense.

The first noteworthy feature of the Single European Act is that it contains a new commitment to create, by 31 December 1992 a genuinely free internal market, which is vital. Britain has long championed the achievement of the freedoms set out in the treaty of Rome: the free movement of goods, persons, services and capital. We

[Mrs. Chalker]

now have an important commitment to accelerate progress to that end; and to the extent that barriers have not been overcome by 1992, the Council may decide before the end of that year on the mutual recognition of national measures.

To enable progress to be made as quickly as this, the Single European Act introduces improved decision-making procedures. Qualified majority voting replaces unanimity for most internal market directives establishing common standards and procedures; for consideration of whether there should be policies for sea and air transport and how those policies should operate; for directives on co-ordination of policy on capital movements between member states and third countries; and for measures to remove obstacles to freedom of provision of services by nationals of third countries.

This extension of majority voting should make it harder for a few member states to block the adoption of measures liberalising air and sea transport, or the common standards for industrial products which help British firms export to Europe.

I should assure the House, however, that our special interests are fully safeguarded. Unanimity will still be required for tax measures; for the movement of persons across national frontiers, for example; and for the rights and interests of employees. We will also continue to be able to protect our high standards of animal and plant health. There has been no change whatsoever in the so-called Luxembourg compromise. It remains open to us, where necessary, to invoke that compromise to protect a very important national interest.

Mr. Foulkes: Why have the British Government insisted that unanimity should remain in respect of the rights and interests of employed persons? The hon. Lady will know that the British Government are blocking any agreement on parental leave, which would be of great help to people in this country and which the House of Lords Committee has indicated would cost nothing extra. Why are the Government blocking that? Why have we not moved towards majority agreement on this item?

Mrs. Chalker: When we talk of unanimity, we refer to the rights and interests of employees as a whole. So far as I am aware, parental leave is not at present being considered on that basis. That cannot be so, because we do not have the ratification by each of the 12 member states of the Single European Act. The matter may be resolved in the meantime, but we shall face it as it arises. At present, the unanimity rules will remain for all the matters to which I have referred because the Act will not have been ratified during the coming discussion on that issue. If I am in error, I shall come back to this when I reply to the debate.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): Where majority voting takes place, can the veto still be applied?

Mrs. Chalker: That was the point of my last remark before I gave way to the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes). Of course, it remains open to us, where necessary, to invoke the compromise. That is exactly what I said.

The second important area covered by the Single European Act is research and technological development. The Community has long been concerned with research and development. The existing programme includes the exciting ESPRIT programme, in which more than 60 British companies are successfully participating, and which is playing a major role in helping to make our companies competitive in information technology. Up to now, the Community's R and D programme has lacked a sense of direction and purpose. It grew up in the 1970s, when energy needs dominated our thinking, and it has failed to adjust to Europe's industrial needs for the 1980s and 1990s. That will now change.

The purposes of Community research and development are clearly defined in the new Act in terms of practical application and the needs of industry. The Community will encourage research and technological development activities by companies, including small firms, as well as by research centres and universities. This will be supported by exploiting the potential of the internal market to the full, opening up public contracts and removing legal and fiscal barriers to co-operation.

The framework programme, which establishes the financial envelope for Community R and D over each five-year period, will in future define much more clearly the content, objectives and priorities of research and development programmes. That overall framework will remain subject to unanimity. The specific programmes to take place within it will subsequently be decided by qualified majority. In the early discussions on the next research and development framework programme we are already starting to see the benefits of the more industry-oriented approach which the Community is now adopting. There is much more emphasis on projects which will strengthen the foundations of European industry, such as RACE—research in advance communications in Europe—and BRITE—research to help modernise traditional industries, for example, through computer-aided design and manufacture. Those are the areas in which the Community needs to catch up in order to be able to compete. Those are the areas in which we shall now have the necessary legal framework in which to set Community activity.

The third major area covered by the new treaty amendments is the environment. Here, too, the Community has a long-standing involvement, as of necessity it must. Pollution knows no boundaries. Effective conservation requires an international effort. The Community has already taken many useful environmental initiatives, such as improving water quality, reducing pollution from motor vehicles, handling dangerous substances in industry and protecting the agricultural environment.

What we have now done is to establish the criteria for those activities. The criteria stipulate that the Community should take action relating to the environment only to the extent that environmental objectives can be better attained at Community level than at the level of individual member states; that the Community should weigh the potential benefits and costs of action before taking it; and that it should weigh the environmental conditions in the various regions of the Community. What is necessary in the Mediterranean may not be necessary in the North sea. We will be able to ensure that, where we wish, decisions continue to be taken by unanimity.

In reaching these decisions, the Heads of Government had to consider carefully the institutional balance within the Community. The European Parliament, directly

representing an electorate of 320 million people, has an important role to play in decision taking. As we said in our manifesto for the European elections last year, on a growing number of issues, the Community is regarded as the voice of Europe. Yet the existing institutional arrangements have not enabled the European Parliament to play the positive role that it could and should. What we have therefore sought is a means of maximising the European Parliament's contribution and influence without, however, any change in its formal powers.

That is the effect of the new co-operation procedure which is most usefully and clearly analysed in the Scrutiny Committee's report. The procedure provides that, in certain areas where qualified majority voting applies in the Council, the European Parliament will be able to propose amendments if a majority of its members agree. If the Parliament proposes amendments, the Commission has to decide whether or not to amend its proposal accordingly. But it should be emphasised — in the words of the Scrutiny Committee report—that

"at end of the day the European Parliament still has no power to insist and the last word remains with the Council."

Nor could any intervention by the Parliament lead to a vote which would normally be taken by unanimity in the Council being taken by qualified majority instead. That could not happen.

What we hope and expect, however, is that the potential of the European Parliament for constructive involvement in the development of Community policy can now be more fully realised. Too often in the past the European Parliament has used its negative powers to block proposals and delay decision-making when it has not — perhaps because it has not—been properly consulted, and when full weight has not been given to its opinions.

Sir Russell Johnston: I appreciate that the Minister has given way generously. It is not fair for her to attack the European Parliament on the ground of delaying decision-making when delaying decision-making lies firmly at the door of the Council.

Mrs. Chalker: I am sorry if the hon. Gentleman thought that I was making an unjustified attack on the European Parliament. There are times when there are delays in decision-making, as the hon. Gentleman knows. The point is that the whole of the Community has been bedevilled in much of the progress that it has sought to make by all sorts of delays. I was referring to a way of consultation through which we may minimise future delays.

Mrs. Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mrs. Chalker: I will give way for the last time.

Mrs. Kellett-Bowman: The European Parliament frequently introduces reports on minor subjects which may be of interest to a limited number of people but which clog up the works. If the minor reports were not introduced, the major crucial reports could go through faster and delay would be obviated.

Mrs. Chalker: I have a great deal of sympathy with what my hon. Friend says. She is referring to the whole of the management of Community business, not just in the European Parliament but in the Community institutions. I hope that it will be possible to improve the management so that the major issues can get the attention that they rightly deserve.

In discussing the Single European Act, in the sphere of foreign policy, an increasingly potent symbol of unity in European policy was vividly demonstrated last week in the Philippines. It was a major goal of the Government throughout the negotiations to secure treaty provision for such co-operation, and it was finally agreed in very much the form that we originally proposed before Milan. The new provisions consolidate for the first time in legal form the existing commitments of European political co-operation to consult and co-operate, although they remain juridically separate from the treaties establishing the Communities. The Twelve undertake to consult before adopting a position on foreign policy issues of general interest and to avoid any action particularly in international fora, such as the United Nations, which could undermine their cohesiveness and ability to act as a force internationally. The treaty also strengthens the commitment to consultation on certain aspects of security questions.

The treaty enshrines the general feeling that the time has come after 15 years to give formal recognition to political co-operation as an important component of the policies of the Community of Twelve. We do not expect dramatic overnight improvements in cohesion on foreign policy issues. But there is now a more serious commitment to move foward together, while the creation of a small secretariat will provide permanent small machinery to enable the Twelve to react to events with greater facility than hitherto. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister told the House on 5 December, we expect that there will continue to be differences between us, but the Twelve will in future try to work together as far as possible to ensure that their voice is more generally heard and better respected. That has already begun to happen.

I have discussed how, in the period covered by the report, we prepared the way for the changes which are being introduced into the treaty. I have discussed the main features of the Single European Act by which they are to be accomplished. We warmly welcome the outcome of the Danish referendum last week, and the signing of the Single European Act by Denmark, Italy and Greece. The way is now clear for national ratification procedures, and, as the House knows, we plan to introduce a Bill as soon as practicable to carry that through. From now on our focus must be on the implications of the Act.

Mr. Marlow: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mrs. Chalker: I have already given way a considerable number of times, and I understand that many hon. Members wish to speak, so I must finish my remarks.

The excellent Scrutiny Committee report discusses the particular implications for scrutiny by the House. That is one important aspect at which we wish to look carefully.

However, there are also implications for the development of the Community, and for Britain within the Community. During the second half of this year, Britain will assume the presidency of the EC. It is my earnest hope that, before the end of the year, the Single European Act will take effect. The Community will then have a good opportunity to build for the future, and Britain, in the presidency, will have a special responsibility to direct that process.

I want a Community that is relevant and is seen to be relevant by its people, especially the British people. The completion of the Common Market is the most important

[Mrs. Chalker]

single step that we can take to achieve that aim. The treaty changes and other new procedures agreed in Europe will help us in taking that step. It is an important step for the future not only for Britain but for peace in the Western world. I commend the motion to the House.

5.20 pm

Mr. George Robertson (Hamilton): I beg to move, at the end of the Question to add,

'and, noting the First Special Report of the Select Committee on European Legislation (Session 1985-86), calls on the Government to undertake to co-operate in improved procedures so that the House can effectively scrutinise proposals under the Treaties as they would be amended by the Single European Act.'.

The Minister properly avoided the vast bulk of the White Paper that we are supposed to be debating and concentrated more on the future than on the past. Her peroration included memorable words about the importance of the EC being relevant to the people, and then invoked the internal market as the method by which the people should judge the effectiveness of the EC. If the people outside were consulted, they would consider the internal market, or the creation of Lord Cockfield's dream world, a most remarkable method of judging a Community of 12 nations in such a deep recession.

Such debates are, by definition, retrospective, but they are also an opportunity carefully to consider developments in the European Community and to look forward to what the Community could or should do for the people of Europe and for the people of Britain. All too often, our debates on the EC are dominated by its chronic budget problems. The Minister of State, Treasury, is here as an observer of the debate. No doubt he is relieved that the massed ranks of the Tory anti-marketeers are, surprisingly, absent today, leaving the Floor free — *[Interruption.]* The massed ranks are absent; only the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) is here to speak on their behalf. The Minister of State, Treasury, must wish that he could stand at the Dispatch Box today instead of on a later occasion, when his hon. Friends will be ready, knives in hand, to scalp him.

Our debates on the EEC budget usually degenerate into unintelligible, fairly negative and introspective seminars that do not enlighten the outside world about the potential of a 12-nation Community to contribute to solving Britain's and the European Community's problems.

As the Minister said, we are fortunate to have the first special report of the Select Committee on European Legislation. I am sorry that bad scheduling has meant that the Chairman and members of the Committee cannot be here for the beginning of the debate. The report includes an excellent analysis of the practical problems that we shall face because of the process of so-called reform, which started at the beginning of last year and therefore during the period that we are considering. The process has culminated in what is called the Single European Act. I look forward with interest to the Minister's explanation of that peculiar translation of a French phrase.

Mrs. Chalker: It seemed to be such an obvious phrase that I did not question how the Act came to have that name. However, I have thought about it and obtained a little help from my friends, and I can say that the changes to the European treaty and the new treaty on co-operation on foreign policy are brought together in a single Act. It is European and it is an Act. Indeed, it is a surprisingly logical name to come from the EC stable.

Mr. Robertson: But the hon. Lady's friends had to explain it to her. We accept, with gratitude, that information, which makes the Single European Act seem all the brighter. No doubt the practical problems that will be thrown at us will be greater than the interpretation of the name.

Our scrutiny of European legislation should worry us greatly. In 1984, the Select Committee published a report which damned the Government's attitude to scrutiny in general and cited examples of major changes that went through the Council of Ministers before debate or discussion took place in the House. It gave the examples of the ESPRIT programme and the new arrangements for the regional development fund. Those examples and the report came long before the increase in majority voting, which has made the problem much more severe and which will increase when the Act comes into force.

The latest report of the Select Committee shows how much worse the position will be if the new Luxembourg system comes into effect. Of course, that depends upon the House and 11 other Parliaments ratifying it. It will pose a genuine dilemma to the House of Commons. We have tabled this amendment because of the complex problems of the scrutiny of European legislation and the likely increase in workload. We are grateful that the Government have taken on board our point and have accepted the amendment. I am probably the only Opposition Front-Bench spokesman who has managed to get not just one but two amendments accepted by the Government. No doubt the "Guinness Book of Parliamentary Records" will note that.

Sir Anthony Kershaw (Stroud): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is not the Government who accept amendments, but Mr. Speaker or the Chairman of Ways and Means.

Mr. Robertson: I must correct the hon. Gentleman. Mr. Speaker simply selects an amendment. It is for the Government — the parent of the original "take note" motion—to accept the Opposition's amendment. I hate to dance round on a pedantic pinhead, but, uncharacteristically, the hon. Gentleman is wrong in this case.

We must consider how best we can effectively monitor, supervise and scrutinise the mass of important detailed legislation affecting our people which is being enacted by the Community and as a consequence of section 2 of the European Communities Act 1972. It is not enough for the House to have debates such as this — considering a period that started 12 months ago—and pretend that we get to the heart of keeping tabs on developments in the EC.

Mr. Marlow: The hon. Gentleman knows that the House of Lords Select Committee is allowed to comment, and quite properly comments, on the merits of the proposals put before us, but the House of Commons Scrutiny Committee is allowed only to decide whether a matter should be put for debate either in Committee or before the House. Would the hon. Gentleman like to see the Scrutiny Committee have the powers to comment on the merits of a particular proposal with regard to the United Kingdom interest?

Mr. Robertson: The hon. Gentleman makes a valuable point. I have not put forward any conclusions, but my hon.

Friend the Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) will deal with a number of positive suggestions that are available to us about the way in which we deal with such scrutiny. The House continually turns for advice to the House of Lords Select Committee and it is an example at which we should be looking carefully, especially given the fact that the bulk of scrutiny will increase substantially should Parliament choose to ratify the Single European Act.

The debate concerns a six-month period a year ago. We are now only a few months away from this country's tenure of the Presidency of the Community, and the debate would have been an opportunity for the Minister to set out an agenda for that period. She could have inspired us with the vision of reform and revitalisation that will motivate the Government when they hold the steering wheel of Europe in July this year. We might have expected her to tell us how they will take on the challenge of fighting for jobs in a recession-hit Community, with over 14 million of its citizens out of work.

The Minister might also have enlightened us as to how the Government see Europe grasping the opportunities for technological and industrial co-operation across the Community. We might even have expected to hear how they intended to deal with the recurring problems of the European budget, and what they intend to do with the common agricultural policy, whose faults threaten not just budget discipline—that has gone out of the window—but the whole of the Community. We might have expected to hear all that, but we waited in vain, and we can reasonably conclude that, not surprisingly, the Government have as little idea of what to do in the European Presidency as they have of what to do with the economy of Britain. The economy of Europe and our country are at the heart of politics today.

Mrs. Chalker: It is not true.

Mr. Robertson: The hon. Lady may say that, and she may tell us that the litany of clichés that she brought out was a substitute for the agenda for the Presidency. The idea that reform of the internal market will inspire confidence among the 4 million unemployed in this country, never mind the 10 million others out of work across the Community, leaves me in mystification, and will give no hope to the people of Europe.

The European Commission, in its annual economic report and programme for 1986, has elevated the strengths and potential of a co-operative strategy for growth. In its opinion, there is now a unique opportunity to boost wealth and reduce unemployment by 30 to 40 per cent. over five years. Even without Spain and Portugal, there are 14 million unemployed in the European Community, and 45 per cent. of them are young people, a growing proportion of whom are now chronic long-term unemployed.

The President of the Commission, Mr. Jacques Delors, said at the beginning of 1985, when he presented the Commission's first programme:

> "Faced with the uncertainties and worries of the future, what people are looking for above all else is not freedom of movement (of peoples and goods) . . . Pulling down the frontiers will not convince them of our resolve to do away with massive unemployment. Economic convergence will be meaningless to people if we have not reversed the tide of unemployment within the next 2 years."

We might reasonably have expected the British Government, who will take over the Presidency, at least to echo some of those heavily weighted sentiments.

Will the Government, during the Presidency, initiate talks to achieve a co-operative growth strategy to reduce unemployment by 1 million in the United Kingdom alone, as all the economic experts and the European Commission believe possible?

The Commission stressed in its 1986 programme that one of its strategic objectives will be

> "the adoption of a framework programme for research and technological development . . . clear in form and content and attractive to firm and research centres encouraging them to co-operate."

The Minister touched on this matter in her speech, but the Government must give an answer both in the House and beyond it, because the Presidency has a wider responsibility. Are the Government willing to increase the funds for ESPRIT and meet the challenges that it faces, and will they commit themselves to future financing of EUREKA projects? We have had many fine words about technological co-operation, but will they be accompanied by the standard public parsimony that the Government inflict on every programme that could make a contribution?

How can a clear European framework conducive to co-operation develop, when the Government have agreed to participate in the strategic defence initiative research programme in the United States, and when they have not laid down any guidelines regarding intellectual property rights and the ability of British scientists to use their work in Europe? How can Europe hope to establish some kind of technological superiority if it allows the technology to flow to the United States?

What is most disturbing of all—the Minister's speech highlighted this only too well—is that the Government have now adopted, as the flavour of the month, the crusading zeal of Lord Cockfield in his drive to create a true common market by improving the internal market. The internal market—in this Eurospeak which reduces the meaning of everything that we say in these debates—is a more clear-cut free trade area, which will involve wide and sweeping changes. This will have fundamental and dramatic implications for Britain, and there is no sign that the Government have grasped any of the issues thrown up by what they are saying.

For example, do the Government know what the effect of these changes will be on the structure of British industry, on employment, on our balance of trade in manufacturing policy or our invisible earnings through the free exchange of services about which we so often hear? From the answer that the Minister for Trade gave my hon. Friend the Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley, it would seem that they do not have the slightest clue as to the implications.

Either the Government have carried out detailed studies of the effects, in which case they have an obligation to present them to Parliament in the form of a White Paper so that we can all judge their merits, or we can conclude that they have no real idea of the effects of the changes, and are simply gambling with Britain's future for the sake of a free market ideology. A free market ideology is just as valid in the internal market of the United Kingdom as it is in the internal market of the European Community. As the Minister for Trade, who gave such a characteristically vague, almost useless and optimistic reply to my hon. Friend, is one of the high priests of the

[Mr. Robertson]

free market, one can only conclude that the Government do not have the slightest clue about the implications of Lord Cockfield's dream on the structure of industry.

The evidence is clear. The Government's view of the internal market differs sharply from that of other European Community countries and from the view of the Commisson. The Government believe that the internal market will require the harmonisation of value added tax, which has been repeatedly stressed by both the President of the Commission, Jacques Delors, and by Lord Cockfield, but nobody except the Conservative party believes that on its own a free trade area will do anything for Europe and its problems. The Commission's programme for 1986 makes it clear that

"Completion of the internal market must not be allowed to compromise the Community's social priorities."

However, the British Government have expressed no view about that.

When he presented the Commission's programme in January, Jacques Delors said:

"The creation of a vast economic area based on the market and business co-operation is inconceivable, I would say unattainable, without some harmonisation of social legislation."

That criterion, which was quite right and proper, was laid down by the President of the Commission. There is no possibility of creating an internal market if the social obligations that accompany it are not recognised. However, this Government have not only stopped the people of Britain and the rest of the European Community from enjoying the benefits of directives on employee consultation and information, parental leave and worker participation by vetoing them every time they have been raised, but Lord Young of Graffham has presented a new programme of deregulation under which many of the benefits that are enjoyed in this country and in the European Community — for example, the benefit of equal opportunities—would be withdrawn.

In the letter last month of the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office to my hon. Friend the Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley — in his intervention the hon. Member for Northampton, North was getting, in his probing style, to the heart of the matter, although from a different direction from mine—she said that, despite the treaty changes which allow for majority voting in a number of other areas,

"Directives affecting the rights and interests of employed persons will remain subject to unanimity."

What is the point of majority voting if British industrial employees are still to be denied the best that the European social structures have been able to offer to European employees for some time?

The prime example is the draft directive on parental leave, which the Government are opposing on the simple ground that it would impose costs on industry. The report of the Select Committee of the House of Lords has already been mentioned. It favoured the directive and declared that it could find no reason to believe that industry would suffer from the introduction of that directive.

The Government talk about a "people's Europe". They go along with the idea of a common stamp, a common flag, a common passport and a European anthem. If, however, the European Community is to be credible, as the Minister of State has said that it should be, and is to benefit the people of the Community, surely it must be allowed to be used in these areas where it can be of use.

In recent months we have heard much about multinational companies that have the freedom to play off against each other the workers in their various subsidiaries, but many of these abuses can be curbed only by measures that can be applied on a European basis, such as those that are proposed in the directive on worker information. However, they have all been vetoed by this Government.

Mr. Marlow: If the hon. Gentleman wants more of these policies to be decided at the European level, does he consider that more powers should be given to the European Community? If so, will he say which powers he would give the Community?

Mr. Robertson: My point is that there are aspects of the European Community which would benefit the people of this country but that this Government, who pretend to be enthusiastic about Europe, choose to deny to the British people the opportunity to raise the level of benefits and increase the social infrastructure. They concentrate instead upon mealy-mouthed platitudes and upon reducing the standards that apply to British industrial workers.

The internal market will lead to a greater concentration of wealth and production. Even its advocates admit that any benefits will have to come through economies of large-scale production, in which case there is an even greater need for a European Community regional policy which is effective and which has sufficient resources to fulfil the demands that are caused by inequality in the European Community, especially on account of the greater disparities that accession have created. This will require a fundamental reform of the European Community's budget and, as a prerequisite, reform of the common agricultural policy. That is of major importance, in view of Britain's future Presidency of the European Community. The Minister of State chose not to deal with that point in her speech. My hon. Friend the Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley will deal with it at some length and in devastating detail if he catches your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, at the end of the debate. Its importance should not be under-estimated.

Almost inevitably, our European Community debates tend to be over-critical—sometimes justifiably critical—and almost always pessimistic. The problems facing the Community always seem, to our eyes, never to exploit the opportunities that a huge community of nations provides for us. That is unfortunate. The House and the Community have a duty to offer the population of Europe and the British people more than just an eternal wrangle over incomprehensible details, or an endless financial crisis, or an agricultural policy which goes from the absurd to the obscene. Politicians, like our Government, who continually dodge all the real challenges and prefer playing with the sideshows of European politics are simply squandering the future of our continent.

5.46 pm

Sir Anthony Kershaw (Stroud): A measure of the way in which European debates have almost become a part of our domestic scene can be gathered from the attendance this afternoon in the House of Commons. They rate slightly below Scottish housing debates.

The hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) made a very good and typical Opposition Front Bench speech. He railed against the Government. He criticised every kind of point and, luckily for him, he avoided making any

positive statement. He complained that in these debates we spend our time wrangling over details. Every debate about Europe cannot turn into a Second Reading debate on whether or not Britain ought to be in the European Community. Of course we are wrangling over details, in a sense, but we are addressing the points that are of importance to our electors and to this country.

The hon. Member for Hamilton slightly puzzled me when he said that a free trade area in Europe would be useless. I thought that that was the policy of the Labour party.

Mr. George Robertson: I did not say that.

Sir Anthony Kershaw: The hon. Gentleman went on to amend that statement by saying that there must be more use of the European dimension. My hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) intervened on that point. However, the hon. Gentleman should be careful. Although his party is in favour of free trade in Europe, it is against the extension of the European dimension.

Mr. George Robertson: I do not want to take up the time of the House, but I must correct the hon. Gentleman. I did not say any of those things. I criticised the Government's lack of precision in measuring the effect that the changes in the internal market will have upon the British economy. A better internal market would create a more common market for Britain, but we must consider its effects upon industry and upon employment in Britain before we embark upon it.

Sir Anthony Kershaw: I regret that I did not understand that to be what the hon. Gentleman said. I am grateful to him for having given us another explanation.

We must choose only a few of the tasks in the White Paper with which the presidency will give us an opportunity to deal. The first that I want to mention is European political co-operation. Not since Roman times has Europe spoken with one voice, and more is the pity. If it were able to do so, its influence——

Mr. Eric Deakins (Walthamstow): Charlemagne, Napoleon, Hitler.

Sir Anthony Kershaw: It depends on who is in charge. If the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Deakins) or I were in charge, that would be all right.

The influence that Europe could exert would surely be beneficent in the world, because Europe, considered as a whole, is a satisfied power. We have no claims on other continents or countries; none of the sorts of claims which so disturbed the world before 1939 and brought us nearly to ruin. Therefore, our political experience and weight applied together would be a beneficent influence for the peace of the world.

In trade, there can be no doubt whatever that unless Europe stands together we cannot possibly have any influence in the Western industrial and economic scene. As individual countries we are incapable of facing the might of Japan and the United States, so it is necessary for us to act together. Some problems obviously cannot be settled without Europe working together. The world debt problem is one. The problem of aid to developing countries can surely not even approach a solution, let alone have one, except by European co-operation.

In the White Paper mention is made of the European attitude towards South Africa. The weight which a combined opinion in Europe can bring to bear upon the South African Government could be a great deal more useful than the specific sanctions that are urged by some. The influence that Europe has already exerted has caused the South African Government to shift their ground to some extent, and the attitude which the Foreign Ministers of the Twelve took at Lusaka was considerably more helpful to the South African scene than that which was taken at the Commonwealth conference in Bermuda.

We shall have to wait to see whether the recent speech of President Botha is implemented. On the face of it, he said that a great deal would change, but those who are close to him say that his words should not be so interpreted. It is a fact, and I am glad that it appears in the White Paper, that the Ministers were agreed that, unless desegregation is the objective at which the South African Government are ultimately aiming, no cosmetics short of that will cure the situation. I hope that the Foreign Ministers and the Prime Ministers of Europe will be able to continue to make that view clearly known to the South Africans.

Another matter which was discussed last year and which is in the White Paper is terrorism, on which the Government have taken a lead in putting the issue before the Ministers. Clearly that is another sphere which cannot be tackled usefully without general co-operation. I ask the Government to consider one thing, which I am sure they have done, but nevertheless I hope that they will consider it again if they have rejected it or been unable to persuade our allies—that to break off diplomatic relations is a weapon to use against states which harbour or encourage terrorists. If diplomatic relations are broken the diplomatic bag does not travel to and fro, and we all know that grave infractions of the law about diplomatic bags have occurred. It would be useful if we could make that easy transit of weapons, and apparently of people sometimes, more difficult. The more difficult terrorists find it to get weapons, and the more difficult they find it to move, the more difficult they will find their terrible tasks.

The White Paper also mentions the problem of overseas aid, and I want to single out one particular case where European co-operation could effect useful changes. Ethiopia is the largest recipient of European aid, mostly food aid. The amount of food aid that is promised, and doubtless will be delivered, at least to the ports of Ethiopia during the coming season will be enough to feed the people who need it to the extent that is considered essential. Unfortunately, whether it will reach them is another question. However, no doubt a lot of it will, and so the arrangements that have so far been made to feed the starving Ethiopians are satisfactory.

What goes on inside Ethiopia is not satisfactory at all. The resettlement programme is a scandal. No doubt it is necessary, because it is impossible, especially during the late season before the rains start, for people to live in the arid regions from which they are being moved, but it is the way in which that is being done that is so reprehensible. It is said that the camps to which the people are moved have more casualties than the camps or areas from which they came. That is an unsatisfactory state of affairs which could be remedied by example and by our assistance.

The leadership of the Ethiopian Government is at fault. Mr. Mengistu seems to be a most unsatisfactory person. He has done his best to reduce his country to misery, and he does not stop intervening in the affairs of those round him. He sustains a civil war in the Sudan. He was active

[Sir Anthony Kershaw]

in Aden when that civil war broke out, and he keeps his own civil war on the boil all the time. He has reduced his country to misery and seems to want to do it to his neighbours as well. We should get together with our allies. I know that Italy has a soft spot for, or a guilty conscience about, Ethiopia — I do not know which — but nevertheless something should be done to try to alter that Government's policies, and Europe working together could do so.

Mr. Colin Moynihan (Lewisham, East): Does my hon. Friend agree that the steps that have been taken by the international community in Ethiopia to encourage major reforms in the handling of the resettlement programme and the agreement by the Ethiopian Government to put an embargo on further resettlement as from 1 January this year are important moves and that we should monitor closely the success or otherwise of those proposals in assessing the effectiveness of the programme?

Sir Anthony Kershaw: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that, because he has just come back from Ethiopia, having seen those camps. I am sure that what he says is wise and I hope that it is followed by the countries concerned and by ourselves.

Inside the EEC there is a long list of what at first sight may be thought comparative trivialities, although certainly the common agricultural policy cannot be classed as a triviality. I hope that it will be possible during our presidency to edge that policy along in the right direction. There are, however, one or two bad signs. For example, I notice that we are increasing the price of beet, which takes the place of cane sugar. Europe does not have to grow beet; it is unnecessary. I have a sneaking suspicion that most of the beet in northern Europe is grown only for the partridge shooting. If that were stopped, we would be able to take a great deal more cane sugar from countries which can export nothing else.

I notice also in the introduction to the White Paper that Portugal is being given an exemption to import 75,000 tonnes of cane sugar, but for only five years. What will happen after that? Will the Portuguese be condemned to buy French sugar or German sugar? It is absurd to increase the price of beet, which we do not want, at the expense of people who have nothing else to sell and are in dire straits.

I know that my hon. Friend the Minister of State, as a former Minister of State, Department of Transport, is very much aware of the ridiculous restrictions imposed at frontiers in the European Community. I am told—I may be a little out of date, but I am sure that my hon. Friend will correct me if I am—that it does not take a long time for a lorry to cross the German frontier. It takes about an hour of formality, but the driver must pay 45 deutschmarks—no one knows why.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): The Germans want it.

Sir Anthony Kershaw: Yes, but to what end?

The average lorry crossing the French frontier takes one and a half hours to go through the formalities and the driver has to pay a contribution towards the new computer which the French Customs has bought. I should have thought that the French could afford their own computer. I do not understand why each lorry should pay. Occasionally it becomes a tremendous business, with a French Customs officer deciding that goods inside a sealed container are liable to VAT. How does one open a sealed container without destroying it? This causes delays.

The other day one of my constituents took two large lorries to France. A trivial part of the form filling had not been done correctly—a signature or some such detail was omitted—and the driver was allowed, by mistake, to go through the checkpoint at Le Havre. He was pursued by the gendarmerie, arrested and brought back to Le Havre police station. The trucks remained at the side of the road and, in the end, £150,000 worth of machinery was dumped in a wood and he returned to Gloucestershire. That is absurd and should not be allowed.

Getting into Italy is virtually impossible if one is a truck driver. If, by chance, the driver does get in, he has to pay a thumping tax, which is levied, believe it or not, by the local province to pay for the paperwork.

We all know about sheepmeat. We are not entirely without fault in these matters. Of course, we have to certify that French milk coming into Britain is fit to drink. Unfortunately, we take such a long time making up our minds about sending someone to see what is happening that by the time he gets there the milk is indeed not fit to drink. We should, of course, look at our own actions.

Paragraph 6.6 of the White Paper seems to show that there are now or will be opportunities for British coastal shipping to enter continental ports hitherto banned. I am glad to note from paragraph 5.19 that the European Court is considering insurance law, especially in Germany. We expect the decision to be made by the summer. This is a blatant example of discrimination. It is a bit of a cheek for the Germans to buy our insurance companies, yet we cannot buy theirs.

Paragraph 5 is full of points which I hope will be cleared from the agenda during our presidency. Taken one by one they may not look important, but, taken together, they will make Europe a much more economic area. This will enable us to tackle the unemployment problem, to which the hon. Member for Hamilton referred, and the many other difficulties in Europe.

6.3 pm

Mr. J. Enoch Powell (South Down): In this rather desultory and at times, it appeared, desolate debate, there were signs early on that discussion might centre on the results of the Luxembourg conference and that peculiarly named—it is still peculiar after the Minister's attempted explanation—Single European Act.

We have been assured by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in its explanation memorandum on the second of the documents before the House:

> "In the United Kingdom any such amendments"—

that is, such amendments as the proposed amendments to the treaty by means of the Single European Act——

> "would be submitted to the house for approval."

It is important at this stage that the Government should make it clear what sort of legislative approval this will be. The Minister used different and contradictory adjectives in different parts of her speech. She referred to it first as a "formal opportunity" and then referred to it as a "full opportunity". The difference between the two is crucial.

In 1972 the House made a comprehensive renunciation of its powers—legislative and financial—and of British judicial authority and of the control of the House over

policy. It did it on the then basis of the treaty to which we were acceding, but did it only after a most exhaustive examination of a Bill occupying some six months of a parliamentary Session. That Bill itself was limited because it presupposed the terms of the treaty and did not propound them to the House for examination. Nevertheless, the nature of the Bill was such — because of the comprehensive renunciation which it embodied — that during those debates the House was able to examine—or would have been able to examine but for the guillotine which the Liberal party enabled to be imposed — the major features and consequences of the treaty to which we were acceding.

That treaty is being profoundly altered by the proposed new treaty. Many of the aspects of that treaty which were taken for granted as the basis on which the House passed the legislation of 1972 are altered by the proposed Single European Act. It would be wrong if the House of Commons were to give its approval to the new treaty—that is what in effect it is—with a less comprehensive parliamentary procedure than that which was available to it in 1972.

I believe we should insist that the Government make clear in advance what kind of legislation they envisage, whether they are sincere in claiming that it is legislation that will give the House a "full opportunity" of addressing itself to the respects in which the treaty to which we acceded in 1972 is being altered by the Single European Act in matters which affect the House and Britain. I hope that, if we obtain nothing else either in, or as a result of, this debate, we shall bring home to the Government the necessity of being candid well in advance with the House about the nature of the legislative progress to which they will look before the new treaty can be ratified.

Every alteration proposed in the new treaty is an alteration which diminishes the powers of the House. The powers of the House were drastically diminished by the original treaty — that was why we had to have the renunciation embodied in the 1972 Act — but if we examine the changes which would be introduced by the Luxembourg conference, we shall find that in almost every case we confront a further erosion of the powers of the House, which means a further erosion of the opportunity for the British people to influence the policy and the laws under which they live.

Sir Russell Johnston: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that if powers are eroded one's judgment of the consequences must rest on what the effect is? Does he agree that there is an argument for saying that as a consequence of our membership of the Community we have access to greater powers than if we were not in it?

Mr. Powell: That is the old trick of substituting one meaning of the word "we" for another meaning in successive sentences. I do not dispute that there are those, including the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston) — the hon. Gentleman has made no secret of this—who believe that we would take better decisions and be better off in this country if we in the House had less control and discretion over legislation and Government policies. That is a point of view which can be argued. It is not a point of view that I share, which is why I would like to draw the attention of the House to two specific areas in which the proposed treaty changes will limit in effect the legislative power and authority of the House.

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving way on a second occasion.

The right hon. Gentleman always uses the phrase "the powers of this House." Would it not be more accurate and more helpful to the nation to describe them as the powers of the Executive within the House? Is this not, in all international comparisons, a parliamentary system in which Parliament is at its weakest in many respects, in comparison with the overriding powers of the Executive, which, in our system, is based on a simple majority system on a minority vote?

Mr. Powell: I am old-fashioned enough to think that one of the functions of this House is to criticise the manner in which the Executive exercises its powers and, by criticising, effectively to limit and control those powers. If the House does not do that, it is not exercising one at any rate of the functions for which it exists.

Another function of the House, which the hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) may have had in mind, is to entrust the Executive with powers: part of the activity of hon. Members consists in defining the powers which we will concede for use by the Executive. Indeed, in the greatest periods of the power of this House—when it had real power—it was used by the Executive as an arm for creating law which the Executive would be able to use.

In both the respects to which I want to draw the attention of the House, the treaty which is by implication before us will limit the influence, the authority and the opportunities of the House.

The first is the legislative respect. Even with the assistance of the Select Committee on European Legislation chaired by the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing), whose presence we are glad to welcome at a late stage—not as a result of his fault, but because of an unhappy rearrangement of business—it is not easy to be certain as to the consequences of the change in the legislative process which the new treaty will embody. If I have understood it correctly—and there are those who will correct me if I have not—I believe that when the European Parliament—as we are to authorise it in future to be called — proposes amendments and those amendments are adopted by the Commission in a revised proposal submitted to the Council of Ministers, the proposal so submitted ceases to be a proposal requiring unanimity and becomes a proposal that can be dealt with by qualified majority.

Mr. Dykes *indicated assent.*

Mr. Powell: I am obliged to have the assurances of the hon. Member for Harrow, East, a careful student of these matters. I seem at any rate to have got it right so far.

Mr. Marlow *rose*——

Mr. Powell: I would like to continue without assistance from Northampton at this stage.

If that is so, the opportunity of this House through the Government as represented in the Council to influence and affect legislation is automatically diminished. That must be so as a consequence of the substitution of a qualified majority for unanimity as a result of the adoption by the Commission of amendments initiated by the European Parliament.

That is one of the consequences which were portended when we decided—mistakenly in my view and in the view of a considerable proportion of the House at the time

[Mr. Powell]

—to agree to a directly elected European Assembly. One could not in the end deny to that Assembly control over both finance and legislation. Of course a rearguard action is being fought, and the so-called co-operation mechanism embodied in the Luxembourg agreement is part of that rearguard action. However, the rearguard action has been lost to the extent that the European Parliament has gained an effective input into Community legislation which automatically reduces the extent to which the House through its scrutiny and other procedures can influence Community legislation.

Mr. Marlow: The right hon. Gentleman will agree with me that he heard the Minister of State say that even in circumstances where unanimity is no longer required Her Majesty's Government will still have a veto in the Council of Ministers.

Mr. Powell: It is true that the Luxembourg compromise is, if I understand it correctly, comprehensive in its application. Nevertheless—and this is relevant to the amendment which has been proposed and which the Government have said they will accept—the powers of scrutiny, of influence and of intervention by this House are necessarily diminished by the procedure which will be followed wherever the Commission accepts amendments put forward by the Parliament. A kind of co-operation is established between the Parliament and the Commission which to that extent aborts the input from this House. Therefore, in legislation, as in other matters, the new treaty will curtail the control of the House.

Mr. Dykes: Is the right hon. Gentleman not really indulging in monumental fantasies in his continuing reiteration of absurd theoretical arguments that have no relevance or reality to modern-day constitutional parliamentary practice? The right hon. Gentleman objects to the real majority, which has to come from a qualified majority system which is developing in the Community, but he accepts a minority — majority system which appears to obtain here. What does the right hon. Gentleman mean when he refers to the House making policy and inputs into the Government? The Executive decides policy, whichever Government are elected. The Executive then bestows that on the House and the Whipping system ensures that it gets through.

Mr. Powell: That is an interesting insight into the mind of one of the most vigorous supporters of the European Economic Community. The hon. Gentleman thinks that the Executive "bestows" on the House the fruits of the exercise of its authority. I believe that the processes of debate, backed by the processes of voting in the House, do influence the information and behaviour of Governments. We do not have to exercise our memories very severely in March 1986 to recall recent examples where the House has, by its reaction and criticism of Government behaviour, brought about alterations in the way in which the Executive behaves. No doubt the hon. Member for Harrow, East regrets that — the hon. Gentleman, after all, wants our Executive to be absorbed into a larger Executive which would be beyond even what he calls the nominal control of this House. However, I will not weary the House further by demonstrating, as I am afraid he enables me progressively to do, how much I dislike and reject his view of the House of Commons and its function.

Another area in which authority—I shall continue to use that notion in the face of the hon. Member for Harrow, East—is effectively withdrawn from this House is that termed political co-operation. One can easily be mistaken about this because if one looks at the terminology it appears to be concerned with a desire for unanimity through consultation. For example, one of the subsections of a proposed clause says:

> "In order to ensure the swift adoption of common positions and the implementation of joint action, the High Contracting Parties shall, as far as possible, refrain from impeding the formation of a consensus and the joint action which this could produce."

Of course, under that terminology one is still allowed to dissent; but by an international instrument we shall have bound ourselves as a nation to make every possible endeavour to arrive at common positions and to arrive at them by "swift adoption."

"Common positions" and "swift adoption" are significant terms. In the past 10 years we have had much experience of the operation of political co-operation. It means that the Foreign Secretary has joined his colleagues from the other member states of the European Community and produced a European policy which is promulgated as such and as subsuming the assent of all the member states. Precisely through this process of political co-operation, the Foreign Secretary's and the Government's relationship with the House is profoundly altered in reality. The Foreign Secretary comes to the House after the event and says, "As in duty bound to attempt, I have concurred with my colleagues in the rest of the Community to achieve a European consensus and here is the European policy that we have produced." It is far more difficult for Members of this House to criticise a foreign policy decision when it can be presented as part of a collective European decision.

Sir Anthony Kershaw: A short time ago the Danish Parliament did exactly that which the right hon. Gentleman says is impossible here.

Mr. Powell: The Danes have a different arrangement, which I do not necessarily commend, in relation to European legislation and policy. In any case, they recently found themselves overruled by a popular vote into compliance with the very procedures that I am criticising.

The mere fact that the process is consultative and voluntary rather than binding in form does not deprive it of the power to diminish the input of this Assembly and of public opinion in this country into the formation of our foreign policy. The foreign policy of the United Kingdom, adopted by the United Kingdom as such, has to rest, and be seen to rest, upon the consent of the House of Commons —if necessary emerging out of debate. When it is part of a European foreign policy under the political co-operation arrangements to which we are binding ourselves by treaty, it is possible for a Government effectively to escape from all those pressures and from the necessity to stand upon the common will of this House as representing the electorate of this country.

I therefore stress the necessity not to be distracted by the apparently voluntary and optional form of the wording. To bind oneself by international agreement to arrive if possible at a consensus with 11 or 12 other states is a major

derogation from the responsibility of the Executive to this House. In this context, it is right to draw attention to a fact to which the Select Committee referred in the context of the effect of this enlargement of the community on the relative position of the United Kingdom within the Community. On page 10 of its first special report the Select Committee made three points:

"(i) the position of the Big Four (France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom) has been reduced;
(ii) two members of the Big Four do not have, by themselves, a blocking power;
(iii) the new Mediterranean block (Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain) can exercise a major influence."

In the past 12 months there has been a real shift of power inside the institutions of the European Economic Community. When deciding, as I hope that we shall be able to decide in due course in due legislative form, whether the House accepts the new treaty for a Single European Act, we must bear in mind the real invasion that it represents into the existing relationship between Parliament, the Executive and the institutions of the European Economic Community. I hope, at any rate, that this debate will not conclude until we have secured from the Government a specific undertaking that the legislative process will enable these matters to be separately explored, separately debated and separately decided.

6.25 pm

Mr. Michael Knowles (Nottingham, East): I was heartened—as, I suspect, were others although I doubt whether they included the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell)—to read the comment of my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary that the Community is not just a forum in which to defend national interests but a forge in which to fashion the means of achieving common objectives. Those of us who support the Community will endorse that. Our only question is why we were not there 20 years ago saying exactly that and fashioning the means to carry out that policy.

I wish to address much the same problems as the right hon. Member for South Down addressed, although my views differ somewhat from his. The White Paper on developments in the European Community, like others before it, suggests that we are groping towards agreement but that there is no positive means of getting action. One can see both opportunities and dangers ahead for parliamentary scrutiny, particularly with the Single European Act. One of our problems as a national Parliament was created quite deliberately in a way that marks us out from, I believe, all other members of the Community, in that we have no institutional link between this House and the European Parliament. Whenever such a link is suggested, it is opposed in all parts of the House. Labour Members are always very much against it, but I suspect that many Conservatives who take the same view are content to hide behind the opposition put up by the Labour party.

There is no institutional link but we kid ourselves if we suppose that the process that we use in this House gives us any real influence. I am honoured to be a member of the Select Committee on European Legislation. The Chairman, too, is present in the Chamber. In fact, however, because we cannot consider anything until we actually receive a piece of paper, by the time we discuss an issue and it is debated in the House things have gone so far down the road that we cannot influence them. If we wish to influence matters in the European Community, we must get in at an earlier stage, as a House and as a democratic institution. The bureaucratic link between the Commission and Whitehall is well built in, with constant contacts and plane flights, but if any Member of this House wishes to ring a Member of the European Parliament he has to pay for the call himself.

This House is effectively chopped off from the European Parliament, and that is no accident. The Select Committee therefore cannot act effectively. Indeed, it is designed not to act effectively. Yet any suggestion that its mandate should be widened is constantly resisted by the Executive because that would shrink the power of the Executive. That is the normal interplay of forces. We have a powerful bureaucratic link, but a democratic deficit between this Parliament and the European Parliament. We have been so jealous of our rights and prerogatives that democratic control of any kind over these decisions is being lost. This is a problem to which we must address ourselves—we need to be informed much earlier. The House of Lords is of more use to Parliament than are its Select Committees.

On 27 January, the House of Lords had an interesting debate on its report on the external competence of the European Communities. The debate contained serious implications which the House has not picked up. The fact that the Community can sign an external treaty means that, within the Community, the process, in terms of law, operates backwards. It overrides laws passed by this House or any other national legislature. The attention of the House was not drawn to that. There is no way in which this House can pick that fact up from the Select Committee procedure, and indeed it is not designed to pick it up. In this case the House of Lords is doing the job that we should be doing.

There is no point in our being jealous and moaning continuously about the European Parliament if we will not do the democratic job. It is my view that someone must do the job. If we fudge the job, then let the European Parliament do it. However, I think we could and should do the job.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): I think there is a slight misunderstanding. Although I agree that the reports from another place are often informative, surely there is nothing to prevent the appropriate Committee—the Select Committee or departmental Committee—in the House from fulfilling that parallel objective on merit if it so wishes. For instance, the hon. Member for Stroud (Sir A. Kershaw) and his Committee could if they wished look at the merits of the Single European Act that we are discussing. Any hon. Member may take part in the debates of the Select Committee on European Legislation and Standing Committees considering European documents.

Mr. Knowles: We know that that does not happen. That is the theory, not the practice.

I believe we need a better system. Some people have suggested a Grand Committee system. I am not enough of a parliamentary expert to know whether that is the answer, but the present system does not work and certainly a job which needs to be done is not being done. We must find a way of doing it. If this is not done, the House will lose power not to the European Parliament but to the Executive—somewhere between Whitehall and the Commission. That is the reality and that is what I oppose.

We shall soon assume the Presidency and I suspect that it will pose certain problems for Ministers. With the

[Mr. Knowles]

collapse of the dollar, there will be a great pressure on the CAP, to which an enormous part of the budget is still devoted. I suspect—I hope that I have to eat my words—that before the end of the year requests will be put before us for more money. It will be in some disguise, but it will be a request for money. The VAT increase of 1·4 per cent. will not take the strain.

We must address ourselves to the central problems and avoid fudging the issue. Is there a proper system of control? How is the Council of Ministers supposed to operate? The Council is sometimes treated as an intergovernmental conference or just as a sounding board for national disputes. At other times it is seen as the engine of the Community, which will push things along. It is sometimes viewed as a legislative body, but if it is I think it is the only one in the democratic world that meets in secret the whole time.

As we are debating the Single European Act, this is the right time to consider how the system operates. We are a member of the Community and we should stay a member and make it work effectively. That means that there must be great changes. There must be changes to the Council, to the Commission, and to the European Parliament. This House has to examine how it is carrying out its mandate of democratic control in this area. I do not believe that we are fulfilling that function.

6.34 pm

Mr. Eric Deakins (Walthamstow): The importance of a parliamentary debate must not be measured by attendance at the debate. There have been many occasions in parliamentary history when there has been a low attendance at debates on matters of great importance.

I agree with a number of the comments made by the hon. Member for Nottingham, East (Mr. Knowles). Although we disagree fundamentally about progress in the EEC and Britain's role in it, I agree about the legislative role of the House. I applaud his work and the work of my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) in the Select Committee on European Legislation.

This is an all-embracing debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) mentioned unemployment, social policy, and so on. The hon. Member for Stroud (Sir A. Kershaw) raised a number of issues which are mentioned in the six-monthly report. There is a danger that we shall ramble on from one subject to another without a coherent theme. I think that the theme pursued by the hon. Member for Nottingham, East is important, and I shall return to it later. However, I wish to concentrate on three areas where things are going wrong and which carry serious future implications for the House and the country. Those issues are mentioned in the six-monthly report. The first issue is the common agricultural policy, the second is the Single European Act and the third is the continuing dispute over finance between the Assembly and the Council.

With regard to the CAP, I draw the attention of the House to paragraph 1.10 of the six-monthly report. That paragraph relates to what was said by the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in a written answer last year but which was never followed up. Last year, the House will recall that in the price fixing for agricultural commodities, in particular cereals, the Germans used the veto in the Council of Ministers to prevent cereal prices to farmers being reduced. That veto stood. However, the Commission, in its wisdom, subsequently managing the market in the absence of the Council's agreement, reduced cereal prices to the level to which they would have been reduced had the veto not been applied. That is mentioned in paragraphs 1.10 and 4.1 of the report.

Thus, the Commission has allocated to itself powers which are only for the Council. The Commission has no authority to change agricultural prices once they have been agreed by the Council. In the absence of the Council's agreement to change the previous year's agricultural prices for a particular commodity, the previous year's prices apply. Therefore, the cereal prices should not have been reduced. I believe they should have been reduced, but that is a separate issue. It is a matter of principle as to which body has the power to reduce the prices. I am surprised that hon. Members have not pursued the Minister and the Government on this issue. We have agreed, in default, to give extra powers to the Commission which are not laid down in the treaty of Rome, nor are they to be laid down in the Single European Act or in any other legislative provision.

It is a fact, within the memories of all hon. Members, that in the past year the argument for increasing the VAT contribution to 1·4 per cent. and subsequently 1·6 per cent. rested on an assurance and undertaking by the Government that that was all very well, but as a quid pro quo there would be strict control over Community expenditure on the CAP by the budget mechanism of financial guidelines. That has gone ahead and everyone has accepted it. Some of us had doubts about the validity of the financial guidelines, but at least we were prepared to give them a chance. The Minister may not read every written answer in *Hansard*, but I do every weekend, and it is amazing what one learns. I have to inform the House that the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, in a written answer on 26 February, when talking about the agricultural price proposals put forward for the current year by the European Commission and the Council, said:

> "I commended the Commission's determination to place the main emphasis on action through price, but I expressed concern about the proposal to exceed the financial guideline for agricultural expenditure. I made clear my very strong objections in particular to those aspects of the proposals." — [*Official Report*, 26 February 1986; Vol. 92, c. *549*.]

I shall not bore the House with those proposals, but I draw attention to the significance of the financial guideline. The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food is now telling the House that, although he disagrees with it, the Commission, which was supposed to have agreed to be the guardian of the financial guidelines, has now put forward price proposals for agricultural products for the current year which "exceed" — his own word — the financial guideline. If that is not a devastating admission on the part of the Government, I do not know what is. It should give us all cause for concern, whatever our views on the EEC.

The Minister "expressed concern" about the financial guideline being exceeded, but he used stronger language when talking about the possibility of income support for some small farmers—he strongly objected. Why did the Minister not object to the major issue of exceeding the financial guideline? He could have objected to other things — one has no objection to that — but he, or his civil servants, must have chosen the words of his answer very carefully. I hope that the answer does not mean that the

Government are now backtracking on their commitment to ensure that the Council of Ministers observes the financial guideline.

Paragraph 3.10 of the White Paper refers to the intergovernmental agreement which gave the Community extra money by way of non-repayable advances, which are outside the scope of the treaties. Those advances are not included in the treaty mechanism procedure; they are agreed by a special Council meeting.

I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) will stress in his winding-up speech that more intergovernmental agreements will come this year. I challenge the Minister to deny that. My concern is not merely that more money will be allocated to the Community than was put forward in the budget discussion, but that it will weaken our case before the European Court later this year in the dispute between the Assembly and the Council. The prospect of further intergovernmental agreements to raise extra money to meet commitments and appropriations under the EEC budget will undermine our case.

If the Minister feels that there is some doubt about that, I refer her to the legal submission on behalf of the United Kingdom Government to the European Court, which was put in the Library at the end of January. It is an entirely legal submission. Paragraph 21 and following paragraphs give the view of the Assembly and say why it disagrees with the Council. One of the Assembly's arguments against the Council's budget and in favour of its own illegal budget is that the draft budget as adopted by the Council does not make adequate provision for existing commitments.

The Assembly's case for an illegal budget is likely to be supported by the Government having to come to the House later this year for extra money in 1986. I beg the Minister to take that point on board. I am glad to see the Minister of State, Treasury present as this matter is important for our future relations with the Community and for relations between the Assembly and the Council, which have a spin-off for the House.

The Single European Act represents a defeat for the Government. That is admitted in the White Paper, paragraph 2.7 of which says:

"[On the second and third points the European council decided by unprecedented majority vote to convene an intergovernmental conference to draw up a treaty]".

We know from what the Prime Minister has said that she did not want any treaty amendments or a Single European Act, and we must assume that she was speaking for the Government as a whole. The Act was therefore a defeat for the Government. Since June, the Government have been involved in a part public relations and part damage limitation exercise. Once the intergovernmental conference was convened, the federalists in Italy, Holland and elsewhere, the Commission and the Assembly tried to get real amendments to the basic treaties which moved in a federalist direction. The Select Committee has done the House a service by drawing attention to the fact that, although we have limited the damage, as the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) said, there have been incursions into the sovereignty of the House as a result of that relatively modest—so its supporters would claim—Single European Act.

The conflict between the Assembly and the House about the Assembly's legislative powers is merely postponed, but the Assembly has been encouraged by the Single European Act. The Assembly, thinking itself even more democratic than national Parliaments, will, given an inch, try to take much more. In due course, there will be further incursions into national sovereignty. The Assembly is being backed by the Commission. One of the safeguards mentioned in the final Act is removed by the fact that the Commission may accept amendments to a Council legislative proposal pushed through by the Assembly.

Of course, the Commission wants the Assembly to have more power and national Parliaments to have less, so it will always accept the Assembly's amendments. That will pose the dilemma, which the right hon. Member for South Down mentioned, about the powers of the House and those of the Council when it comes to rejecting, by qualified majority, the amended proposals put forward by the Assembly and the Commission. This is an additional power to the Assembly, courtesy of the Commission and of the Council having to work by qualified majority.

The major battle between the Assembly and this Parliament is still to be fought. These are preliminary skirmishes, but they are significant. If we do not stop the rot now, when considering the Single European Act, we shall have more incursions.

That brings me to the budget dispute, which has not received much publicity in the House or outside. I assure the House that, as far as I can see, it is of the utmost significance in terms of relations between Community institutions and the House of Commons and the Government. The pretensions of the Assembly for financial control may not be all that well known. If not, I recommend hon. Members to read a publication of the European Assembly entitled "Effective Parliamentary Control of European Finances," which is basically a foreword from the President and an introduction by the Chairman of the Committee on Budgetary Control. There are many suggestions in it. From the foreword of this year's report—which may be an annual report, I do not know—the President, Pierre Pflimlin, says:

"The need for democratic control of Community revenue and expenditure underlies the increase in the European Parliament's budgetary powers brought about by the revisions of the Treaties of Paris and Rome in 1970 and 1975."

Therefore, it is quite clear that the Assembly is using this dispute over the 1986 budget as a test case for its powers. That is why we in this House must take it very seriously.

Sir Russell Johnston: Does the hon. Gentleman find it interesting that this view is expressed by the President of the Parliament, not as a party politician but as someone speaking for the whole Parliament? That is something we seldom get in the same way in this House.

Mr. Deakins: I accept that the President was purporting to speak, and may well have been speaking for all I know, on behalf of 100 per cent. of the members of the European Assembly. That does not surprise me in the least, as, with the possible exception of a few British Labour members—I am not making a party political point—the vast majority of members of the European Assembly are federalist at heart. They want to see the European Assembly in complete control of the legislative procedures in the Community and of the budgetary procedures and so on. It is their right to demand that and it is our right to resist—certainly those of us who have the interests of the House at heart.

[Mr. Deakins]

I have quoted the President, but I now wish to point out two features of the 1986 budget dispute which have perhaps gone relatively unnoticed. The first is on expenditure. Fortunately, that is mentioned in the legal submission against the illegal budget made by this country to the European Court. On expenditure, the Assembly is now ignoring the maximum rate of increase on non-obligatory expenditure and, for the first time, it is also trying to increase obligatory expenditure. I ask hon. Members to think seriously about the implications of the second point, if it is upheld by the European Court. It will give the European Assembly the right to increase expenditure on the common agricultural policy. In the past year the Assembly has passed at least one resolution saying that not enough money was being spent on the common agricultural policy.

That is bad enough, but worse is to come. There is an issue that has gone unnoticed in the legal submission, and I should be grateful if the Minister would give us some assurance that it will at least be looked at. I cannot expect her to answer it in the space of a few hours because it may need to be looked at by legal experts. The Assembly has put forward a balanced budget for 1986. The budget which it had rejected by the Council, the November budget, was also a balanced budget. As the Assembly had increased expenditure in its illegal budget, I was at a loss to know what happened on the income side. Therefore, I tabled a question to the Chancellor of the Exchequer. The reply came from the Minister of State, Treasury, who is present. I will not bore the House by reading the details, but he was referring to the Assembly's budget. He said:

"Within the 1·4 per cent. VAT ceiling, the amount of VAT own resources at the uniform rate was increased in the adopted budget". —[*Official Report*, 27 February 1986; Vol. 92, c. *691*.]

For the first time, the Assembly has sought to arrogate to itself the power to increase taxation. That has not happened before. I know that we are opposed to the illegal budget, and if it is thrown out by the European Court, as we hope, the issue will not arise. However, I want to put down a marker, and I think that the House would also want to do so, because until now the Assembly has been trying to increase expenditure but has done nothing about taxation. In the illegal budget — as we claim in the House — it has tried to increase, and has increased, expenditure. That expenditure will be financed by a revenue increase which will not have been approved by the Council of Ministers. I need hardly say what the implications of that will be if the illegal budget is upheld by the European Court towards the end of this year.

Mr. Spearing: I have been following what my hon. Friend says with great interest, particularly in relation to the question he asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer because it had escaped my attention. Is he saying that, irrespective of the court's judgment on the legality or otherwise of the Assembly's budget, the Assembly's motion will increase revenue? Surely in terms of the treaty of Rome, that was not within its competence. Had there been a Table Office, such a motion would have been ruled ultra vires.

Mr. Deakins: I hope that my hon. Friend will forgive me. I agree with his point and will come back to it.

On the national legal action which is now being taken by the Government against the Assembly—the Council of Ministers is also taking action and the two actions are running in parallel—one has to accept that there is no machinery in the treaty of Rome to curb the actions or the pretensions of the Assembly. That is the fault of the founders of the treaty of Rome. I think that there is such machinery in article 37 of the European Coal and Steel Community treaty, which is now merged with the other two basic treaties into a single uniform treaty for the Community. The Assembly is trying something on. I am not convinced that the court will not try to help it along that particular path.

The Assembly is claiming increased budgetary powers, but in the treaty of Rome there does not seem to be any direct provision for the Court of Justice to get at the Assembly for exceeding powers which are granted to it in the treaty of Rome. I believe that that was a mistake by the EEC states in 1957 and that mistake has been repeated in the latest treaty amendments in the Single European Act. There is nothing in the Act which would give the Council a proper power to take the Assembly to the European Court for abusing or trying to exceed the new powers which have been given to it in the Single European Act.

I read with great interest the United Kingdom submission to the court. I think that it put a strong case. It is obviously cogent and well argued. However, I have two questions, if not for the Minister who will reply, to be taken on board by the appropriate Ministers. I have had correspondence with the Prime Minister about these issues. First, why are we not taking action, in addition to article 173 of the treaty of Rome—it does not directly mention the Assembly but there is at least a legal argument for saying that by analogy the Assembly is caught by that provision—under article 177, paragraphs *(a)* and *(b)*?

It might help the House if I quote briefly from article 177:

"The Court of Justice shall have jurisdiction to give preliminary rulings concerning:

(a) the interpretation of this Treaty;

(b) the validity and interpretation of Acts of the institutions of the Community".

Surely, an illegal budget by the Assembly is, at least in part, a matter of interpretation of the treaty. I am astonished that the Law Officers, the Government in their wisdom, and the legal advisers of the Foreign Office have not thought fit to ensure that our case runs on two lines, one under article 173 and the other under article 177. It is still not too late to put in a separate submission and I hope that the Government will consider that.

Why have we not put anything in the legal submission on the Assembly claim, which I mentioned earlier, to have tax-gathering powers — powers over increasing the revenue of the Communities by increasing the VAT contributions within the 1·4 per cent. ceiling? The Assembly has no such powers under any of the basic treaties, so where does it get the power from? As it does not have the power, it should be possible to undermine its position by an appropriate reference to the court.

I am not a legal expert, but in my view, if the Assembly had wanted to increase expenditure and there had been a disagreement, the illegal budget should have been returned to the Council, and if the Council agreed with the extra expenditure that the Assembly wanted, it would have had the right to say, "We shall increase the revenue to make sure that we have a balanced budget, which we have to do." That has not happened. The Council is at fault. I have

not seen its submission to the court yet, but I hope that it will also be made available to hon. Members. We might be able to offer some useful suggestions through our own Government as to the line that the Council might take, because, on the issue of authorising extra taxation, there cannot be any two ways about it. Either the Assembly or the Council will have that power. It cannot be shared between two institutions of the Community, both of which have democratic pretensions. I know which one most hon. Members will support—the Council.

We must shoot down the Assembly's case on that point by the end of the year. I am emphasising this point so much because I am not yet convinced that we have taken it on board in our legal submission. I do not expect a reply now on such an important matter, but I hope that the Minister will take it away and come back to the House with an answer in due course.

7.1 pm

Sir Anthony Meyer (Clwyd, North-West): I shall return to budgetary discipline, which was so exhaustively dealt with by the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Deakins). It well illustrates the difficulty that the Government will find themselves in through rash boasts of their ability to contain increases in budgetary expenditure.

Like every speech that the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) makes in debates on these matters, his speech today was brilliant and lucid. It was, at every stage, introvertible. At the end he had succeeded in creating an impossible object, which one sometimes sees in ingenious drawings. It was an impossible object of great terror to him and to those who feel like him, an impossible object that I and those who feel like me may marvel at; it was an impossible object none the less. It was the impossible object of a Community that was so organised that it could control its own destiny, sweep aside the will of the House and vote itself the money that it wanted to create the things that it wanted. Alas, it does not exist. I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman, in his heart of hearts, knows that it does not exist and rejoices thereat.

On these occasions, I usually find myself defending the Government against hon. Members on both sides of the House who want to stop the world and get off and who never lack for plausible reasons why we should all do so. I should be particularly glad to be able to do so today, with my hon. Friend the Minister of State at the Dispatch Box, because I know that she, like her predecessor, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Pentlands (Mr. Rifkind) who was sitting in the Chamber a few moments ago, is more aware than almost any other Minister of the vital need for this country to exploit to the full the opportunities that membership of the Community offers.

However, it is [illegible]ways too easy to defend a Government who, apart from four or five Ministers, are so half-hearted, so full of qualifications, reservations and withdrawals in their own defence, and who are so reluctant to proclaim the advantages that may arise for our country through a policy of full-hearted participation in a European Community that really works. The Government are far too ready to make concessions to their adversaries in that matter. So determined are they to avoid any charge of weakening in their defence of the right of national veto that they have, as the report on the activities of the six months in 1985 makes plain, contributed towards a further enfeeblement of the decision-making powers of the Community which, now that it has grown to a Community of 12, urgently needs to strengthen its decision-making capacity if it is not to relapse into total paralysis.

So keen are the Government to parade their zeal for budget-cutting that they are raising a series of hopes of being able to contain increases in the European Community budget. The fall in the value of the dollar and the consequent huge gap, which is becoming wider, between Community food prices and food prices in the rest of the world will impose a colossal strain on the budget of the Community, and it will be increasingly difficult to contain the increases within the ceiling that has been set.

Of course, the merchants of gloom are right. They are nearly always right. It will not be possible to reform the common agricultural policy because those same merchants of gloom refuse to consent to the improvements in decision taking which alone would enable the reforms to be made. Budgetary discipline will break down precisely because the unreformable common agriculture policy will run out of control.

However, I do not want to speak on that matter. I want to talk about developments in industrial policy in Europe in the period under review. There were no developments in industrial policy in the period under review. Here at home there were two tremendous industrial issues. At any rate, they were tremendous in the political sense. Those two issues were Westland and British Leyland. If there is to be such a thing as European industrial policy—that is to say, at its very lowest, a conscious attempt by European Governments to ensure the survival of some part of their manufacturing industry and the jobs that go with it by encouraging closer co-operation among European firms to enable them to withstand United States and far east competition—surely there should have been a credible European alternative to an American takeover of Westland and British Leyland.

Even so, the American solution might very well have been the more attractive choice for workers, shareholders and even the nation. However, despite the efforts of my right hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine), there was no credible European alternative for Westland. The total lack of interest by Her Majesty's Government and the short-sighted greed of the European helicopter manufacturers saw to that.

As for British Leyland, successive Governments of both parties who for years propped it up with large subsidies have systematically neglected to use that leverage to push it into a European partnership of near-equals and have contented themselves with allowing British Leyland to become a broken-winded Trojan horse to smuggle Japanese cars into the Common Market.

I do not go all the way with those of my hon. Friends who say that Land Rover must remain British at all costs, still less the rest of BL. However, if Land Rover is to be used as a sweetener to get General Motors to swallow the other more gristly bits of BL, why on earth was no attempt made to put together a similar dowry to tempt a European bridegroom? Once again, the American solution may well turn out to be the best for all concerned in the end, but why was there no choice? Thus, the last British helicopter facility, and the last British motor manufacturer, are passing out of British hands and straight into American hands, with no attempt by the British Government, or, for that matter, the other Governments in the Community, to

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devise a short or long-term policy to strengthen European helicopter capacity or consolidate European car manufacturing industry.

If what has happened in helicopters and motor cars has not happened in civil aircraft, it is precious little thanks to British Governments of either party, and no thanks whatever to British Airways. It is due solely to the foresight of Hawker Siddeley, which put its money into European Airbus, a family of aircraft that has been a big success, despite the British Government. Now, here too, continued British participation in further development is at risk because the Treasury is holding back on the launch aid that is necessary to keep British Aerospace in the later stages of the project.

There has been a series of sins of omission, each one excusable and possibly justifiable on its own but adding up to a culpable failure to have any coherent strategy to defend British industry and jobs. Such a strategy must have as its main element—I do not say its sole element because often there will be partnership legitimately with Japanese or American firms — the use of the vast economic potential of the European market.

The Government have two answers to the charges of negligence. The first is that each case should be judged on its merits. I am not saying that each industry needs to find a European solution to its problems. Nor can it make sense to ignore altogether the fact that we are a member of the European Community and that the mechanism of co-operation and the habit of working together on projects are already there, waning though they may be for lack of Government interest. To say that each case must be judged on its merits is another way of saying that we have no policy.

The other answer is to say that things must be left to the play of the free market, the judgment of the stock exchange and so on. That was the answer given in the Westland case. It is manifest piffle. What possible free market can there be in the technologically advanced industries which are defence-related when national Governments are the only purchasers?

Fortunately, the Government do not believe their own nonsense; they use their purchasing power to exert a British preference, very understandably, in arms purchases. All Governments in the European Community are in the same business of using their purchasing power to favour their own industry. In 1982, the last year for which figures are available, the United Kingdom spent no less than 98·3 per cent. of Government cash on equipment made within our own borders. The 1·7 per cent. left over is not much with which to encourage any joint European venture but it is at least better than the 0·3 per cent. left over by the Germans, the 0·09 per cent. left over by the French, or the nil per cent. left over by the Italians, every penny of whose procurement expenditure went on goods made within the Italian frontier.

All the political pressures in this Parliament, as in every other European national Parliament, will be exerted in support by a "buy national" policy. There are no votes in European co-operation; it just happens to be necessary for industrial survival. Not only do Governments vitiate, by blatantly protectionist policies in public procurement, the free markets to which they claim to be attached, but their attitude towards the completion of a single market in Europe, which in itself or by itself could do a lot to sustain a competitive European industrial base, is all too reminiscent of Arthur Clough's version of the sixth commandment:

"Thou shalt not kill; but need'st not strive
Officiously to keep alive."

We British complain about German, French and Italian frontier delays, with good reason, but we all know how effectively Her Majesty's Customs manages to hold things up at our sea ports and with what derision it treats the notion of a green customs channel. It looks as if it will shortly be transferring its energies to ensuring that after the Channel tunnel is built it will take longer to get from London to Paris by train than it does at present by ferry.

I hope that the Liberal party will not offer itself as the champion of effective European industrial policy. The only Liberal voices that we heard during the whole Westland affair were those of the two hon. Members who had a direct constituency interest in a quick sell-out to the Americans. I am still waiting to hear proposals from the Liberal party for a thought-out European solution for the future of British Leyland. We know that, with the sole exception of the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston), who is an invariable attender at and participant in debates—he is the European policy of the Liberal party — the party is now giving all its attention to more electorally fashionable topics.

As for the Labour party, it is still officially committed to taking Britain out of the European Community.

Mr. Foulkes: No, we are not.

Sir Anthony Meyer: We are not sure about that. Although there may be legitimate doubts as to whether the Labour party means to take us out of the European Community, and whether it means that more than any of the other things it says, there is no doubt that the Labour party is still the same narrow, insular, suspicious party that it always has been. The hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) made a fair fist of something that sounded like a European speech. That was because none of his minders was present apart from the hon. Member for Walthamstow, but he is so amiable that I do not think he would strike fear into anyone's heart.

Only a Conservative Government can give the urgently needed new impulse to the evolution of an industrial policy which will enable Europe to remain an industrial society well into the next century.

Mr. Foulkes: The hon. Gentleman has said that only a Conservative Government can give such impetus. It is on public record that he wants a change in the leadership of the Government. Since we know that the Prime Minister is not the most enthusiastic European, is that one of the reasons why he wants a change in leadership? Does he want to make sure that the initiative he is talking about takes place?

Sir Anthony Meyer: I want to make sure that the policies of my right hon. Friend are successfully defended at the next general election. My right hon. Friend may be the person best qualified to defend her own great European achievements. As to my right hon. Friend's commitment to the European idea, I do not see how any impartial observer could question the depth of her attachment to the concept.

In the effort to ensure that Europe will remain an industrial society, we have a start of sorts in the EUREKA project — not, I fear, a British initiative, although it

should have been. It covers only a tiny number of projects in the most advanced area of technology. It will not help us to keep our steel industry, our car industry or our aircraft industry, but we cannot keep those going by our own unaided efforts. We must work more closely with our European partners to create the conditions in which our industries can survive. I look to this Government to get on with it. It would be no use looking to any other.

7.17 pm

Sir Russell Johnston (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Clwyd, North-West (Sir A. Meyer) whose courageous consistency in defence of the ideals of the European Community through fair weather and foul must attract general respect. I say that despite the somewhat limp slap on the hand which he felt obliged to give to the Liberal party.

It is also a great pleasure to welcome to the six monthly "take note" debates the Minister of State, the hon. Member for Wallasey (Mrs. Chalker). If it is not an embarrassment to her in her absence, I must say that I have always found her an exceptionally fair-minded Minister, not given to being dogmatic, but willing to listen—which cannot be said of all Ministers. Her arrival on the European scene will enhance the Government's contribution. We could do with more people with her engaging, intelligent frankness. I say that unreservedly.

In these debates we ask ourselves where we are in the Community and where we are going. An optimistic view, which is becoming fashionable, is that not only the Government but the great official structures, such as the Foreign Office, the Treasury and the Department of Trade and Industry, think that we are making progress, that we must make more progress and that there is movement and a more positive attitude.

One gets a taste of this in the first paragraph of the White Paper, which states:

"The enlargement negotiations were completed and the Spanish and Portuguese Accession Treaty signed. Agreement was reached on the new own resources decision embodying the budgetary corrective mechanism for the United Kingdom. With these long-standing issues resolved the Community was able to give greater attention to its future development and in particular to institutional reform and better decision-making."

More than anything else, that changed attitude was enshrined in the paper presented by the Prime Minister to the Fontainebleau European Council in June 1984. Many of us felt that the hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes)—I am sorry that he has left the Chamber—had written that document in secret and that its publication was to be the precursor of his meteoric rise to office. Sadly, that did not happen.

It was certainly a positive document. I am surprised at how few hon. Members have read it. I strongly recommend it. It had the most positive tone of any document produced by any United Kingdom Government since the halcyon days of the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath). Indeed, it will make an interesting speculation for future political historians whether, had the right hon. Gentleman won the 1974 election, our path into Europe would have been very different and whether we would have ridden the oil crisis that coincided with our entry quite differently. The pro-European mood was certainly there, as the 1975 referendum demonstrated, but thereafter it was steadily dissipated, first by an unenthusiastic Labour party and secondly by a very nationalistic lady.

What is now the status of the Fontainebleau paper? It was quite at variance with the spirit of the Fontainebleau paper — first, on institutions — that we should ally ourselves with Denmark and Greece in making reservations on the Dooge report. That is referred to in paragraph 2.6 of the White Paper, when the present Secretary of State for Scotland had the job of chumming up with Mr. Papandreou and the Danish representatives. It was also at variance with the spirit of Fontainebleau that, in making the argument for budgetary adjustment to take account of the United Kingdom's continuing economic decline and the GNP relative to other members, we should simply make a United Kingdom case without establishing this in a Community frame to take lasting account of the problems of other countries. For example, Portugal was in exactly the same position, but from an even lower economic base.

I also suggest that in our appointments to the Commission we gave no evidence of a wish to promote United Kingdom politicians of the first rank, far less those with enthusiasm for the institution that they were joining. In parenthesis, let me record that I very much regret the departure of Ivor Richard, who was beginning to do a very good job.

I again ask what the status now is of the Fontainebleau document, and I hope that the Minister will say something about it in his reply. I also hope that he has read it, studied it and agreed with it.

The Luxembourg meeting took place after the publication of the White Paper, but, even if the Government went along with the conclusions of the Luxembourg agreement and prised themselves apart from Denmark and Greece, their role was one of brake, not accelerator, and the vision one saw in the Fontainebleau agreement was surpressed.

In passing, I entirely agree with the Minister of State and am pleased with the result of the Danish referendum. I congratulate the various forces in Denmark on their success, particularly my political friends in Venstre.

Over the years, there have been a variety of approaches to reconciling the enthusiastic call of the Six with the others who joined later—who have always been a bit difficult, with the possible exception of Ireland, which has managed to get quite a bit out of it. In 1974, Socialist Willy Brandt coined the idea of a two-speed Community, and the Liberal Ralf Dahrendorf afterwards came up with the idea of an à la carte Community, although that had many federal connotations. The new French President of the Commission, Jacques Delors, was the variable geometry man. They have all been trying to find a way of reconciling those two problems.

Although the decision-making process was approved in Luxembourg, it must still be put to the test of vested interests. I was not terribly encouraged by what the Minister of State said. She said that our special interests were protected, and we all know the result of that. She also said that the Luxembourg compromise holds, but what happens then? The only direct thing that she said was that we will decide things for ourselves. That did not encourage me to think that the Government were of a mood to go in for majority decision making.

Even if all this works, we shall thereafter need stronger mechanisms for regional regeneration and for dealing with changing technology. The hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) spoke about this, and he was quite right.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): I take it that the hon. Gentleman is speaking on behalf of his party. Does the leader of the SDP agree with him on majority voting in all material respects?

Sir Russell Johnston: The leader of the SDP and myself have a very amicable relationship——

Mr. Cash: Will the hon. Gentleman answer my question? He will appreciate that this is central to the development of the European Parliament and the Community in the context of the aspirations of the alliance in a couple of years time. Therefore, it is important for the nation to know where the alliance stands on this very important question.

Sir Russell Johnston: If the hon. Gentleman wants me to answer his questions, he should oblige me by not interrupting before I have got through my preamble.

The Liberal and Social Democratic parties produced a joint programme for the European elections that dealt with majority voting. We stated our position quite clearly, and that is the position that I have just enunciated.

The Government's continued obstruction to an increase in the powers of the funding of the regional and social funds is difficult to understand. I have remarked before that I will never forget the enlightened first speech of my right hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Jenkins) as President of the European Commission in Luxembourg, to which I listened as a member of the European Parliament. His central theme was the increasing divergence between the magic square of Hamburg, the Ruhr, Paris and London, and the peripheries, which include the highlands of Scotland, which I represent, a great swathe of the United Kingdom almost down to the midlands, and Mediterranean countries and Portugal. Incidentally, I must say to the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) who referred to Portugal as a Mediterranean country that it is Atlantic and quite different in attitude.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Hillhead believed that the trend must be reversed. Because of the Council's resistance, he could not do much about it, and since then the position has worsened. In those days a great deal of hope centred on the enlargement of the non-quota section of the regional fund. Now it has been abolished, which is a bad thing. I am referring to section V, paragraph 5.1 of the White Paper. Did the Government support that, and if so why?

The non-quota section, which at one stage increased to 13 per cent., seemed to hold out the best chance for the neglected peripheries of the Community to obtain help. I greatly deplore that change. Most, if not all, of the peripheries suffer from neglect by their central Governments. The opportunity to involve people from outside, operating on agreed criteria, was immensely helpful. That was certainly the view of Mr. George Thomson, now Lord Thomson of Monifieth, the Commissioner who established the regional fund. Incidentally, we also continue to ignore additionality.

Do the Government accept that economic convergence will not work unless it is balanced by social and political mechanisms? When the hon. Member for Hamilton said that enlarging the market is not likely by itself to inspire the confidence of the unemployed, he was right, especially regarding the peripheries. Nor will economic convergence work unless it is buttressed by an integrated financial system.

It is extraordinary that no hon. Member has yet uttered the three letters EMS. The hon. Member for Nottingham, East (Mr. Knowles) referred to the Foreign Secretary's speech which is reported in *The Times* of today, in which the Foreign Secretary said that perhaps we could not continue saying that the tide was not quite right. Shakespeare said:

"There is a tide in the affairs of men"

and in this matter the Government seem to be marooned on a tideless sea, unwilling to take any decision.

Jacques Delors, the President of the European Commission, said at the Luxembourg meeting:

"The Commission's proposal is for keeping on the idea of European Union. This resolve has been asserted by a number of heads of state and government. Now, it is hard to suppose European Union can come about without eventually operating on the basis of unified institutions. I freely admit this it is not feasible now. But we must nurture the feasibility of it in the future, given the close interdependence between foreign policy and security on the one hand and what may be called stewardship — economic, financial and monetary affairs — on the other. Again, stewardship involves the social side, the arts, the will to get along together."

The issue of will is fundamental.

I did not expect to find very much about the European Parliament on page 38 of the White Paper, largely because in the contents it states that the Court of Justice is dealt with on page 39. What a miserable report it is. I accept that the Minister expanded on it. The reports are interesting and useful, and record in careful bureaucratic fashion in the peculiarly neutral language of the Committee Clerk what has happened, but it would be of immense advantage and would give bite to these debates if they included the Government's forward views. They do not. What do the Government think of the European Parliament in the long term?

At Luxembourg Jacques Delors said of the European Parliament:

"I would stress that it is necessary to increase the powers of the European Parliament. Is the European Parliament a parliament of the same standing, and the same nature, as the national parliaments? We shall not settle that question: anyhow, the answer differs from country to country. I would, though, make the point that the heads of state and government decided the Parliament should be elected by universal suffrage; and, however much some of its debates may on occasion be ridiculed, its members *are* elected by universal suffrage . . .We could help it by making it more responsible and involving it more in Community decision-making."

That is not impractical or visionary, to use the Minister's phrase, but rational and positive. How do the Government respond to that question?

At the next European elections, the Parliament has responsibility for making proposals about a uniform electoral system. The Bocklet report is now before it as the successor to Seitlinger. What is the Government's view on Bocklet? We have not the faintest idea from the White Paper. After the 1979 European elections it was recognised, even by Mr. Angus Maude as was, that it was disgraceful that the Liberal party got 13 per cent. of the vote but no representation. In 1984 the alliance got 20 per cent. of the votes but no representation.

I do not know whether the Minister reads *The Scotsman*. He nods wisely, but that could mean anything because Ministers have a tendency to nod wisely when anything dangerous is in the offing. The Scots were asked what they thought about proportional representation, and

57 per cent. said that they would like to see it introduced. Even 50 per cent. of the Labour party thought that proportional representation would be more effective than the present system, and only 19 per cent. thought that it would be less effective. Those were the results for our present system of national government, and the argument for European elections is far greater because there is not the problem of direct accountability to constituencies.

If the Community is to move towards greater cohesion, even à la carte cohesion, there must be a democratic oversight, and the Council does not represent that. It is a compromise Council, negotiating inter-state disputes. It has none of the necessary supranational overview of a permanent commission of an elected parliament. What is the Government's view on that?

I began by asking about the Prime Minister's Fontainebleau paper. Since then the big change, or part of the change, is that British interests in the Community are now defined, not just by the Government, but by many other elements in the country, as lying in the reinforcement, rather than the erosion, of existing economic and commercial commitments and the strengthening of political co-operation. At last that is being recognised as the means to exercise greater influence, rather than a component in the reduction of our influence.

Mr. Foulkes: The hon. Gentleman's speech has been helpful and interesting, but he has not mentioned agricultural policy. As he knows, the CAP is a major part of Community expenditure. Recently, the other part of the alliance — the Social Democratic party — agreed that quotas are inevitable for all supported farm production. Does the Liberal party agree that quotas are inevitable in all those areas? Is that the policy of the alliance as a whole?

Sir Russell Johnston: It is true that I have not dealt with agricultural policy. One cannot deal with everything, and I have already spoken at some length. I have discussed the CAP previously. It must be evident to the hon. Gentleman that much discussion is necessary when two different parties work out policies—*[Laughter.]* It is all very well to laugh, but that is a fact. The same is true of any coalition on the continent. The hon. Gentleman asked what I think about quotas——

Mr. Foulkes: No, the Liberal party.

Sir Russell Johnston: The party is in negotiation. Personally, I accept that quotas are inevitable across the board, and that the SDP is correct.

The anti-Europeans have now mostly fled the Chamber. The only two Opposition Members who spoke before me were anti-Europeans—the right hon. Member for South Down who has a well-established and almost mythical record in this regard, and the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Deakins). Whatever criticisms they may have — I agree with some of them — they must begin to square up to the fact that the Community provides a bedrock of commitment and predictability to the United Kingdom. All of us must ask ourselves how best we can develop that, but they more than others.

The Liberal party and its alliance partners, the Social Democrats, are convinced that the only viable future for Britain — if it does not want to become a nation of hamburger salesmen, as my right hon. Friend the leader of the Liberal party remarked recently — is within the European Community, with all its industrial and technological challenge, in which we play a part. The hon. Member for Clwyd, North-West mentioned that. We must give the citizens of Europe a say in the political future of the world, strung taut as it is between the United States and the Soviet Union.

7.42 pm

Sir Brandon Rhys Williams (Kensington): I warmly welcome my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Foreign Office, who opened this broad-ranging debate so satisfactorily. She began her political career in Kensington, which gave her the background for an informed and penetrating weltanschauung, as she has already shown us in her new post. The debate has ranged widely, and I hope that the House will not think that I am straying too far if I deal with some fundamental issues which it is important to review in the light of Britain's assuming the presidency of the Community during the second half of this year.

We have heard the usual chorus of hon. Members expressing their anxieties — one might almost call them heebie-jeebies — about the way in which the European Parliament appears to be growing in importance and the budget is becoming a slightly heavier burden on our national economies. I could not help but wonder whether, if one turned back to the accounts of the debates in the early years of the state legislatures in the United States of America, one might have found people with an equally timid and provincial outlook in view of the growth in importance of Washington as a force in the development of the United States. We can all be glad that the federal forces in the United States won in the end; the world has been a better place as a result. It would be good if, in time, the federal forces gained the ascendancy over the national parliaments in the EC. However, I also believe in the inevitability of gradualism, which is attractive to Opposition Members. We do not wish to build our constitution too quickly, because trees that grow quickly tend to decay quickly too.

We have not made great progress in the European Community since the striking move forward in the Fontainebleau agreement in June 1984, which can be counted as a special success for my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. Since then, we have been marking time after Europe began to recognise the force of my right hon. Friend's arguments, very persistently put, on the necessity to control the budget, to reform the agricultural policy and to improve the workings of our institutions.

Britain has had the difficulty since its late entry to the EC that it feels some reticence about its membership. We have been members of the Community since 1973, yet to some extent we still regard ourselves as outsiders. That is partly due to the continuing attractions of our Commonwealth links. It is also partly due to the English-speaking link with the United States of America, which gives us hope that we can still build on our special relationship with that country. In dealing with economic matters, we still cling to the idea and the tradition of sterling as a world currency and the most important medium of trade. Unfortunately, it is no longer that, although it is still an important international currency.

That reticence has caused us to cultivate in the House of Commons and elsewhere what one might call the "greater Switzerland" fallacy: that we can have a friendly relationship with the Common Market, but that we will

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never be completely integrated into it. We think that somehow we can retain our independence and customs, look back on our independent history and never allow ourselves to be completely trapped in the clauses of the treaty of Rome. The difficulty with a "greater Switzerland" relationship with the Common Market, however, is that Britain is too big to become an appendix of a great continental economy, which is what happened to Switzerland. We cannot live in a marsupial relationship with the German economy; but, equally, we are too small to be a world power in our own right. Therefore, the greater Switzerland fallacy fails in both respects: Britain is too small in one way, and too large in another, to fit into that formula. If we are not careful we shall become a greater Iceland, because we shall have drifted away from the continent in business terms. We cannot afford to contemplate that.

The continent sees Britain as a timid child running to and fro at the edge of the swimming pool, but afraid to jump in and join the other children enjoying themselves in the water. We cannot afford to continue looking like timid members of the Common Market. Our half-hearted relationship with the Community has continued for too long.

However, Britain has lately been successful in persuading the other members to make the reforms which we believe are important if we are to participate more fully. That process must continue when Britain assumes the presidency. We must maintain the momentum for control of the budget, and we must continue the policy of agricultural reform while recognising that the agricultural vote is still an important factor affecting the democratic policies of the continental parties.

I hope that there will be some new, positive British initiatives while Britain has the presidency. The most important initiative will be the completion of the internal market. As a London Member, I believe it is vital that London should play the most active possible part in the development of a united European economy. We have set ourselves the target of creating an internal market by 1992, which is what one might call a six-year plan. Socialists usually love six-year plans, but they do not seem to be too enthusiastic about the six-year plan to complete the internal market. It must be the major British interest, since we are a nation that depends on trade. It is no good belonging to a so-called Common Market that maintains ridiculous frontier barriers and obstacles to the free movement of goods and services.

Lord Cockfield's excellent report on the subject is a tribute to what British thinking can offer to the Common Market, and it has been very widely supported on the continent. The British Government owe it to Lord Cockfield to give the maximum possible support now to his campaign for the completion of the internal market. We should also recognise the lead that has been given by Jacques Delors in this respect. He is a man of particular integrity and foresight, and the type of Frenchman upon whom one can rely to act in the interests of the Community and not just in the interests of France. This is an important matter, because we tend to be over-suspicious of prominent French individuals who take a lead in the Common Market, because we suspect that their first loyalty is to France, and we retain a suspicion that it is bound to do us harm to become too closely involved in their initiatives.

I had the pleasure of working for Jacques Delors for three years when he was chairman of the Economic and Monetary Committee of the European Parliament, and I can say that he is a man to whom we can look for a first-class lead in the Community. He has thrown his weight of influence behind the creation of the internal market, and I am sure that he accepts the necessity for the internal market to be not just a matter of the exchange of goods and services, but, what is particularly important for London, the way to the complete integration of the European market for capital.

It is no good thinking that Europe is a Community that can live on current account alone. We are trying to build a capitalist society—a society in which people can take long-term decisions. We must build a context in which long-term decisions are likely to be taken in the most fruitful possible way. That is also vital for London's financial institutions, which are not concerned just with insurance, with which the Government seem to be preoccupied in dealing with this aspect of the internal market.

On the stock exchange, in house purchase finance, in the commodity markets, and in all the other activities in which London is pre-eminent and is capable of making an important contribution to the smooth operation of the Community, we still have formal and informal institutional barriers, barriers of tradition, and protective devices of all kinds, which prevent the operation of a genuinely effective integrated European market for capital.

One of the major difficulties is that we are still clinging to our national currencies, repeating the mistakes of the 1930s. The British Government should be seen to be taking a long-term approach to currency stabilisation. But we are waking up to the fact that we are facing a great decision. Do we want the world to be organised into two zones of time for the movement of capital, one based on Tokyo and one on New York, with London taking a subordinate and suburban position, related to both the great capitals, but not making any great contribution? Or do we insist that the world should be divided into three time zones, in which London, making its contribution as the pre-eminent financial centre of the Common Market, is able to hold its own for eight hours of each day and contribute to the success of a world economy that is founded on three great centres of excellence rather than two? The crucial decision whether we belong to a world with two time-zones of 12 hours or three time-zones of eight hours is likely to be made in the coming year. The Government must recognise the importance of their opportunity, with the presidency of the European Community, to do what is necessary to create an integrated European market for capital.

The hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston) complained that nobody had yet spoken about Britain and the European monetary system. I have spent a considerable amount of time on this subject, and I had the opportunity to study it for more than 10 years as a member of the Economic and Monetary Committee of the European Parliament.

At the moment the EMS can be regarded as a considerable success, but it is a solar system in which Frankfurt and the deutschmark constitute the sun around

which the other currencies revolve. If sterling were to join that solar system, we would face the danger of creating a solar system in which there were two suns which, from time to time, would be likely to move eccentrically. This could be disturbing for all concerned and eventually lead to what occurred when we tried to join the snake more than 10 years ago. After only a few weeks of membership, we had to withdraw. As I am committed to the necessity to achieve an integrated currency system in the Common Market, I do not want Britain to join the EMS and then have to withdraw prematurely.

We might create the conditions in which Frankfurt and London moved together, or sufficiently closely for the system to co-operate fruitfully, if we reintroduced capital controls. That is not only undesirable, but virtually impossible, and I would not support it under any circumstances. The other way that we can move is towards the complete integration of the capital market between London and Frankfurt, by the perfection of arbitrage and by broadening the relationship between London and Frankfurt, so that we achieve something approaching the stability and continuity that one sees between Chicago and New York.

If we do not achieve something like that, the pound and the deutschmark will inevitably drift apart. We need a single real underlying rate of interest under the currency values of the national currencies, and we need a single market for the distribution of savings into investment opportunities. The European market will have to be seen as an extension of our home market, or even as our home market itself. This means a great leap forward in the thinking of our business people.

Inevitably, the long-term currency relationships must be based on the purchasing power parities. Is that what we would achieve if we joined the EMS as it now is? We have to ask ourselves two questions when considering whether this is the right moment for Britain to join the EMS. The first is whether we have the currency relationships on a stable basis. Is the pound now facing the deutschmark on a rate of exchange that is likely to continue?

Until recently I had not felt that we had achieved purchasing power parity between the pound and the deutschmark; but now we have come a great deal closer to it. It has been achieved because of the movement in the price of oil, and nobody can predict what will happen next to that. However, I hope that it would be Treasury and Bank of England policy, if we joined the EMS, to retain a structure of currency relationships between sterling and the deutschmark and the other major currencies of the continent that corresponded as nearly as possible to the purchasing power parity. That is the right way to turn the Common Market into a real, genuine, home market for British goods and services.

The second question is whether we have gone far enough with the integration of the capital market to be able to regard London and Frankfurt as sufficiently closely bound to each other to be able to co-exist in the same monetary framework for a period not just of months but of years. The answer to that is yes, if our membership of the EMS permits us to adjust the pound to its purchasing power parity in an orderly way from time to time; but the answer has to be no if it means that we are obliged to gear ourselves to a system which inexorably brings sterling back to a condition of perpetual over-valuation.

Many people are waking up to the fact that the decline of British industry relative to the industries of other major manufacturing economies, such as the United States, Germany and Japan, has been due to the Bank of England's persistent policy of maintaining the pound as an over-valued currency. This has been a wonderful background for the prestige of the City of London, but a disastrous background for manufacturing.

I would not want to see the deutschmark, with an inflation rate of less than 1 per cent. per annum, tied to sterling, with an inflation rate still of 4 or 5 per cent. per annum, if the relationship were regarded as so permanent that we were gradually dragged up and up again into over-valuation. But other currencies that are inflating faster than the deutschmark have belonged successfully to the EMS and have made occasional adjustments to the deutschmark without obstructing the system unduly. Therefore, I feel reasonably confident that we can now do that as well.

How do we define the most important target for our presidency, which we hope our Ministers will bring a great step nearer? It is not just joining the European monetary system, and it is not just having certain agreements for winding down controls at the frontiers or eliminating certain particular difficulties in the operation of the capital market. We must create the conditions for the most successful achievement in the creation of wealth by an international capitalist economy within a genuinely democratic framework. Of course, it is an enormous and very ambitious task. The conditions that we have to achieve must be clearly foreseeable over a long span of time so that business men can take ambitious investment decisions, in the confidence that they will prove to be right.

Capitalism is not working in western Europe in the way that we hoped, because many business men are unable to look ahead for even a few weeks.—[*Interruption.*] If the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) were a business man—I know it is claimed that he is many things, but I do not think that anybody has ever claimed that he is that—he would understand a little bit better what I am saying. One needs to be able to have a reasonable degree of confidence that decisions based on knowledge of the market and on knowledge of one's product will prove to be right. They do not prove to be right if there is unpredictable Government interference, or central bank interference, or tax changes, or other incidental movements which mean that decisions proved to be wrong, through no fault of the original investors or the economic planners.

This does not require merely the free movement of goods and capital. It requires also continuity and a favourable policy in matters of taxation, about which I want to say a few words. When we refer to the harmonisation of goods and services in the internal market, we must not forget the vital importance of tax harmonisation and the harmonisation of policy in regard to changes in taxation that will also be necessary.

Looking towards this country's Budget, I should like to say a word in support of those who are campaigning for a reduction in the stamp duty on investment decisions. We want to create favourable tax conditions for the integrated capital market. We want to take off London the burden which we ourselves have imposed upon London. I do not want just a halving of stamp duty. There should be an end to stamp duty altogether on investment decisions on the London stock exchange. We should set London free to exert its strength for the benefit of the whole Community.

[Sir Brandon Rhys Williams]

We should also seek out the best ways to end the artificial frontiers that are created by differences of taxation interpretation, such as the different treatment of particular classes of goods for value added tax. Next, we should make a serious effort to tackle the anomalies that are created by the different systems for the taxation of corporations in all of the member states. We made a considerable study in the Economic and Monetary Affairs Committee of the different systems of corporation tax which operate in the different member states. We tried to find a way in which we could work towards their eventual harmonisation so that we could end the tax frontiers created through the corporation taxes. We reached the conclusion that the only practical road to the harmonisation of corporation tax was the progressive abolition of corporation tax altogether.

This is not such a wild ambition when one realises that corporation tax is simply a tax on the eventual consumer of the goods or services that the company provides. But it is virtually a random system of tax, and it is very unfair and uneven in its operation, whereas value added tax, which is a similar tax, in that it puts the ultimate burden on the eventual consumer, operates in a much more comprehensible and more even and general way. It would be better even to have a slow increase in value added tax if it were accompanied by a step by step reduction in corporation tax, and eventually brought us to the total elimination of corporation tax throughout the European Community.

I realise that I have caused mirth on the Opposition Benches and that what I am saying constitutes ambitious objectives; but do we sincerely want to raise the level of the British economy in order to suck into profitable employment all the people who are looking for cash rewards for their work? Are the Government—and, for that matter, the Opposition—sincerely looking for a way to reduce the level of unemployment in this country? If so, we have only one road to follow. That is to make a success of our membership of the Common Market. If we continue to stay on the fringes of the Common Market and do not make a success of it, we shall waste the opportunity that is provided for us by the treaty of Rome to create a really successful economy and one which needs the services of all the people who are willing to work. We must help the other member states to do the same.

Our presidency offers us the opportunity to make important progress. The continental members of the Community have accepted the Prime Minister's lead in the control of the budget and the reform of the common agricultural policy. I believe that they would also welcome a major British initiative towards the creation of the internal market.

I should like to say a few words about preparing British opinion for the consequences of completing the internal market. This is a job for the British Government at home. We talk about the internal market, but we have not yet prepared ourselves for what it means. It means that economic nationalism will become an obsolete and impossible policy. It will bring much greater efficiency, far superior exploitation of capital and more rapid technical advances; but it will also mean the amalgamation and rationalisation of old established industries.

In recent weeks we have seen the excitement that has been caused by talk of the rationalisation of this country's motor industry. We have seen manifestations of a movement of opinion which has been interpreted as anti-American sentiment, or as a determination to keep our industries British, and to rebut amalgamation with the car industries of other countries. I do not think that British sentiment is anti-American or, for that matter, anti-Japanese; but British workers do not want to be dominated by people whose decisions are taken far away in a totally different economic context. We do not want to be dominated from overseas by people who do not have a very close relationship with the particular interests of this country.

Public opinion polls have already begun to show that British workers do not feel the same degree of suspicion where Common Market enterprises are concerned. The reason for this must surely be that they are beginning to feel a sense of community with the Common Market countries which we do not generally feel to the same extent with the Japanese or with the dollar countries. This, at bottom, if we analyse it, must be because we have the protection of the Rome treaty. The treaty is a highly detailed device for creating a market in which its members work together, instead of against each other's interests in forms of competition, which is unfruitful. It is a relationship which is far more precise and much closer than we in Britain could ever hope to achieve either with yen area industries or with the industries of the dollar area.

I have spoken at length, and the House has been indulgent, but I should like to make one last point. I regard it as an important recommendation for our presidency. We should seek to make the most of the Lomé convention, not just because it is a link with our former overseas territories, but because the accession of Spain and Portugal means that we have the opportunity to suggest a widening or a fresh development of the Lomé convention, so that more formal relationships can be established with the Spanish and Portuguese-speaking territories that lie outside the European Community. We need to put Government enthusiasm into creating a better understanding of and better relationships with these important economic areas.

I have said before, and I should like to repeat it, that we must look ahead to the influence which satellite television will exercise before very long in the context of the world economy. We may not understand this, but the Americans and the Japanese already understand it. They are making progress which will either leave us behind or leave us out of the picture altogether. I should like to see, as a development of the Lomé convention, the production of regular tapes for educational purposes. They could be shown in English, French, Spanish, Portuguese and, for that matter, in Russian on a world wide basis in order to give people at home in their own institutes of education what we used to try to give them by bringing them to this country for technical training, language practice and training in other subjects. Those services would be building on the success of the BBC overseas service and the Open University. We have taken the lead in those areas in an English-speaking context, but we have not yet grasped the idea of putting a world university of the air into effect as part of the EC's relationship with the outside world.

I should like to see a conscious, deliberate move by the Government during their presidency to take into account the influence that we can have, now that Spain and Portugal are members of the Community, on the Spanish

and Portuguese-speaking territories of the world. This is an important EC opportunity to teach other nations how to live.

Let me conclude by wishing all success to our Ministers, who now have the duty to take the lead for six months in the running of the European Community.

8.10 pm

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): We have listened to some grand and formidable compositions tonight. I want to follow the advice offered by the hon. Member for Stroud (Sir A. Kershaw) that in these debates we should occasionally wrangle over details of EEC decision making. That is precisely what I would like to do vis-a-vis the fishing industry.

I want to make a comment or two on the common fisheries policy in the light of what the White Paper and the *Official Journal of the European Communities* have to say. The White Paper devotes all of one paragraph to fisheries, an industry that is important to Scotland, particularly its more remote maritime communities. In that single paragraph the White Paper says:

"Under the common fisheries policy the European Community logbooks and Landing Trans-shipment Declarations were introduced on 1 April 1985. Along with the European Community's Fisheries Inspectorate they will help ensure that the common fisheries policy is applied equally and fairly to all Community fishermen and that member states observe TACs and quotas."

It is that equal and fair treatment of fishermen on which I want to comment.

Given the present circumstances of the common fisheries policy and the approval, albeit qualified, that it engenders among fishermen, it is now time to strengthen some elements of it in order to ensure the continuing viability of the industry and—the industry is dependent upon it—the continuing viability of the commercially important stocks.

Last night, during the Second Reading of the Salmon Bill, harsh words were spoken about the devastation inflicted upon salmon by interceptory fishing methods employing monofilament nets. I have a great deal of sympathy for those views, but at the same time I have some concern for the villains in that drama—villains to some hon. Members. They are the fishermen of the north-east of Scotland drift net fishery. We need European Community-wide measures to deal with that and other problems.

In addition to what was said last night by the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, a statutory instrument was laid this morning—the Inshore Fishing (Prohibition of Carriage of Monofilament Gill Nets) (Scotland) Order 1986. It says:

"The carriage of monofilament gill nets for any purpose in any British fishing boat in the specified sea area"—

that is Scottish waters—

"is prohibited."

Apart from the friction and anger that that order and the Government's proposals in the Salmon Bill will create for the drift net fishery, it will also create in the fishing ports on both sides of the border some considerable tension. These are piecemeal measures within the EEC framework. The Government should follow the advice contained in the report of the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs on the fisheries protection service which was published this morning. Paragraph 77 says:

"The ban on monofilament will apply to all British boats in Scottish inshore waters. The SFF,"—

the Scottish Fishermens Federation—

"when questioned on this point, said that there was no opposition amongst its members to a ban *per se*, but there was strong opposition to a ban that affected only Scottish fishermen."

That legislation affects British vessels in Scottish waters, not the vessels coming into Scottish waters from other member states.

The Committee went on to say:

"The Committee sympathises with the Scottish fishermen. In our view, the strongest possible representations should be made to MAFF and to the EEC for a total ban in EEC waters. The banning of monofilament nets could well be an important move to help protect salmon stocks; but it should not be selective."

I hope that the House is given the opportunity to debate that report; at the very least, the Scottish Grand Committee should take it on board.

The report also has a sensible word or two to say about the vexed question of by-catches and the level of by-catches is again determined under the auspices of the common fisheries policy. The report says:

"The problem of by-catches by industrial fishermen has several facets. The permitted by-catch level is itself a matter of dispute. The permitted level returned to 10 per cent. at the end of May 1985; we were told that there was pressure within the EEC to raise the level to 18 or 20 per cent. again. There is to be no derogation from the 10 per cent. limit during the 1985-86 pout fishery."

The members of the Committee go on to say:

"We commend the successful outcome of the negotiations by UK Fisheries Ministers to retain the 10 per cent by-catch limit, and we hope that no attempt will be made by the European Commission or Member States to raise the limit in future years."

Let us hope that those member states opposed to an increase in the by-catch pay heed to that sensible observation and resist any attempt by the Danish Government to shift the percentage upwards. Such a move would be disastrous for the commercially valuable stocks of fish in the North sea.

The report also says:

"DAFS"—

the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, Scotland—

"told us that they had arrested boats carrying both a 16 mm and 80 mm net and had not experienced any problem in securing a conviction, but that they had nevertheless taken up with the Commission the question of banning the carriage of 80 mm nets on industrial boats".

On that important issue, the Committee says:

"We support the efforts of the Government to secure a ban on the carriage of 80 mm nets by boats fishing for industrial species. It is our view that no fishing vessel should be permitted to carry both types of gear at one and the same time."

Again, I hope that the Government and the House remain vigilant on those matters.

Conservation measures of the kind introduced into Scottish and English waters need to be extended through our European Community seas. That should be the objective of the House and the Government. In the meantime, I commend to the House the report by the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs. I am a member of that Committee and—I hope the House will forgive my modesty—one of the authors of what some would call a commendable report.

Chapter 6 of the annual report by the Court of Auditors for the 1984 financial year deals with certain aspects of the common fisheries policy. Dealing with expenditure on biological studies carried out by institutions in the European Community, the annual report states:

"The appropriations for biological studies, entered in Article 412 of the 1984 budget and amounting to 640,000 ECU, are intended to enable the Commission to obtain, by means of

[Dr. Norman A. Godman]

specialized studies commissioned from external bodies or experts, the scientific information needed for the implementation of the policy for the conservation and management of resources."

I am not sure that that work is being done well.

The report states:

"Up to the end of 1984, contracts for biological studies were mainly concluded on the basis of proposals submitted by research institutes in the Member States. These studies should meet needs identified in advance by the Commission and set out in clear and precise terms; this has not been the case up until the financial year in question."

Replying to that criticism, the Commission stated:

"The Commission has decided to introduce a system of checking and, as far as possible, competitive tendering. The requirements will depend on the amounts involved."

In its defence, the Commission stated:

"In the fisheries sector, however, the specialized nature of the studies to be taken plus the geographical constraints severely limits the number of research institutes potentially capable of satisfying the requirements. Consequently, the Commission's choice is inevitably restrictive from the outset."

I believe that that is a weak defence of this poor method of controlling research.

The Commission should take a leaf out of the report by the Comptroller and Auditor General, entitled "Achievements and Costs of the Common Agricultural Policy in the United Kingdom". In regard to the poorly commissioned and inefficiently controlled research studies, it is worth pointing out that paragraph 45 states:

"While recognising the political problems involved in having (and indeed arriving at) precisely defined objectives, it seems to me that if greater attention were concentrated on the settlement of criteria and targets associated with the objectives, the negotiation of cost-effective measures to achieve them would be made easier."

I commend that advice to those who seek to commission research within the European Community.

Paragraph 6 of the White Paper refers to the need for a more co-ordinated system of maritime transport. In paragraph 6.6 we are offered some hope of a more equitable system of cabotage. I suspect that that is a vain hope, given the reluctance of some member states to make any concessions. The Minister of State, with her experience in another Department, will perhaps agree. The British coastal trade suffers badly in this regard. When will there be an improvement in community maritime transport routes and practices?

The importance of the fishing industry cannot be over-emphasised. For many Scottish communities, it is the only industry that can provide employment not only for the present employed generation but for the youngsters who are still at school. In the long run, if it is managed properly and efficiently, it will provide employment and a first-class food for the consumer long after the offshore oil and gas industries have been shut down. The House has an important duty vigilantly to monitor the decisions taken in Brussels on fishing operations in United Kingdom waters.

8.26 pm

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): I find debates of this kind somewhat disappointing, because so few hon. Members attend them, yet this debate concerns a matter of great importance to our constituents. It has oscillated frequently between the Euro-fanatics and the Euro-haters. The Government's position is made more difficult by this polarisation.

Legislative and harmonisation programmes and the problems of agriculture, commerce and competition policy are all matters upon which our legislation is firmly hinged on the European Community. People in our manufacturing and service industries are greatly affected, yet so little attention is paid to what is happening all the time behind the scenes.

I am a member of the Select Committee on European Legislation. This afternoon, that Committee had the good fortune to see my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. I thought that it was important to ask him, in relation to his policy on Europe, whether we should adopt a sector by sector approach. The common agricultural policy takes up an enormous proportion of the Community's budget and directly affects farmers, including those in my constituency. I believe that the Government would like to help them, as I would. Farmers are greatly affected by overproduction, but opportunities to make alternative use of the land and to reduce the amount of nitrogen fertiliser used in farming are not being taken up.

It is all very well for us to complain that there is massive overproduction of food, but, in trying genuinely to help the farmers concerned, we should look at what we are doing in the European Community to help them. We should look through the mass of verbiage at the complexities of the market mechanism and consider whether wheat is grown in Duisburg and whether all the other factors are taken into account in determining target and intervention prices. However, when we consider everything, we are really talking about overproduction.

Why is there overproduction? There is overproduction, in part, because, according to the experts, there is too much use of nitrogen fertiliser. Instead of overly concentrating on the elaborate legal framework set up in the Community, we should ask questions, the answers to which will be of practical help to the farmer.

At present the Agriculture Bill is approaching Report. New clause 1 of that Bill includes several useful provisions provided by the Government. They provide that the farmer shall have services and advice available to him. I am sure that farmers will be extremely keen to take up that offer. However, it is no good providing such services and advice if, when farmers ask what they should do about overproduction, there is no opportunity for them to take advantage of alternative use policies because they are constrained by planning requirements from putting the land to alternative use. I urge those responsible in agriculture to consider such practical questions and, through consultation with the Department of the Environment, to find ways and means to alter the planning guidelines which were tagged on to the policies pursued in the mid-1970s. That will enable us to improve the rural economy, provide alternative land uses, such as forestry and tourism, and enable the farmer to maintain his income in practical terms.

I urge that we do not maintain the co-responsibility levy in connection with milk or cereals as is now being proposed by the Commission. I hope that the Minister will fight hard for the British farmer in that respect. I also urge the Minister to keep the beef variable premium scheme for which he fought so successfully last year.

The White Paper covers the question of the internal market and competition law. All of our commercial policy —the rows in the City about mergers, whether the City is ripping people off and the extent to which huge companies are entering into relations with one another and causing difficulties for the small investor and British

industry as a whole — is dependent on our applying competition policy effectively. Our competition laws are based on the treaty of Rome. At the eighth European conference on competition law recently, the experts clearly stated that competition policy simply was not working. If that policy is not working and we cannot apply it, it is not surprising that criticisms are levelled against us about the difficulties that are cropping up through mergers and monopolies in the City.

The same problem could arise in connection with financial services. I am a member of the Committee on the Financial Services Bill. We have not so far reached the competition policy provisions in Committee, but they have a direct bearing on how our economy functions. We must recognise that there are problems and consider whether the provisions of the treaty of Rome are working effectively for the benefit of the people of this country.

I tabled a question to the Minister concerned, asking if he would be good enough to examine whether, for example, regulation 17 could be revised. One assumes a glazed expression as soon as the boring and technical subject of regulation 17 is mentioned. I find the whole thing very boring, but the fact is that it is upon such legal principles that so much of our commercial policy operates. There is no point in pretending that problems do not exist. The Civil Service operates upon such regulations and our courts make decisions based on them. In fact, all commercial policy is developed on the basis of such regulations. If they are not working effectively, we must seriously consider how to improve and reform them.

Reference is made to science and technological research in paragraph 5.13 of the White Paper. At the risk of trespassing on a subject in which I have been involved for the past few years, I would ask those concerned to consider whether, under headings such as science and research, policies are being developed and directives formulated on human genetic engineering. In its own way that topic is as important, if not more important, than the atomic bomb. We must consider whether, by developing policies along these lines at European level, we are storing up serious problems, which we will later regret, for ourselves and for future generations.

In connection with external relations, trade and aid, I sincerely hope that the proposals for the new general agreement on tariffs and trade are successful this time round. This matter brings me back to the central theme that I developed on the question of competition policy. I hope that the people responsible for negotiating the GATT will come up with a practical proposal which will deal effectively with the Japanese problem and whether the Japanese are importing a sufficient amount of manufacturing products from other countries.

I have been to Luxembourg and Brussels recently and had the opportunity to discuss overseas development in relation to food aid with people in the European Commission and with the Court of Auditors. I returned very depressed about the poor showing in providing food aid to the countries which needed it during the emergency. I appreciate that there are difficulties and that there are no magic wands. However, when one examines the way the process developed, the Court of Auditors' report is worth reading. The reality is that the European Commission, for some reason or another, did not respond effectively enough. If we place the responsibility for handling such matters in the hands of the people in Brussels, then I hope that they will come up with something rather more effective than occurred on that occasion.

I am not by any means anti-European in terms of political co-operation. One of the mainsprings of the European Community has been a desire to move closer to a sensible degree of political co-operation. By that I emphatically do not mean political integration.

The ideas raised this evening by the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston) about majority voting and federalism are extremely dangerous for this House.

Paragraph 13 of the White Paper deals with Parliament, and in two paragraphs it disposes of the work of the two Select Committees on the European Communities. Legislation and harmonisation have an amazingly important impact on how we conduct our affairs in commerce and in industry. There is almost total ignorance of the principles of law upon which these operate. Those responsible for organising the examinations in the Law Society and in other colleges of law should give a higher priority to examinations in European law and legislation. We have been a member of the European Community since 1973, yet these subjects are not even part of the normal curriculum for law students. That is an extraordinary state of affairs, given the impact of that law and legislation on our daily lives.

I wish to touch briefly on the Single European Act, which has been deposited in this House, and the co-operation procedure that will operate under it. The Minister kindly wrote to me when I asked a question about this the other day. I appreciate that the nature of the Act makes it difficult to give a precise answer, but one is left with serious worries about the way in which it will operate in practice and about the apparently significant increase in the powers of the European Parliament which will accrue at the expense of this House. I appreciate that the Council of Ministers can have the final say, but that is not the real world.

In reality, constant accretions of power exercised within the Council, subject to the co-operation procedure as it develops, are gradually whittling away the powers of this House in relation both to scrutiny and to the manner in which legislation is devised. The fact that so few Members are present for this debate shows the difficulty that we face in this respect. When matters of vital concern to our constituencies are debated at a late hour or come before the Select Committee on European Legislation for scrutiny, without in any sense being anti-European we must ask ourselves whether we examine these matters sufficiently carefully to ensure that the system of law being devised is genuinely in the interests of those whom we represent. Is it not possible for those with responsibility in these matters to ensure that the Select Committee is able to consider prospective legislation affecting our constituents at the earlier "avant-project" stage when the working groups of civil servants who go to Brussels are considering these matters?

There is no doubt that under the new procedures a number of things will occur. For example, there will be an increase in the number of matters subject to majority voting, which will undoubtedly reduce the power of individual member states to put a brake on progress. If they are so minded, the other member states can cut short

[Mr. William Cash]

attempts at negotiation and proceed to a vote, and that will have a significant effect on the way in which legislation affecting this House goes through.

It is also clear that, following the accession of Spain and Portugal, the position of the "big four"—France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom—has been reduced. Two of those four states will no longer be able to exercise a blocking power and the new Mediterranean bloc of Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain will be able to exercise a major influence.

The first special report of the Select Committee on European Legislation shows one uncertain element at the centre of the whole question—the extent to which the Luxembourg compromise will operate under the new arrangement. There has been pressure to require member states to identify the very important interests that they seek to protect by invoking the compromise, but none of that appeared on the face of the Single European Act—nor could it do so, because, as the Select Committee pointed out, the compromise is not legally binding. In reality, however, because the compromise currently lies at the root of the way in which voting takes place, which is the basis on which we determine whether to insist on unanimity or go to majority voting, the question of whether the arrangements under the Single European Act will necessarily be in the interests of our constituents is vital.

Finally, although some of us take a pragmatic and, I hope, practical view of progress in the European Community and are in no sense anti-European, we wish to ensure that when legislation goes through this House it is properly scrutinised so that, when we have to answer to our constituents for the decisions taken in their name, we can give reasonable answers to the questions that they reasonably ask about the legislation that goes through. I therefore ask that great care be taken to ensure that the procedures under the Single European Act are truly in the interests of our constituents and that, when making procedural changes in this House, we ensure that the scrutiny procedure really works in a way that is both fair and reasonable to those whom we represent.

8.46 pm

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): The reference to "decisions taken in their name" was one of the most important aspects of the comments of the hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash) because one such decision was taken in the name of the British people when the Minister of State signed the Single European Act on the royal prerogative. I do not think that the hon. Lady is yet a member of the Privy Council, but I make no complaint about that.

I am grateful to the Minister of State for her remarks about the Scrutiny Committee, of which I have the honour to be Chairman, and I apologise for not being present at that time. My absence was perhaps a symptom of things to come, in that it was the timetable of the European Council and of this House which prevented some Members from being present at that time as we were listening to evidence from the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food at a meeting arranged some weeks ago. But more of that anon. The Minister of Agriculture also take decisions for the people of this country, although he and the House have lost control over British agricultural policy—indeed, there is no longer any such policy.

I referred earlier to the prerogative of the Crown. We are now discussing, with other developments in the EEC, an Act which was signed by Her Majesty's Government unwillingly, as the Prime Minister told us when she went to Milan last June. I wonder when a Government last invited the House to ratify a treaty that the Government had signed unwillingly. I can think of no context in which that would have been possible in the past.

Mr. J. Enoch Powell: The Anglo-Irish agreement.

Mr. Spearing: That may be true, although there was a majority in the House for it, but the right hon. Gentleman will at least agree that that related to the British Isles and not to mainland Europe.

The assumption about the royal prerogative in signing treaties was, ever since the Labour Government of 1923, that nobody's Government would sign a treaty which could not command the majority of their own party. That was, as it were, taken as read.

When the Ponsonby rules were adumbrated, they said in effect that a treaty would lie on the Table, as a statutory instrument might, for some 40 days. If it was not prayed against or voted against it was deemed to be ratified. The Minister may go into greater detail on this but she and other Ministers have kindly said that our ratification procedure will not be of that type for this particular treaty. It will be subject to further legislation. We can be grateful to that extent. However, the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) was right when he asked in what way we can actually scrutinise the terms of this treaty—which runs to 77 typewritten pages, some not full—and which is legislation by reference and changes the treaty of Rome.

In effect, that means changing the written constitution that exists in the United Kingdom. One might say that there is no written constitution; indeed, that is one of the things which people are taught in history. In practice, however, we know that it is not true. The written constitution of this country consists of a whole number of written documents. I believe that the Standing Orders of this House are one such document and the mysterious documents circulated by Prime Ministers inside the Executive may be another. It also includes a number of other Acts of Parliament such as the Representation of the People Acts, and the Quinquennial Act. These documents are all bound together by a series of understandings, custom and practice. That is our constitution plus the treaty of Rome.

The treaty of Rome is to be substantially amended by the treaty which has been the subject of discussion tonight. As the preamble has not been read this evening, I shall do so:

> "Moved by the will to continue the work undertaken on the basis of the Treaties establishing the European Communities and to transform relations as a whole among their States into a European Union, in accordance with the Solemn Declaration of Stuttgart of 19 June 1983. Resolved to implement this European Union on the basis, firstly, of the Communities operating in accordance with their own rules and, secondly, of European Co-operation among the Signatory States in the sphere of foreign policy and to invest this Union with the necessary means of action".

That is the preamble to the treaty. It is important to study some of the facets because they will make a great deal of difference to how this House keeps track of legislation and other developments which are continually going through the European system.

That system is complex. Many hon. Members present will know that, when listening to informed speeches such as that of my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Deakins) it is difficult to follow the labyrinthine constitution which has arisen. Indeed, I would suggest —the Minister may know this for herself—that unless one has been involved with these issues for perhaps the past 10 years and has organically developed with this tangled mass of interlocking growth, it is almost impossible to understand it, no matter how many lectures one might attend.

The greatest change occurs in the way in which legislation is created. It means a change in the scrutiny and oversight of this House, of how Ministers behave or of how, to refer back to the text given by the hon. Member for Stafford, "decisions made in our realm" are carried out and the way Ministers are accountable. The work of the Scrutiny Committee—recently committed to the House —will probably be changed by the changes in the treaty, if they are effective. It is up to the House to decide whether changes in our constitution are made.

The Danish people had a referendum on this matter only six days ago. It is true that they decided—not by a big majority—to go ahead with these changes. However, the referendum showed that there was a major divison of opinion in that country, just as there has been a difference of opinion in Britain on the main question.

Mr. Deakins: Does not a difficulty face any country with a written constitution—how those changes should be put to the Parliament or assembly concerned to represent the opinions of the people? We are faced with a difficulty which does not face countries such as the United States which have a written constitution. In the United States they consider constitutional amendments individually and can discuss them in great detail. In Britain we have to consider amendments en bloc and have no opportunity to consider them in detail; nor are we able to accept this or reject that. We have to accept or reject them all at one stage.

Mr. Spearing: Yes, that is one of the disadvantages of the way in which our constitution has arisen. It is based on an assumption that the Crown would not give away power. It also assumed that nobody would go against the Act of Praemunire—that is to give prior allegiance to another sovereign power. They are the assumptions on which our constitution rests. Thus, in respect of EEC legislation, there are difficulties which have been pointed out by my hon. Friend.

I do not wish to be partisan. It is clear that there are different views about how the EEC should operate. The hon. Member for Kensington (Sir B. Rhys Williams) made it clear that he wants progress towards a United States of Europe. I do not think I am doing him any injustice.

Sir Brandon Rhys Williams *indicated assent.*

Mr. Spearing: Indeed, he nods his assent.

However, that is anathema to other hon. Members. In the discussion of this Act and the changes in the constitution there is a continual difference of emphasis between the people who take those views. I suggest to the Minister that even among people of differing views there is a fundamental common interest, that democracy, whether on a United Kingdom or pan-European level—which the hon. Member for Kensington wishes to see—is effective, efficient and seen to be democratic and is understood by the people whom it seeks to serve. When "decisions" are made in their name, whether at national level or at pan-national level, as with the EEC—it is not federal—they are understood and there is a chain of accountability which commands confidence. That view will bridge all opinions in the House, including the hon. Member for Kensington and even the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston). Public life and democracy demand confidence and transparency. Without them, the quality of democracy falls apart, just as rotting cement will cause a building to fall.

I should like to consider the change in the new article 149. At the moment, the House can examine documents and proposals on a proposal from the Commission, and anything to do with the internal market or harmonisation requires unanimity. As has been said, that will be changed to a qualified majority. We shall therefore get more harmonisation a la the Cockfield Green Paper, and it will come more quickly. Moreover, it will be more difficult for the Government to hold up those proposals if that is to the national advantage.

Of course, there is always the so-called Luxembourg agreement, but I think that the Minister will agree that there are moves afoot—they may be right—to see that it is used in a less liberal way. Perhaps there are written orders. If one uses a dangerous weapon such as that agreement too often in the wrong way, it may become a little blunt. I suspect that we shall have more harmonisaiton, which it will be more difficult to keep track of.

Sir Anthony Meyer: This is all getting very muddling. I assume that the hon. Gentleman is talking about the traditional Luxembourg compromise and not the agreement that was recently reached there.

Mr. Spearing: The hon. Gentleman is quite right. I was referring to the historic non-agreement.

Sir Anthony Meyer: The agreement to disagree.

Mr. Spearing: The second feature of legislative change will be the insertion of a second round for some legislation. Hon. Members will be aware of what can happen. Instead of the Council trying to change a Commission proposal by sending it back, whence it will return in revised form, if the Council does not agree with what the Commission says, having obtained the opinion of the Assembly/Parliament, it has to produce what is called "a common position". That phrase appears in the treaty. The "common position" is passed to the Assembly/ Parliament, which can amend it or reject it by simple majority. If the Commission receives an amended "common position", it puts a new proposal before the Council of Ministers, which can be passed by a qualified majority. If the Assembly/Parliament rejects the "common position", the Council can only insist by unanimity. That means that the House and the Scrutiny Committee will be faced with a second round, which I think I will call a second reading, for some legislation, including that relating to harmonisation and achievement of the internal market, which has aroused some of the greatest controversy.

The Select Committee said in its report that there could be difficulties, as there might be more, longer and possibly more acrimonious debates in the House. Moreover, the

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decisions might be more difficult for the Government as the pace of harmonisation could well increase. There might not be a single proposal. We all know that, in the EEC—I shall not say that it does not happen elsewhere—there is linkage to produce a package proposition. One considers the whole and cannot distinguish between the parts. That is one of the least satisfactory features of what is going on.

If the EEC is to work properly in the next two or three years, we want proper partnership and co-operation. I am anxious to carry the hon. Member for Kensington with me. One of the distinguishing features of a healthy and proper partnerhip is that one of the partners can say no, knowing that it will not be penalised. I am afraid that, as I understand it, all too often in EEC affairs a partner says no at its peril, whatever the merits of the issue.

Sir Brandon Rhys Williams: Is not the great danger that some other member will say no and that Britain will be penalised? We need progress with the Community. If other member states can block it, we may suffer the worst.

Mr. Spearing: The hon. Gentleman may be correct. However, there is an opportunity for blocking—it will be reduced to some extent; although some people believe that a reduction in the power to block is progress, other people take a different view—which I think is one of the inherent problems in the EEC. Its ambitions in terms of integrated Common Market harmonisation, whatever their merits, are so politically ambitious when one is faced with the vested interests, proper or improper, spoken or unspoken, which will prevent that, the whole machinery, good or bad, falls into disrepute.

I suggest that we shall see a new phase in the life of the EEC if this treaty is agreed. It will make life more difficult for this House, particularly in keeping up with legislation, because there will be more of it, it will move faster and it will be further away from the control of this House, and therefore from the people. I will not dwell on this at length, but that includes the creation of what some people will dub a European foreign office, which is now a treaty obligation.

There will be an obligation for consultation at every level and an obligation to have an EEC party group, if I can put it like that, inside every international organisation or conference where members of the Community are present in any number.

Therefore, we will find that most of the features on which we have prided ourselves through the ages, such as being a sine qua non of a Parliament and parliamentary democracy, will be diminished. We know that those features are legislation—the power to appoint judges, the power to tax and the power to control expenditure. There are other criteria but those are the primary ones. In respect of legislation, we know that we will now share it more and more and, for the first time, an Assembly which is not of this country will have a hand in originating legislation which then becomes binding on every citizen.

We know only too well from some dramatic examples in the past fortnight and exchanges across the Floor of the House, indeed even in statements from the Government, that the ruling of the European Court, whatever its merits, will be of increasing importance in this country. We know that our own courts have increasingly, formally or otherwise, to refer cases to the court of the EEC.

We still have, just about, the power to determine maximum levels of taxation—1·4 per cent. of VAT and so on. However, I suggest that we have largely lost control of the EEC's expenditure. It is true that we may not be too great on that inside the United Kingdom, but the Government are accountable and may be broken by the House. Therefore, when we passed greater powers of taxation to the EEC we did it, did we not, on the understanding that there was budgetary discipline? Some hon. Members have already said tonight that all the signs are that it will not bite in the year when we thought it was going to bite. It is becoming increasingly clear that in 1986 there will not be the budgetary discipline which the House was promised as one of the conditions of its voting extra money.

Therefore, if all those factors come together and if the House approves the Single European Act, we will be in a completely new phase of the EEC where it will accelerate and widen the ambit of its competence, not only to help the environment and other things of that sort, but in terms of a European foreign policy.

About 12 years ago, at the time of the great debate on the subject, the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) said that the position of the Queen would not be affected. I do not think that the right hon. Gentleman understood some of the basic constitutional principles on which the country has evolved. That is perhaps a charitable view, and it may be a startling view for someone who was then Prime Minister of our country. The position of the Queen, or the monarch, was not affected as much as the position of the Crown by the decision in 1973. It will be further affected if the Single European Act is approved by the House. Until that date, it was the Crown, in one form or another, which approved legislation, appointed the courts, and, in Parliament, was the highest point of appeal in the House of Lords. It also decided the level revenue of taxation.

That was not so on 1 January 1973. The power of the Crown in those matters, and so the power of the British people themselves, was diminished. I suggest to the House that if the Single European Act is ratified, it will be diminished further.

9.11 pm

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): I join my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) and the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston) in congratulating and adding my welcome to the Minister of State, who has joined our debates as well as the foreign affairs Front Bench team. I was going to say that the British motorists' loss was the Europeans' gain, but I thought that it might be taken the wrong way, so I shall confine myself to welcoming the hon. Lady.

In my reply I shall have some difficulty in living up to the billing given to me by my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton, but I shall do my best, because, unlike the hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash), who was a bit disparaging about the debate, I thought that it was unexpectedly interesting in several ways, and quite worth while. I was not expecting some of the comments and contributions that we have had. I accept that it has not been an exciting debate, but it has been interesting.

I should like to ask the Minister some questions. I hope that I shall receive some answers tonight, but, realising that this is a complicated issue, I shall understand if I do

not. The Minister and I are becoming regular correspondents—*[Interruption.]* "Letter writers" might be a better phrase to use. Perhaps we can continue our letter writing on the points that the hon. Lady cannot answer tonight.

In the short time available to me, I hope to get down to the essentials of these complex matters. I sometimes think that the jargon, the Eurospeak and the gobbledegook that surround this area are designed as deliberate obfuscation by the Eurocrats, so that we know little about what is happening, and so that they can get on with things, and we remain without knowledge and understanding of what they are up to. I think that some of them like to keep the public and Parliament in ignorance of what is going on in the Community. I hope that part of our job is to try to sweep that away.

The right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell), as usual, made some excellent points about the Single European Act. We now understand why it is called that. It is not a singular sensation for the House. However, it would be helpful for us to know how the Act will be considered by the House. I know that to some extent that is a matter for the usual channels and the Leader of the House, but obviously the Foreign Office is involved. When will we get it? Many Conservative Members, some of whom have not been here today, are anxious to know. The Minister said that it would be within three months. That is a fair leeway. I hope that it will be in the earlier part of that period. When we get it, what will the procedure be for its consideration? It is important to know whether we can amend it.

Many comments have been made about the useful report from the Scrutiny Committee. I should like to pay tribute here, as I do informally on other occasions, to my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) for the work that he does. He is extremely valuable to my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton and myself.

The major point that I want to make is to endorse on behalf of the Opposition the recommendations in the report on the need for greater parliamentary scrutiny of all the matters that come to us from Europe. As the hon. Member for Stafford said, whether they have been traditionally pro-European or anti-European, all hon. Members are anxious for greater accountability. Even in 1984 the Scrutiny Committee said that scrutiny was inadequate. It is clear from the present report that there will be more proposals to be examined. Because of majority voting, the House will have to debate major issues much earlier than it did in the past, and the British Government will not be able to hold up decisions of the Council of Ministers pending a debate in the House. For those reasons, scrutiny becomes even more important.

Even in 1984 the report of the Scrutiny Committee was already critical of the Government's attitude to scrutiny. As my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton said, it pointed to major changes which had been agreed by the Council of Ministers before we had had the opportunity to debate them. I am thinking, for example, of ESPRIT and of the new arrangements for the regional development fund. Both those who are for and those who are against Europe think that it is wrong that changes should be made before we have had an opportunity to discuss them.

I hazard a guess that the United Kingdom is among the poorest, if it is not the worst, of the European Parliaments in its arrangements for scrutiny. It has already been said that within this Parliament the House of Lords does a better job than we do. The House of Commons is woefully inadequate in carrying out scrutiny. My hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton said that I would try to put forward proposals. I shall not go that far, but I shall suggest some points which may be taken into account by the Government, especially as they have said that they will accept the Opposition amendment.

Statements to the House after meetings of Ministers have to be drawn from the Government like rotten teeth. My hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton is on the telephone regularly to the Foreign Office asking for statements. I am referring not just to Foreign Affairs Council meetings but to important meetings of the Energy Council and the Environment Council. When matters of importance are on the agenda when decisions are being made or when consideration is undertaken on our behalf, it should be a natural course to have regular reports to the House. If that means that time for other debates is squeezed, consideration must be given to another way of dealing with the statements. I shall come in a moment to the suggestion of a Grand Committee—

Mr. Deakins: Does my hon. Friend agree that, in addition to having more oral statements, we should revert to the procedure whereby there was a separate slot of 20 minutes in Foreign Office Question Time for oral questions on European Community matters?

Mr. Foulkes: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for mentioning that. That was to be my fourth point but I shall deal with it now.

I do not want to criticise anyone. We ought to look at the arrangements for European questions, but we should do so without taking any time away from foreign affairs. Today, for example, questions were raised about South Africa, the middle east and the Falkland Islands, and an hour a month is not a great deal of time. We should therefore consider the possibility of having a separate Question Time for European matters, because today there were no questions at all on the EEC.

Sir Anthony Meyer: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will recall that when we did have EEC questions hon. Members were allowed to table only questions that related directly to the Foreign Office, whereas one wanted to table questions relating to all European activities. That was the great defect of that 20-minute slot.

Mr. Foulkes: I accept that. That is why I said that I would have difficulty in living up to my billing. I am not trying to be definitive. I am merely trying to point to the way in which the Government ought to examine this matter.

Sir Russell Johnston: I thought that the Labour party was active in taking Europe out of foreign affairs questions. In the negotiations, I was certainly opposed to the idea.

Mr. Foulkes: It was agreed as an experiment, and I am sure the hon. Gentleman agrees that foreign affairs questions require a lot of time. The subject covers the whole world, and quite often certain issues are not covered.

Our one Scrutiny Committee is overwhelmed by paper. I do not criticise it in any way, because it does a

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marvellous job. Perhaps we should look at the House of Lords or at the possibility of having more Scrutiny Committees.

There is also the possibility of setting up a European Grand Committee, which might have a separate Question Time, to deal with statements and consider European business. I know that there are problems about that, and I am not advocating it. I am merely saying that these are some of the things at which the Government should be looking.

I also hope that we will look at other national Parliaments in Europe. I think that we can learn from our European partners and from their parliamentary set-ups. Having accepted the amendment, I hope that the Minister will tell us how the Government will consider this matter, and how Parliament will be allowed to consider any report that they make.

Having dealt with scrutiny as a principle, let me refer to some of the issues that we are scrutinising today. The Government keep stressing the blue-eyed concept of the internal market, about which they seem to be star struck, but the implications have not been spelt out. This is a very important development, but the House has not had the opportunity of dealing with it.

There is the proposed common market in banking and insurance and the liberalisation of financial services. What does that mean in relation to control over the City and Lloyd's? There will also be changes in public procurement policies. What does that mean in terms of safeguarding United Kingdom industries? There will be European directives on radio and television—not, I hasten to add, that that will mean "Coronation Strasse" for the Germans —*[Interruption.]* I thought that hon. Members might moan at that. The development of satellites raises some very important matters. What effect will that have on the Bill of the hon. Member for Davyhulme (Mr. Churchill)? There will also be the harmonisation of competition policy, including mergers. What effect will that have on the current merger mania that is under way in the City?

I have tried to obtain some answers from the Government. I tabled a question to the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry asking about the effects of the European internal market on the structure of British industry, the level of employment in the United Kingdom, the level of British exports to the EEC, the level of British imports from the EEC, the balance of payments and the rate of growth of the British economy. That gave the Minister for Trade an ideal opportunity to spell out what the internal market means. He said:

"Progress towards completing the internal market will be one of a number of factors influencing the development of the British economy. In general, removing barriers to trade within the Community should further increase our trade with other member states and reduce costs to business. It should, therefore, help to stimulate increased efficiency in the use of resources and accordingly encourage growth of the economy." —[*Official Report*, 24 February 1986; Vol. 92. c. *422*.]

Where have we heard that before? It is not an answer to the question. I hope that the Minister will make the position clear.

The Government's views, as we understand them, seem to differ from those of other countries, which believe that the international market will require harmonisation of VAT, which causes us great anxiety. Does it mean that? The Minister shakes her head, but Jacques Delors, Lord Cockfield, and others seem to think that. Why cannot we have a White Paper on the effects of some of the proposals? We get parliamentary papers of one kind and another on less important issues, yet these matters are not spelt out for Parliament and the people.

Another area for scrutiny is the budget and its overrun. During the six-month period that we are considering, a supplement of £120 million was requested, as my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Dr. McDonald) will remember. We had to agree to pay our share of a £1·1 billion non-refundable advance. Soon the Community will run out of euphemisms for the money that it keeps asking us for. Although the limits on agricultural spending for 1986 were agreed only in June 1985 and the new budgetary discipline — that sounds good and rigid — was to be invoked in 1986, in the first year of their operation agricultural expenditure will break the limits. Yet the Government said that the great control was a major achievement and would be effective. Indeed, they said that they had agreed to the increase in own resources only because there was to be effective control and, preferably, legally binding control. They have now forgotten that, and the ceiling has been broken in the first year.

In *The Scotsman* recently, Mr. Andriessen, the farm Commissioner, is quoted as saying that surpluses are a time bomb. The headline was:

"EEC may seek £450 million supplement to budget."

The Council spokesman, Mr. Junker, said in December that there would be a supplementary budget by the end of the year. May we have a categorical assurance from the Government that they will make no further requests for loans, non-refundable advances, or whatever they are called? The Minister must answer that question, which Labour Members have asked previously. We have the discipline, and if it is effective, there is no need for additional funds. Indeed, if it is effective, the Ministers should be using it to effect and we should have no further requests.

We in the Labour party are demanding fundamental reform of the common agricultural policy. Price freezing is not enough, as Mr. Andriessen has made clear. The system itself must change. We must have an end to a system which allows the EC to dump subsidised produce on world markets, causing great harm to developing countries. The latest inequity is dumping under-priced sugar in Jamaica. The EC is undermining the economies of Third world countries and making it more difficult for them to pay their debts.

I have been fairly critical of some areas, but I should like to welcome one aspect. Perhaps some of my hon. Friends will disagree with me, but if they consider the matter and understand fully the implications, they should welcome co-operation on foreign policy. But we must know how the secretariat will operate and where it will be sited. I understand that it will move with the presidency. We would welcome joint foreign policy co-operation if it meant more effective co-operation on South Africa and if it forced the Government to impose stronger sanctions on South Africa, as our European partners wish. We would welcome it if it meant that the European Governments could persuade the British Government to join the condemnation of American aid to the Contras in Central America. Indeed, Congress is considering further aid to the Contras to undermine the duly elected Nicaraguan Government.

Finally, I should mention the "people's Europe". The people who I meet in Dalmellington high street do not think that the internal market is a major priority. They do not talk much about it when I meet them on the street. They do not say how marvellous it would be if United Kingdom banks and insurance companies could sell their wares to other European countries. However, they are worried about unemployment. In my constituency there is 28 per cent. unemployment. In the Community 14 million people are unemployed — nearly half of them young people — and their despair, despondency and anxiety cannot properly be understood by anyone in the House. School leavers have a less than 50 per cent. chance of obtaining jobs, although, to give it credit, the Commission is proposing joint reflation.

Will the Government take the opportunity of their presidency starting on 1 July to advance a strategy of co-operative growth to reduce unemployment? Will they give more money to ESPRIT, EUREKA, the social fund and the regional fund, which would also help to reduce unemployment? The Minister will not give us that answer tonight. I assure the House that, after the next election, when the Labour party is returned to office, we shall use the mechanisms of the Community to ensure joint reflation among the increasingly Socialist Governments of Europe. Our priority will be a reduction of the appalling unemployment.

9.32 pm

Mrs. Chalker: With the leave of the House, I thank hon. Members for their kind remarks and for their welcome to this maze of a Community debate. It has been a long debate covering more than the documents before us. There were many ideas and misconceptions, and I am sorry that I shall be unable to comment on everything that has been said in more than five hours of detailed debate, with questions from hon. Members on both sides of the House. A few moments ago, I thought that the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) wanted, instead of a system of filibustering, a system of Eurobustering. That might be even less workable than the unsatisfactory system that we have now, but which we are trying to change for the better.

We have heard three sorts of contributions to the debate. Some hon. Members were highly critical, and we share some of their criticisms. Others were anxious, and some were forward-looking. My hon. Friend the Member for Kensington (Sir B. Rhys Williams) made some especially ambitious remarks. I should make two general points to those who were highly critical and anxious. In 1972, the House decided to join the Community. In 1975, the Labour Government conducted a referendum in which that decision was endorsed. Since then, we have been through a difficult process of accession — the most recent being that of Spain and Portugal. With two major allies making the decision to join us, we know that they, like us, consider the economic and political growth of the EC to be tremendously important.

Of course, there are problems with the essential workings of the Community. There is no way in which a Community of 10 or 12 would not have such problems, and we shall not be satisfied until we achieve better working methods and better scrutiny, as I have already told the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing), whose Select Committee has done such a good job.

Over a long time we have frequently experienced irrational results, but that must not mean that when things go wrong we should sit back and refuse to look at possible solutions to making the European Community a better and more workable institution. The length of time that it takes to consider many parts of European business is a problem. Coming to this matter from the Department of Transport, I am reminded of the average timetable from the inception of a road to putting the first vehicles on it, which is 13 years. There have been long-drawn out considerations but now, having had progress bedevilled for many years and after hard work in a number of Committees in past years, we have the Single European Act, which is an important step forward.

I shall try to go through the fears and anxieties expressed by a number of hon. Members, because I understand some of them. Other hon. Members have been more positive. I listened to the speech of the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell), as always, with respect. He is an authority on constitutional law, but I fear that his obsession with a narrow interpretation of national sovereignty is misguided. Every international treaty can be interpreted as a diminution of national power, in so far as it limits freedom of independent action, yet, inevitably and rightly, we have entered into treaties because we believed that the benefits of combined action at international level outweighed the theoretical limitations on our sovereignty. NATO is one such example, and political co-operation is another. We live in an international world, not a national environment that automatically seeks and abides by boundaries. The Single European Act acknowledges and gives form to the excellent and useful practices that have developed.

The hon. Member for Newham, South said that we were asking the House to approve an agreement that the Government had signed unwillingly. He rightly pointed out that in Milan we argued against an intergovernmental conference because we believed that the improvements that all member states recognised to be necessary could be achieved by other means. But once the decision was taken to hold a conference, the Government's main concern was to ensure that the outcome was one with which we could willingly agree. That is what happened, and that is why, on 17 February, I signed the initial stage in the process.

I have been asked about the nature of the legislation that follows from the Twelve having signed this agreement. The House will have a formal presentation—not going through on the nod—and a full opportunity to debate the matter. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary made clear in the House several weeks ago, we shall introduce a Bill to amend the European Communities Act. The issues raised by hon. Members tonight can be aired on Second Reading and no doubt in Committee, on Report and on Third Reading.

Mr. Foulkes: When?

Mrs. Chalker: I wish that I knew the date on which the Bill will be introduced, for it would make my diary planning easier. I can say that it will come up within the next three months. The Bill will then pass on to the House of Lords.

The right hon. Member for South Down misunderstood what I said in my opening remarks about the co-operation procedure involving the European Parliament. There are no circumstances in which the European Parliament can

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cause decisions to be taken by a qualified majority that would otherwise be taken by unanimity. It is true that if the Commission incorporates amendments to its proposals, they can be further amended only by unanimity. That, however, is a feature of the existing provisions of the treaty, under article 149. So no change in the existing constitutional balance is involved.

The hon. Member for Newham, South asked about the extension of European Community competence on foreign policy. The treaty provisions in the sphere of foreign policy are entirely separate from Community treaties. There is no extension of Community competence. The treaty leaves us free to maintain, where necessary, a separate position. That we shall do, where necessary.

The hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Deakins) asked whether there would be further intergovernmental agreements. He knows that this is an own resource decision. It neither provides for nor excludes further intergovernmental agreements. Such an agreement would be proposed only if the 1·4 per cent. value added tax ceiling were found to be inadequate to meet proposed expenditure. That is not the position now. Unanimity in the Council would be required if a proposal for an intergovernmental agreement were to be put forward. We could not proceed without it.

Mr. Terence Higgins (Worthing): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mrs. Chalker: I apologise to my right hon. Friend, but I have many questions to answer.

Mr. Higgins: Could my hon. Friend just confirm——

Mrs. Chalker: No, I shall not give way, because the time in which I can respond to all the points that have been made in this debate has been very severely clipped.

I was asked about the breach of financial guidelines. The 1986 budget is within the financial guidelines. However, recent developments, particularly the decline in the dollar-ecu rate, have led the Commission to say that it will need to seek a provision within the supplementary budget, which will be needed later this year anyway to cater for the expected increase in the United Kingdom's abatement. If we cannot get our abatement without a supplementary budget, then, for the sake of Britain, I am in favour of a supplementary budget. It depends upon the outcome of the price fixing. It would be idle to pretend that we can insulate ourselves from the effects of exchange rate movements. That is not possible.

The hon. Member for Walthamstow also asked about the budgetary powers of the European Parliament. Since the call-up of revenue in the Community is the product of expenditure decisions, the actions of the European Parliament have revenue implications. One cannot get away from that; we are dealing with the two sides of the balance. That is one of the reasons why the Council has decided to take the European Parliament to the European Court of Justice. The point is therefore covered in the Council's challenge. Our national case is that we are challenging the European Parliament's power unilaterally to set the level of the budget as a whole. Other nations are doing the same. I shall look at what the hon. Gentleman said about taking up the matter in another way.

The hon. Member for Walthamstow also suggested that we should give consideration to a preliminary ruling from the European Court of Justice under article 177 about the validity of the European Parliament's actions. I shall need to check that, but I understand that article 177 allows for preliminary rulings on points of European Community law that are raised in proceedings before national courts, not before the European Court of Justice. If that is the case, the proper way for us to challenge the European Parliament's decision is by direct action in the European Court of Justice. That is exactly what we are doing.

Several hon. Members referred to the budget. Of course we are concerned about the cost of the budget. However, it is unrealistic to expect there to be no net cost for member states such as Britain, which has an above average gross domestic product. We should expect to contribute to policies from which we benefit. Whereas, before Fontainebleau, we contributed at a level which did not reflect our relative prosperity, our contribution has now been established on a fair basis. Following Fontainebleau, the Federal Republic of Germany makes a net contribution three times as high as ours and France's net contribution is broadly on a par with ours. As a result of the two thirds abatement that was agreed at Fontainebleau, the rebate that we receive from the Community has doubled in two years from £440 million in 1984 to £605 million in 1985, and the estimate is that it will be £900 million, or more, in 1986.

In view of the remarks that have been made tonight, and also because I believe it to be vital, I need to address a fundamental problem that underlies so many of the Community's anxieties — the common agricultural policy. No one disputes the contention of several hon. Members that the costs of the CAP are too high. What is questionable is whether some of the simple solutions that have been suggested would have the effects that have been claimed for them.

The recent report of the Public Accounts Committee, House of Commons Paper No. 71, rightly pointed out that the objectives of the CAP are broadly the same as those of the Agriculture Act 1947 passed under the then Labour Government. The balance between achieving security of supply and reasonable prices to consumers has always been difficult to achieve, and the faults of the CAP are reproduced in most national schemes — not simply in Europe, but in other parts of the world as well.

There is no magic solution, save to those who would offer no support for agriculture, thereby putting at risk the security of supply, the working population involved in agriculture and the 80 per cent. of our land mass which is rural. The Community has not funked the issue of reform. Again, as the Public Accounts Committee reported, over the past four or five price fixings the price of wheat has been reduced in real terms by about 12 per cent. What makes the achievement of reforms at once necessary and difficult is the fact that technological improvements have led to a parallel growth in productivity. I shall be looking at the remarks made by my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash) who was obviously concerned about the productivity from the land today.

We cannot duck the fact that farmers have benefited from technological change, particularly in the cereal sector where one quarter of the surplus stocks in intervention are accounted for by United Kingdom production. We need no sudden about turns, but a sustained programme of reform. As a result of the Government's policies, we have achieved price reductions in real terms in six out of the last seven price fixings.

This year the Commission's price proposals are for a 4·1 per cent. reduction in real terms which, with its other reform measures, amount to savings of 408 million ecu in 1986 and 786 million ecu in 1987. That would be equivalent to a real terms price reduction of 7 per cent., and that is the direction in which we should be going.

The hon. Member for Walthamstow asked about the use of the German veto on the CAP and subsequent action by the Commission. There was no question of the Commission unilaterally implementing price cuts. Based on its own powers, the Commission managed the market arrangements and the timing of the intervention arrangements to achieve savings in costs, particularly in cereals. That is completely within its powers. I should have thought that the savings in costs were exactly what hon. Members wanted. Therefore, if it was possible by management, we should not decry it.

The hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) was worried about European Community White Paper debates. White Papers on Community developments have been a regular six-monthly feature since 1974. Debates on them in the House are usually held within three months of publication, but on this occasion that was not possible. The White Paper before us, as everyone knows, was published in September, but at the end of last year the House gave its attention to several major Community matters, including European Community Finance Bills and various EC budget documents, as well as the European Communities (Spanish and Portuguese Accession) Bill. That was all in the last two months of 1985.

Against that background I hope that hon. Members will agree that there was no lack of opportunity, but I assure Labour Members that I will do my level best to persuade my right hon. Friends that we should have debates within a reasonable time.

The hon. Member for Hamilton also asked about a White Paper on the projected benefits and implications of the internal market. It has not been the practice to publish White Papers on such matters. The proposals have been made available to the House and we have had several opportunities to debate them. However, it would be pointless to keep publishing projections. That is the sort of thing that centralised economies go in for. The hon. Gentleman gave us an interesting example earlier in the day when he told us that he had had a five-hour briefing in Moscow from President Gorbachev. We prefer results to hypotheses. It is clear to us that the liberalisation of the European market will be of benefit in its impact on jobs and prosperity.

Several comments were made on the need for a co-operative growth strategy. The Government's policies have led to the creation of more jobs than in any other European Community member state. We have a common strategy for growth. All the Heads of Government—Socialist as well as Conservative and other Governments—have agreed that jobs and prosperity can come about only by the continuation of the type of policies that we and all other European Community Governments are pressing. It is only the Labour party that has a different view—different even from its fellow Socialists in Europe. It is the only one that is out of step.

I want the benefits of the European internal market to be brought to the ordinary people of Britain. The Opposition are out of touch if they continue to claim that it is irrelevant to try to achieve a reduction in barriers to trade and an internal market. We have achieved cheaper air fares for travellers. In the first year of the United Kingdom-Netherlands air agreement, we had 10 new services, a 16 per cent. increase in traffic growth between London and Amsterdam and 70,000 extra passengers who would not otherwise have travelled. The pattern is exactly the same between the United Kingdom and the Federal Republic of Germany.

We have opened new markets for British goods and services. We are doing away with the barriers and the delays which cost the United Kingdom and the rest of the Community £6 billion a year. We intend to create the prosperity and the jobs that a single large market can bring. The Opposition claim to see no connection between a single internal market and new employment in Europe. The connection is there. It is obvious and crucial. We shall continue to ensure that it works to the benefit of people seeking employment in Britain, because that is what the liberalisation of the internal market is all about.

The hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) asked whether we would make progress on maritime cabotage. That is probably a strange subject for many of my colleagues. I am happy to tell the hon. Gentleman that we are making real progesss. A package of measures to liberalise maritime transporting, including cabotage, is now before the Council. The Dutch presidency is pressing hard, and we shall continue to make this an important part of our work in the second half of this year. As time is short, I shall write to the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow about fisheries.

The hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochabar (Sir R. Johnston) asked about the regional fund and the abolition of non-quota measures. As I think he is already aware, the regional fund will make allowance for a quota range as well as for the Community programme. We believe that we shall have every opportunity to be a substantial beneficiary, as in the past. I remind the House that, in 1985, the United Kingdom received nearly 24 per cent. of the fund. We have not been doing badly, and we intend to continue to do our best to get that which is due.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stafford asked about the new GATT round. I very much share his view on the importance of the new round. Preparations are under way in Geneva. I believe that it is important that we reach agreement on the outstanding issues to enable the launch of the new round at the next GATT ministerial meeting in September. We are taking a positive attitude to the GATT round, and I hope that other member states will take a similar attitude.

Many hon. Members raised the issue of the scrutiny procedures. We are well aware of the unsatisfactory nature of the arrangements which have been pointed out by the hon. Member for Newham, South, who is Chairman of the Select Committee on European Legislation. The Select Committee considered the operation of the arrangements in 1984. That was spelt out in House of Commons Report No. 527. The Select Committee concluded that the Government should make greater efforts to ensure that debates on European Community documents were held in good time. We revised our guidelines in August 1985 with the aim of ensuring that debates should, as a rule, take place as soon as possible after the Committee makes a recommendation. We are committed to doing everything possible to make the new scrutiny procedure work effectively. I should like to examine the Select Committee

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report. We must work within the new guidelines already accepted and consider other suggestions in the Select Committee's report.

It is sometimes very difficult to strike the right balance between debating a proposal at a very early stage, with the risk that it may be amended out of all recognition by the time that it goes to the Council of Ministers, and debating it late in the day when the debate may have to be hurried through at the eleventh hour. I give the hon. Member for Newham, South an undertaking that we will do our best to have the debate at the right time.

I should like to give further consideration to the suggestion about a Grand Committee. I do not believe that the House wishes to weigh itself down with yet more detailed debates, as some hon. Members already complain about the verbosity of other hon. Members on occasions when we discuss procedure.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Sir A. Kershaw), who unfortunately could not stay this evening as he had a prior engagement, made a number of remarks about political co-operation. It is helpful to be in firm political combination with our partners in Europe, as we have shown in the past two months in the statement on terrorism and the influence that Europe is having on the South African issue. My hon. Friend the Member for Stroud spoke about Ethiopia, and the views he expressed about resettlement are shared by the Government. I am glad to say that they are also shared by many of our partners in the Twelve.

Matters are frequently discussed and views exchanged. I am grateful for the welcome given by the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley to the political co-operation part of the Single European Act.

It would be impossible to recount all the matters which have produced the present position. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's report, "Europe: the Future", is important, and we stand by it. It is positive and realistic. Equally, we have few reservations about the Dooge report. I pay tribute to my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Pentlands (Mr. Rifkind), now Secretary of State for Scotland, for all that he did to bring that about and to ensure that Britain's views were thoroughly and well known by our European partners.

I should now like to emphasise the importance of the second six months of this year. We have heard both negative and positive comments tonight. I hope that we can cease living in the past, wake up to the present and start working for a positive future. Although some hon. Members may not be reconciled to EEC membership, the negative comments and that lack of reconciliation have more to do with nostalgia than a realistic assessment of United Kingdom interest in many of the matters we have discussed.

We need the unity of the European market if our economy is to be competitive enough to provide prosperity and jobs. We need the strength of a united western Europe if collectively we are to counter Soviet foreign policy. We must also meet the commercial challenge of the United States and Japan rather than try to hang on as national champions. We need unity to fend off the growing threat of protectionism from whatever source.

The Community has achieved many things in the past few years. Some things, like Fontainebleau and the effective start of agricultural reform, are well known. Others, less well known, are none the less important to our prosperity. I was glad that the Community's research programme was mentioned by a number of hon. Members tonight, including research into information technology.

Environmental decisions are another important feature. These include exhaust emissions which protect the environment and preserve the unity of a single market. There has been a breakthrough on standards by the adoption of the 15 directives which had long been blocked, and agreements on future mutual recognition of standards. I mention toy safety because for many people that has been a major issue. How many families in this country do not have small children for whom they wish to buy a toy at Christmas?

There are many other areas in which we shall be working with our European partners. There are many objectives to be gained as well as interests to be defended. We shall do our best to achieve those objectives and to defend the interests of the United Kingdom and of the Community as a whole.

Amendment agreed to.

Main Question, as amended, put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House takes note of the White Paper on Developments in the European Community January to June 1985 (Cmnd. 9627) and of European Community Document No. 8616/85, the Commission's opinion on the Proposal for Amendments to the EEC Treaty and, noting the First Special Report of the Select Committee on European Legislation (Session 1985-86), calls on the Government to undertake to co-operate in improved procedures so that the House can effectively scrutinise proposals under the Treaties as they would be amended by the Single European Act.'.

10 pm

The Minister of State, Treasury (Mr. Peter Brooke): I beg to move,

That this House takes note of the Annual Report of the European Court of Auditors on the financial year 1984, together with the replies of the Institutions, and supports the Government's efforts to ensure implementation of the Court's recommendations where these would improve the Community's financial procedures.

The annual debate on the Court of Auditors report offers a valuable opportunity for the House to discuss expenditure planning and control within the Community. Our discussion tonight will be much helped by the lucid report from the Select Committee on European Legislation, which highlights important themes from the court's report, and I pay tribute to the Committee's work.

The role of the Court of Auditors report in the Community's budgetary procedure is set out in the explanatory memorandum which I submitted to the House on 17 January. As the House will recall, one of the functions of the European Parliament, after advice from the Council of Ministers, is to grant a discharge each year to the Commission in respect of the implementation of the Community budget. The Court of Auditors report is the main document which the Council takes into account when making its recommendations to the Parliament.

Last year, at the request of the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, the ECOFIN Council discussed the court's annual report for the first time. That report related to the 1983 budget. This year, at the meeting arranged for 10 March, the ECOFIN Council will discuss the court's report on the 1984 budget. For the first time, the president of the court will attend to present the report. These arrangements for discussion in the ECOFIN Council are a sign of the importance which the Council now attaches to the work of the Court of Auditors.

As the Select Committee acknowledges in its report, the court has a formidable task. The United Kingdom has always strongly supported the court's efforts to improve financial control in the Community and welcomes the Commission's statement in part 2 of the report that many of the court's recommendations are already being carried out. There is, however, no room for complacency. The latest report provides ample evidence that further improvement is both possible and necessary.

I do not propose to discuss the court's detailed recommendations. It may, however, be helpful to the House if I draw attention to half a dozen areas in which the Government warmly support what the court has said, and to a couple of issues of budgetary procedure on which we respectfully beg to differ.

First, we strongly support what the court has to say about the overhang of past commitments, notably in the structural funds. The court notes that outstanding commitments increased again in 1984. It is evident, as the court says, that a better balance has to be struck between payments and commitments, within the framework of the budget discipline arrangements. The Community needs to cut back on new commitments so as to leave sufficient room for meeting inescapable commitments from the past. In the Budget Council disussions on the 1986 Community budget, the United Kingdom strongly opposed the provision of additional budgetry resources outside budgetary discipline limits to deal with the so-called "cost of the past."

Secondly, the court has recommended that the commission should improve the accuracy of its revenue and expenditure forecasts with a view, among other things, to reducing the number of expenditure appropriations which turn out to be in excess of need. A related recommendation is that the Commission should give more attention to multi-annual forecasting of revenue and expenditure. These recommendations, too, the United Kingdom strongly supports.

Thirdly, the court makes the telling point that functions should be carried out at Community rather than national level only if benefits are likely to be superior to national programmes of a similar cast. this again echoes arguments which the United Kingdom has put forward on many occasions.

Fourthly, the court has paid special attention, as in previous years, to the administration of development co-operation and food aid. The report highlights the continuing difficulties of delivery and timing. It is a matter of concern that, as we suspected, emergency food aid was not arriving significantly faster in 1984 than non-emergency aid. In 1985, by using flexible procedures outside its normal food aid arrangements, the Community was able to arrange swift deliveries of food to the African countries worst affected by famine. We have left the Commission in no doubt that the current review of food aid procedures must produce arrangements which are more responsive to emergency needs.

Fifthly, the court is critical, rightly in our view, of some aspects of the administration of the European development funds. There is still some way to go. In the light of previous Court of Auditors' reports, however, the United Kingdom has succeeded in obtaining agreement to some useful changes. The Commission will now introduce a more systematic method for forecasting contributions by member states, together with procedures to avoid accumulation of excessive balances. It has also brought forward proposals to charge interest on late payments by member states.

The court also draws attention to the problem of fraud and irregularities in the agricultural guarantee section of the budget. The Government take a serious view of this matter. We are concerned to ensure that all reasonable steps are taken to prevent fraud and to ensure that any fraud which does occur is promptly identified and dealt with.

Mr. Terence Higgins (Worthing): My hon. Friend said that the Government hope that there would be a better balance between revenue and expenditure. It is not clear from the Court of Auditors' report that the treaty requires that there should be an exact balance between the two? Do the Government agree with that view?

Mr. Brooke: Clearly there should be a balance between revenue and expenditure. If the budget is drawn up and the Commission asks us to pay a contribution towards that budget under the usual procedure, there may be occasions when, although expenditure is allowed for in the budget, it is not actually spent. That is what I think my right hon. Friend was referring to.

Mr. Higgins: I was thinking in the other direction, namely, when expenditure appears to exceed revenue. Does my hon. Friend agree that that situation is not allowed under the treaty?

Mr. Brooke: My right hon. Friend has anticipated the issue relating to the Court of Auditors' comment. I was intending to deal with that as one of the issues on which we disagree with the court.

There are two matters of budgetary procedure on which the Government do not agree with the Court's recommendations. The first concerns the legality of the intergovernmental agreement for 1984 the court argues that, by using this agreement to provide some 1 billion ecu to finance inescapable financial commitments in 1984, member states failed to fulfil their treaty obligation to ensure that revenue and expenditure balance.

As explained in a memorandum which the Treasury submitted to the Treasury and Civil Service Committee last month, the member states, including the United Kingdom, do not share this view. In our view, payments under the intergovernmental agreements for 1984 and 1985 were entirely consistent with article 4 of the Community's 1970 own resources decision. This referred to the budget as being financed out of own resources "irrespective of other revenue". The Community receives other revenue, such as gifts and bequests. The Government consider that contributions under the intergovernment agreements are likewise a form of "other revenue" and are therefore available to balance the budget in accordance with article 199 of the EEC treaty.

The second area of disagreement concerns the Commission's proposal, in its supplementary budget for 1984, to cancel certain expenditure appropriations which it was then clear would not be needed. These cancellations enabled the Commission to raise less extra revenue from member states than would otherwise have been needed to finance the supplementary budget. This has been criticised by the Court of Auditors, but in the Government's view the Commission was right to reduce the calls on taxpayers in member states in this way.

In conclusion, then, the Government respectfully take a different view from the court on two general issues of budgetary procedure, as well as on certain specific cases discussed in the court's report. But the areas of agreement are far more important than the differences, and we continue to support the court's efforts to ensure that the community's expenditure is properly managed and controlled. I commend the report to the House.

10.9 pm

Dr. Oonagh McDonald (Thurrock): I welcome some of the Minister's comments about the Court of Auditors' recommendations for stricter financial control at perhaps a lower level than overall budgetary discipline. There is much to be done in that regard if the Community is not to engage in wasteful expenditure. I am glad that the Government want some of the recommendations to be carried out.

I was anxious to note that the Government do not accept the Court of Auditors' strictures about the use of the intergovernmental agreement in 1984. The Minister's remarks lead us to expect a similar IGA in 1986. The Minister should make that absolutely clear. We have already heard that Mr. Andriessen, the farm Commissioner, talks about an extra £450 million being necessary to cover certain aspects of farm expenditure. If that is so, and the case is pressed, the Government will have to ask for another IGA.

I could not help smiling when the Minister referred to other forms of revenue such as gifts and bequests, as he merely suggested that the IGA was a form of gift. We shall probably find ourselves making a similar gift this year.

The Minister skipped rather lightly over some issues, such as the Court of Auditors' report for 1984, which made it clear that agricultural spending had increased by 16 per cent. over 1983. As is clear from my reference to Mr. Andriessen's demand for more money, nothing has been done to curb farm expenditure. We expect it to rise once again this financial year. It cannot be contained because the budget discipline is not strict enough, as the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office said in winding up the previous debate. She said that the Community could not be isolated from changes in the exchange rate. That is true, and budgetary discipline is obliged to recognise it, but farm spending is bound to escape. We can expect a future Court of Auditors' report to show another large increase in agricultural spending this year.

The Minister should have drawn our attention to another feature of the Court of Auditors' report—the fact that a substantial proportion of farm spending in 1984 was squandered on storage. Storage accounted for almost half of farm spending and the losses on intervention stocks ran at 2·5 billion ecu. They are massive losses which affect dairy products, especially butter, skimmed milk powder and beef. It is plain that those substantial losses are about to occur again in 1986 and I think that the Minister should have referred to that. The whole design of the common agricultural policy leads to a continual growth in intervention stocks and as they decline in value, money is wasted, first in storage and secondly in further losses as the stock deteriorates.

The Minister referred to what had happened in food aid; that is a sorry story indeed. Not only were goods delivered late—cereals 14 weeks late, milk powder 23 weeks late and butter oil 19 weeks late — but even emergency consignments were late. He might also have mentioned that not only were many of the shipments made far too late, even when they were designed for emergency purposes, but they actually overran the date set by the mobilisation authority. Even worse, some of the food shipped out had to be rejected. For example, Indonesia had to reject over 1,000 tonnes of skimmed milk: its quality was unacceptable because of breakages of packets and excessive humidity during the voyage there.

The Court of Auditors once again draws the attention of member states to the disgraceful and sorry story of intervention stocks, the expense incurred by the Community in storing food and the further loss of value, as compared with what happens to food aid. Not only do we waste food by producing more than we need, but we cannot even manage to get food of decent quality to places which desperately need it on time. That is no record for a civilised community. We all ought to be ashamed and I hope that the Government will make the fiercest possible condemnation of such late deliveries and of the poor quality. More than that, I hope that the Government will take firm action within the Community to ensure that it does not happen again. It is something of which we are all thoroughly ashamed, but shame is not enough; action is what is necessary.

To cap that, millions of ecu—the Court of Auditors estimate 6 million — are lost in fraud. Unofficial estimates put the amount at 30 times the sum given in the

Court of Auditors' report. The report lays specific charges against member states. It states that they do not report fraud before payments to the Commission, they do not scrutinise subsidy claims adequately and they refuse to co-operate with the Commission in the investigation of fraud. Some member countries are particularly guilty in that regard.

Once again, within the Community we want the Government to ensure that money is not wasted in that way. It is bad enough pouring millions of pounds into a wasteful and expensive agricultural policy. To be subsidising fraud, particularly in other member countries, makes matters even worse. I want an assurance from the Minister that our own methods of investigation and control are entirely adequate, that we co-operate with the Commission and that we do everything in our power to ensure that other member countries do the same.

I am glad that the Minister recommended the Court of Auditors' report to the House, as indeed I do. However, it tells a sad tale of the behaviour of the Community over the management of its funds and its disgraceful agricultural policy and it should give hon. Members cause for thought.

10.19 pm

Mr. Terence Higgins (Worthing): It is noticeable that the motion that the House is being asked to consider refers to the House taking note of rather than approving the annual report of the European Court of Auditors.

I found the speech by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Treasury disappointing in several respects. In the memorandum that the Government submitted to the Select Committee on the Treasury and Civil Service this week, which is now in the Library, they say:

"The United Kingdom considers that the Court of Auditors has a key role to play in improving financial control within the European Community. The proposed discussion in the ECOFIN Council of the recommendation for discharge provides an opportunity to support the Court's work and to ensure that the Commission responds to the Council's comments."

The extraordinary thing about the speech by my hon. Friend the Minister of State is that he is projecting some of the points that the Court of Auditors made about the proper financial workings of the Community. He is in a similar position to a company chairman, who, having received qualification of his accounts from the auditors, stands up at the annual general meeting and says, "I do not agree with what the auditors said." Those who were investing in such an enterprise might react in a sensible way. Alas, the taxpayer is not in a position to do so. The plain fact is that the report of the Court of Auditors confirms all the misgivings that I have expressed on previous occasions and which, more particularly, the Treasury and Civil Service Select Commitee has expressed, about the way in which the Community has been conducting its finances.

The Court of Auditors' annual report comments on the practice of using reimbursable advances authorised by means of intergovernmental agreements to finance short falls in the European budget. The court is clear about that, as, indeed, the Select Committee has been on previous occasions. The court says:

"financing the budget by means of reimbursable advances does not fulfil the obligations placed on the Member States by the EEC Treaty".

The court is absolutely clear about that. In his remarks, my hon. Friend said that that was not the Government's view. If there is a conflict between the auditors and the Government, how is the matter to be resolved? It is perhaps rather unfortunate that at a time when rightly, in my view, the Government are taking the European Parliament to the European Court, arguing that it has made an illegal budget, they are, at the same time, opposing the views expressed by the Court of Auditors that what they the Government have been doing is illegal. That does not seem to be a good arrangement, because the law should be indivisible.

The Court of Auditors is also critical of the introduction of article 302. That is an item in the accounts, the expected balance for the current year. It says:

"The Court considers that the introduction of this article into the budget of the current year was simply a device for disguising the fact that the budget expenditure exceeded available revenue, that is, own resources, plust the reimbursable advances, which is contrary to the provisions of Article 199 of the EEC."

The Court of Auditors expressed that view in very clear terms. I have great difficulty in understanding why my hon. Friend the Minister is not prepared to accept the view that the court expresses, and which the Select Committee has pointed out on previous occasions.

After the Fontainebleau summit, on 27 June 1984, at column 1003, the Prime Minister told the House that

"it is not right to raise loans for budgetary purposes because it is contrary"

to the treaty of Rome. The intergovernmental agreement substitutes the words "reimbursable advances" for "loans". The Select Committee, in its report on the special supplementary estimate in January 1985, said:

"A distinction was argued between 'loans' and 'reimbursable advances'. We are not convinced there is any real difference and the requirement now proposed would certainly seem to be contrary to the spirit of those who originally drafted the treaty".

I should be grateful for my hon. Friend's views on a more technical point. The Court of Auditors is there to audit; it is for it, not the Government, to audit. It says that the IGA does not come within the category of gifts and other bequests to which the Minister referred. The hon. Member for Thurrock (Dr. McDonald) rightly drew attention to the fact that that would be humorous if it were not so expensive.

My hon. Friend the Minister has not dealt with the point as to whether the Community is entitled to receive a reimbursable advance. Perhaps he would give his attention to that because it is separate from an advance which is not reimbursable. We may find that the two are indistinguishable because the advances which are said to be reimbursable do not come back to this country, as they are supposed to do. Perhaps my hon. Friend will be kind enough to tell us when he expects to get the advances back and whether they are likely to arrive back on time.

It is extraordinary that the Treasury, which is rightly stringent in many aspects of domestic expenditure, seems to be so profligate—that is the only word that I can use—in going along with such a proposal. It would be intolerable if the House were again asked to approve an intergovernmental agreement in the face of the clear view expressed by the Court of Auditors that intergovernmental agreements providing such advances are contrary to the treaty, not least because it means that once again, when we come up against the VAT limit—in this case 1·4 per cent. as against the previous 1 per cent.—we would be able to put off the evil day when the House had to be asked for an increase in that limit. We know all the consequences which would follow for the United Kingdom on rebates. After all, rebates do not continue indefinitely if the

[Mr. Terence Higgins]

conditions on which they were granted are no longer fulfilled. The problem now is very serious. It should not be subscribed to by the Treasury, the British taxpayer or by those who might otherwise have the money spent upon them at a domestic level.

Budgetary discipline is also mentioned in the report of the Court of Auditors. After the Select Committee took evidence from my hon. Friend and further evidence from Treasury officials this week, I cannot avoid the conclusion that the idea that there is any real budgetary discipline in the Community is a farce. The extent to which that is so is amply demonstrated by the fact that the Government themselves are taking the European Parliament to the European Court on the grounds that the budget that has been made by the Parliament is illegal. Clearly the European Parliament has not the slightest intention of subscribing to any system of budgetary discipline. That is immensely sad.

The House has been told by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister:

"More EC member countries are becoming net contributors. Frankly, that is the best discipline we can possibly have." —[*Official Report*, 27 June 1984; Vol. 62, c. 1001.]

That has scarcely been borne out by the way in which some of the net contributors have been performing against the background of the European Assembly's own illegal budget; some of the net contributors are among those who have been less than forthright in taking the line that Her Majesty's Government have rightly taken on the issue.

If one goes into more detail on the report of the Court of Auditors, one should refer to paragraph 3.4 which says:

"Article 199 of the EEC Treaty provides that all items of revenue and expenditure of the Communities shall be included in estimates to be drawn up for each financial year and shall be shown in the budget".

It then takes particular exception to two items. It says:

"The amending and supplementary budget No. 1, adopted on 25 October 1984, increased the VAT own resources rate to the 1% ceiling. The shortfall was covered within the budget by two new budget lines."

The next words are very important:

"The Court"—

the Court of Auditors—

"considers that these do not comply with normal budgeting principles, nor with the requirement of Article 199 of the EEC Treaty that annual revenue and expenditure of the Communities should be in balance".

It is not good enough for my hon. Friend simply to say that the Government are sorry, that the auditors have qualified the accounts, but that they disagree with the qualification.

Article 820 relates to amounts to be financed by reimbursable advances granted by member states. It states:

"The Court adheres to the view which it expressed in its opinion No. 1/84, that financing the budget by means of reimbursable advances does not fulfil the obligations placed on the Member States."

The same can be said of article 302 relating to expected balances from the current year.

One can go along with the view expressed in the motion that we should support the court's recommendations where these would improve the Community's financial proceedings. The regrettable and sad fact is that, on the most crucial aspect of the Court of Auditors' findings, the Government are not prepared to go along with what it recommends.

This is all in the past, and in one sense we are shutting the door after the horse has bolted. That would be worrying enough—and one accepts that it is difficult to claw back the money—but even more worrying—this was the point on which the Minister of State would not give way to me earlier—is that, having shut the door after the horse has bolted, they are opening the door again so that another horse can bolt. That is totally unsatisfactory.

It is deplorable that the Government should have taken such an attitude. They should stick firmly to the letter of the treaty. That is in the interests not only of United Kingdom taxpayers but of the future of the European Community itself. It cannot hope to get the support that it needs for the many other desirable objectives that have been mentioned if, when a report of this kind has been put before the House of Commons, the Council of Ministers and the Commission, those concerned are not prepared to face the true consequences of what it says.

10.33 pm

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): The ninth report of the Select Committee on European Legislation — HOC 21-ix of the current Session — attempts to summarise the auditors' report which is the subject of this debate. It is proper to point out that the Committee is assisted in its task by Officers of the House, and our weekly reports and this special report are greatly enhanced by their skill. When people thank the Committee and its members—sometimes even its Chairmen—they should be aware of the fact that it is assisted by Officers of the House.

I use that phrase advisedly, because this House is responsible for the proper expenditure of taxpayers' money. When, some time ago, the EC was running out of money, people said, "Ah! Wait till it hits the ceiling. When the 1 per cent. ceiling is reached there will be some budgetary discipline," and we all stood by as the graph reached the ceiling. However, as the right hon. Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins)—who is Chairman of the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee—pointed out, instead of discipline being applied at that point, the ceiling was pierced, and all that we had were ecus falling around the wreckage. That was achieved through the intergovernmental agreement, to which the right hon. Gentleman properly referred, because it was thought to be the way in which the House and taxpayers throughout the Community would achieve discipline. The Government are extremely hot on that in domestic expenditure, but the right hon. Gentleman outlined why that did not work.

Will that view, which I suppose will be adhered to, feature in the meeting on 10 March when the ECOFIN Council meets to discuss the budget? It is a little ironic that the budgetary discipline mechanism applying now will also be on the agenda. I understand that Agriculture Ministers will request that budgetary discipline is put into abeyance for the present year. It will indeed be ironic if budgetary discipline is put in abeyance this year through some treaty let-out, while at the same time the Government will tell the president of the Court of Auditors, who will be present, that they disagree with the court's findings in respect of the intergovernmental agreement in paragraph 3.6 on page 30 of the *Official Journal* at column 326.

I hope that the Minister will not take that view, but if he does he should so inform the House. In effect he will be picking and choosing from the auditors' report. He will be saying, "We accept a great deal of what the auditors

say, but we do not agree with the part where the court says that we have been party to providing illegal funds." Indeed, that is implicit in the words of the motion. That may suit the Government politically, but it is novel for a Treasury Minister, or, indeed, any citizen, to pick and choose from an auditor's report. Indeed, it is a terrible thing to behold. But it appears that the Government will do that.

The position is even worse than the right hon. Gentleman suggested. He properly quoted the important paragraphs, in particular paragraph 3.6 of the report. I shall quote from the Commission's reply to those matters. Page 175, paragraph 3.6a states:

"In order therefore to ensure that Community obligations could be met and that Community policies could continue to be implemented, whilst respecting the requirement in Article 199 of the EEC Treaty, that the budget be in balance, the Commission made a proposal based on Article 235 of the EEC Treaty, for the Member States to make supplementary finance available to the Community in 1984 which would be repaid when new own resources became available."

That did not happen, because the Council decided that that would not be the right way to proceed. The paragraph continues:

"The Legal Service of the Council shared the Commission's opinion that Article 235 was an entirely proper basis for the regulation."

I do not think that the Council thought that, because the paragraph continues:

"In the event, the Council did not adopt such a regulation. The Member States decided rather to make an intergovernmental agreement to provide additional finance in 1984. The Commission regrets that this agreement was entered into outside the framework of the Community treaties."

The view of the Court of Auditors that this was ultra vires and outside the terms of the treaty was apparently shared by the Commission. How can that organisation get away with such activities when a Select Committee of the House, the Court of Auditors and the Commission—with which some of us do not always agree—interpret them to be outside the terms of reference?

The Minister quoted an article in relation to miscellaneous income, but article 199 provides:

"All items of revenue and expenditure of the Community . . . shall be included in estimates to be drawn up for each financial period."

The intergovernmental agreement did not feature in the estimates, or in the so-called budget. That is a bit dodgy, too.

The right hon. Member for Worthing said that no taxpayer could do anything about it. However, one taxpayer tried. The Government tried to get one intergovernmental agreement through by way of statutory instrument under section 1(3) of the Act, and we all know what happened. There was a court case; the Government withdrew from that route and, properly, introduced a new Consolidated Fund Bill, as they should have done from the start. The taxpayer lost his case because of the judge's view of the word "ancillary".

At that stage, we did not know that the Commission believed that the matter was outside the framework of the Community treaties. Mr. Smedley lost his case, and I understand that the Treasury is still asking him to pay its expenses. I do not expect a reply from the Minister tonight, but I put it to him that if the Court of Auditors, the Commission and another article of the treaty give at least some substance to Mr. Smedley's case on judicial review, it is a bit much for the Treasury, after picking and choosing whether to accept qualifications, to come down on a British taxpayer, and an old-age pensioner to boot, and insist on his paying its expenses for the test case. I hope that the Minister will note that point, if nothing else.

The role of the Court of Auditors is fundamental to transparency and confidence in the financial operations of the Community. In many ways, it does a good job—so good a job that apparently the Government object to its drawing attention to payments which the Government consider to be legal. In some ways, that is an excellent testament to its work and a large question mark against the Treasury, which persists in picking and choosing between qualifications in an audit report.

10.43 pm

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): As hon. Members have said many times, the Common Market has been riddled with fraud from the day that it started. Although we have auditors in Britain who are supposed to examine malpractices and corruption, in the Common Market the British taxpayer has been paying heavily to be a member of the club. According to official answers, the total net cost to the British taxpayer during the first 10 years of membership, taking into account the barrowloads of money that the Prime Minister was supposed to bring back after all her well-publicised arguments with the Common Market, was £4,726 million. British taxpayers have had to pay a great deal of money for the United Kingdom to be a member of the club.

I read not so long ago that in Italy there were olive trees that existed on paper only and that the moneys claimed for them went to the Mafia. What would happen if a British local authority was involved in fraud to the extent of about 10 per cent. of its budget? That has been suggested of authorities in other countries on many occasions. That sort of money is not available in Britain to allow that degree of fraud to continue. I want to know why the Government have given the nod and the wink to others in the Common Market. Why have they allowed them to fiddle the British taxpayer at such an exorbitant level? A Minister told us the other day that there is not enough money to allow the Government to give pensioners another 40p a week. That was just about enough to allow pensioners to buy mustard plasters during the coldest February that we have had for 40 years. However, another Minister is accepting a report that details £600 million-worth of fraud.

As the right hon. Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins) said, the Common Market was bailed out this Session by the British taxpayer to the tune of £252 million. Even then, it was still running an illegal budget. A stop must be put to all the money that is pouring out to all the gravy trains in the Common Market. The ex-leader of the Social Democratic Party is being paid a fat pension by the Common Market, and I notice that he is not in his place this evening. He is not present to defend the budget that is before us. I wonder where he has got to.

Where are all the other SDP Members who joined the then Conservative Prime Minister to drag an unwilling British nation into the Common Market without the issue having been put to the vote? Where are Dr. Death and all the rest of them? I suppose that they are in Fulham, but I bet that they are not telling the electors in Fulham of the extent of the fiddling within their beloved Common Market. I note that the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Penhaligon) is in his place. He should be complaining

[Mr. Dennis Skinner]

about the demise of the 500 tin miners in Cornwall instead of trying to defend the rotten system that prevails within the Common Market.

The stage has been reached when we should put an end to this carry-on. The right hon. Member for Worthing has talked about illegal budgets and they have been acknowledged by the Government, including the Prime Minister. However, nothing has been done. That can be said on a day when 80 of my colleagues in Liverpool and Lambeth have been surcharged and threatened with being kicked out of office and made bankrupt for expenditure of less than £250,000. At the same time, others are gallivanting around the world from the Common Market. They are using British taxpayers' money to do so. I read that 63 of them have gone on a trip somewhere. In doing so, they are said to have just about exhausted the moneys that are available for trips, but I do not believe that. I am sure that some more money will be found. Those whose responsibility it is will come rabbiting to the Government for more money. The 63 have taken with them their wives, mates, friends and God knows who else.

However, in the British High Court the judges have decided to hammer 80 councillors for expenditure of less than £250,000. Those who have come before them have not been involved in fraud and they have not rigged the market. They tried to stop the Government from crippling the ratepayers and others who depend on services in Lambeth and Liverpool. That is why it makes me sick.

I have in my hand an article that I saw towards the back end of last year. It is headed "EEC's £600 million fraud" and it says:

> "The official auditors to the common market have uncovered evidence of wholesale fraud in the trade of farm produce. Exporters are claiming millions of pounds in subsidies for food which in many cases does not exist. As much as £600 million a year could be involved . . . Among the irregularities discoved were: Falsified documents. According to customs officials, a British company was caught trying to export non-subsidised vegetable oil as heavily subsidised butter."

There is another system of fiddling, called "the roundabout." The article says:

> "Traders claim several subsidies by sending their produce repeatedly across the same frontier after smuggling it back into the country . . . At one stage Northern Irish farmers were sending the same cattle across the border so frequently that, in the words of one customs official, 'the cattle knew the way themselves'."

There is another fiddle, called exploiting levies. A trader inports a low-fat product which attracts a low import levy, adds oil and re-exports it, claiming subsidy at the full rate. We can laugh at it, but the trouble is that the British people are having to pay through the nose to be in the Common Market. It is time that the British people understood what is happening.

Today, after a £600 million fraud, this Tory Government are giving a nod and a wink to all this irregularity and corruption. If the Government were really concerned about the British taxpayer, the pensioners, the nigh on 5 million people who are in the Tory dole queues, the disabled and all the other people who need assistance, they would not be doing what they are doing tonight. They would be saying to the Common Market, as the right hon. Member for Worthing said earlier, "We are not going to wear this. Take it back. Sort it out. We are not going to take note. It is time that you cleaned up the Augean stables over there in the Common Market."

There has been too much of this Euro-fanaticism during the last decade. We were promised all kinds of wonderful things. The British people were told that the Common Market would get rid of the dole queues, that there would be economies of scale, that in this giant market of 250 million people the economies of scale would result in more efficiency and that all kinds of British goods would be produced. British cars would be sent across to this wonderful market on the Continent and we would have more car workers. Industries in the west midlands and everywhere else would be burgeoning and there would be jobs for everybody.

The whole system has been a fraud from beginning to end. This is the tail end of it—after all these years, after something like £4,700 million, net, has been paid by the British taxpayer, after an illegal budget, after £252 million has been handed out to bale out the Common Market in this parliamentary Session. Yet the Prime Minister is continually telling sections of our society, "Oh, the Government have got no money. It all belongs to the taxpayer." But the British taxpayer has had to foot the bill for this. It is time that we put an end to it.

I do not know what this Minister is going to do tonight. I suppose he hopes that at this late hour he can sneak it through and that we shall carry on again. Then next year the Mafia in Italy, and all the rest of them who have been engaged in these fiddles, will be able to say, "Well, it has gone through that Parliament. It has gone through the others. They had a little bit of a set-to late one night in the British Parliament but they managed to get it through. They've got a 160 majority. One or two people complained." And on and on they will go. Those fat cats in Europe will continue to ride on the gravy trains and to laugh at the British taxpayers who will have to foot this bill.

10.55 pm

Mr. Brooke: With the leave of the House, I should like to reply to the debate.

This has been a brief but interesting and lively debate, and I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins) and those Labour Members who have participated in it. They have underlined once again the importance which the House rightly attaches to the sound management of Community funds.

The views expressed here this evening will certainly be helpful to myself and other United Kingdom representatives as we prepare for the forthcoming Council discussion in Brussels. As in previous years, I intend to draw this debate to the attention of the Community's Budget Commissioner, Mr. Christophersen, and the Chairman of the European Parliament's Committee on Budgetary Control, Herr Aigner, by sending them a copy of the *Official Report* of today's proceedings.

I should like to deal briefly with some of the points which have been made. The hon. Member for Thurrock (Dr. McDonald), like myself, welcomed much of what is in the report and supported it, but she did have three worries. The first related to intervention stocks. The Government share the court's concern at the level of public intervention stocks and the costs involved, both in budgetary and economic terms, in their purchase and maintenance. We remain firmly of the view that the only satisfactory long-term solution to the problem of increasing intervention stocks lies in a rigorous price policy, enforced over a number of years, which will bring

the markets back into balance and enable existing stocks gradually to be sold off. That will restore intervention to its correct role as a seasonal or emergency support for agricultural production. The Court of Auditors has urged a more systematic approach to the depreciation of intervention stocks. That, however, can take place only after having regard to the availability of resources under the financial guidelines for agricultural expenditure.

The hon. Lady went on to talk about food aid, to which I also referred earlier. I said that the performance on the emergency side had been significantly better in 1985 than it had been in 1984. The average time taken to deliver most food aid which was given balance of payments support is not significant. Shipments may, for example, have to await the right market conditions in the recipient country. What concerns us is the fact that the emergency shipments have not moved significantly faster than non-emergency shipments. The Commission is now reviewing its food aid procedures, and we have left it in no doubt that we expect the review to produce more streamlined procedures for emergency aid.

The auditors do not suggest that their examples of badly packaged food aid, to which the hon. Lady referred, are typical of the programme as a whole. The Commission has spent more on quality control recently, and we have no reason to believe that the amounts of food aid from the Community unfit for consumption are higher than from other food aid donors, but of course we shall continue to pay attention to that.

The third subject mentioned by the hon. Lady was fraud, and in that she was supported by the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner). Of course the Government are concerned, as I stressed earlier, to ensure that all necessary steps are taken to eradicate fraud from the operation of the CAP.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): Paragraph 4.28, page 44 of the *Official Journal of the European Communities* says:

"The main thing the Court noted was a certain indifference on the part of the Member States to the financial interests of the Community and a more or less general lack of cooperation in a number of areas".

I should like to be sure that when it comes to investigating such matters, Britain will not fall into the category described in paragraph *(c)*, which says:

"finally, the Member States have frequently shown little inclination to cooperate with the Commission's enquiries, particularly when frauds or irregularities within their territory were involved."

I want to be sure that that will not apply to Britain as a member state.

Mr. Brooke: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that matter. I had intended to come to our position. We are generally satisfied with the current arrangements, but of course we are prepared to co-operate in any intensification of activity in that sphere, although naturally we would hope that controls and anti-fraud activities were cost-effective.

Reference has been made to the potential volume of undetected fraud and the fact that it might be larger than the figure that the Court of Auditors has quoted. It is easy to allege that there is a volume of undetected fraud, but if it is undetected it is, by definition, difficult to quantify.

The United Kingdom is active in the field in the prevention of fraud, with Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and International Board for Agricultural Produce investigation units and Customs and Excise co-operating, not only internally, but through the mutual assistance framework with the authorities of other member states.

Dr. McDonald: The hon. Gentleman has rightly explained what the British Government are doing. Nevertheless, as I stressed in my speech, the activities of other member states leave much to be desired, to put it mildly. Just what is Britain doing to ensure that other member states play their part? There is no reason why the British consumer should subsidise the fraudulent activities of others, never mind the wasteful CAP.

Mr. Brooke: I sought to say, both in my first speech and just now, that we are supportive of the general attitude to these problems. I give the assurance that the hon. Lady seeks.

The hon. Member for Bolsover quoted from a newspaper report and was good enough to state that people were being caught and arrested. Nevertheless, I have to contest the language that he used.

The hon. Member for Thurrock generally approved the report by the Court of Auditors, and in that respect we share her view.

Mr. Spearing: The hon. Gentleman referred to my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) and implied that his language was a little extravagant. On the issue of the Mafia and olives, will the hon. Gentleman at the meeting to which he referred, request the president of the Court of Auditors to state his view or, if not, to report in the succeeding year?

Mr. Brooke: I acknowledge that the level of control exercised in certain member states has been a cause for concern. Olive oil production is obviously one of the issues to which that applies. As the president of the Court of Auditors is coming to the Council's meeting, no doubt there will be an opportunity for a discussion on that matter. the Commission has been assiduous is pursuing the allegations, but has not yet been able to substantiate them. Clearly, the pursuit continues.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing returned to the subject on which he intervened during my first speech. My right hon. Friend and the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing)—I pay tribute to the Select Committee on European legislation, of which the hon. Gentleman is Chairman — referred to the intergovernmental agreements. As I said in my opening speech, the Government do not share the court's views on this matter. I take the point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing that we are taking issue with an observation by the auditors. I must say, in passing, that disagreements between auditors and their clients are not unknown in the conduct of ordinary professional business.

Whatever one's opinion of the desirablilty or otherwise of such agreements, the Government have no doubt that the agreements for 1984-85 were perfectly compatible with the treaties and involved no infringement of them. All other member states shared the Government's view, as did the Master of the Rolls in our Court of Appeal, as the hon. Member for Newham, South said.

Mr. Higgins: Will my hon. Friend take up my point about reimbursable advances? I said that if extra money was obtained by way of gift, or whatever, that was legitimate, in his view. The Court of Auditors and I do not agree. What about what are effective loans or reimbursable advances? Under what paragraph of the treaty do they fall?

Mr. Brooke: In my first speech I went on to refer to gifts and bequests, but I specifically referred to the phrase in article 4 "irrespective of other revenue" meaning items embraced by the measure.

Mr. Higgins: A reimbursable advance is not revenue; it is a loan.

Mr. Brooke: Just as the Government are in conflict with the Court of Auditors, so it appears that on this subject there will be a continuing debate between us and my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing.

My right hon. Friend continued to refer to budgetary discipline and correctly identified the dispute between the Council and the parliament, as a dispute which the council is undertaking both in the context of the legality of the budget and to ensure that budgetary discipline is maintained. The hon. Member for Newham, South also drew attention to this matter.

Mr. Higgins: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way. He is always very courteous, and I apologise for intervening again. Under which provision of the treaty is the Community allowed to accept a loan?

Mr. Brooke: It is clear that there are outstanding issues on which, as I said a moment ago, my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing and I must correspond. I should like to return to the point that all member states are in agreement with the view that we have taken.

Mr. Spearing: They are all wrong.

Mr. Brooke: My right hon. Friend went on to refer to the two new budget lines. The Commission entered in the supplementary budget a new article entitled "expected balance for the year". I referred to this in my opening speech as the cancellation of expenditure appropriations which it was clear would not be needed. By taking this action we will improve budget transparency and ensure that revenue and expenditure are more accurately matched.

The hon. Member for Newham, South referred to the ECOFIN meeting on 10 March. The next step, which will follow the court case which the Council and our Government have initiated, is to ensure that budget discipline is respected in 1987. The ECOFIN Council meeting next Monday is due to discuss the confirmation of the 1987 reference framework. In particular, we will consider the Commission's figures for calculation of the 1987 agricultural guideline, and that will be an important constraint on the 1987 price fixing negotiations.

Mr. Spearing: The point that I made was about the 1986 agricultural settlement and the proposal which I understand will be made, which would breach the framework to which the Minister referred. Will this matter be decided on 10 March and so settle this year's non-budgetary arrangements?

Mr. Brooke: The issue will come before the Council on 10 March, but the Council of Agriculture Ministers will not discuss the matter until 25 March. Preliminary discussions were held a short while ago.

The hon. Member for Bolsover referred to fraud and drew attention, as did my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing, to the text of the motion. My right hon. Friend referred to the fact that we were taking note. That motion goes on to endorse the Government's efforts to ensure implementation of the Court of Auditors' recommendations where these would improve the Community's financial procedures. This reveals the Government's strong support for the report from the Court of Auditors and its contribution to the draft procedures. I ask all right hon. and hon. Members to support the motion.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 67, Noes 8.

Division No. 93] **[11.08 pm**

AYES

Alton, David
Amess, David
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brinton, Tim
Brooke, Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Butcher, John
Butterfill, John
Cash, William
Chalker, Mrs Lynda
Chope, Christopher
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Cope, John
Dover, Den
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Eyre, Sir Reginald
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Howells, Geraint
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lilley, Peter
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lyell, Nicholas
Maclean, David John
Malone, Gerald
Mather, Carol
Merchant, Piers
Nicholls, Patrick
Osborn, Sir John
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Penhaligon, David
Portillo, Michael
Powley, John
Proctor, K. Harvey
Raffan, Keith
Rathbone, Tim
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Roe, Mrs Marion
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
Sims, Roger
Spencer, Derek
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steel, Rt Hon David
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Watson, John
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wood, Timothy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Donald Thompson and
Mr. Michael Neubert.

NOES

Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Duffy, A. E. P.
Godman, Dr Norman
Leighton, Ronald
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Loyden, Edward
Parry, Robert
Spearing, Nigel

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Dennis Skinner and
Mr. Harry Cohen.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House takes note of the Annual Report of the European Court of Auditors on the financial year 1984, together with the replies of the Institutions, and supports the Government's efforts to ensure implementation of the Court's recommendations where these would improve the Community's financial procedures.

PETITION

Allied-Lyons (Takeover Bid)

11.19 pm

Mr. Roy Mason (Barnsley, Central): With your permission, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and that of the House, I beg leave to present a petition from the joint trade union committee of the food division of Allied-Lyons plc, initially signed by Mr. Sam Vickers of the Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union, Mr. Malcolm Self of the Association of Scientific, Technical and Managerial Staffs, and Mr. John Reed of the Electrical, Electronic Telecommunication and Plumbing Union—three senior shop stewards — backed by the signatures of 671 workers of the Barnsley bakery.

The workers in Allied-Lyons are alarmed at the threat to their jobs because of the proposed takeover bid by Elders IXL Ltd. of Australia. They fear that if the bid is successful, Elders IXL will hive off the food division of Allied-Lyons and the 1,500 workers in the Barnsley bakery believe that they will lose their jobs, especially because of the asset-stripping history of Elders IXL and the nature of the bid. They also believe that this foreign firm will disregard any social consequences of such an act, which could be quite disastrous in an area of 20 per cent. unemployment in the Barnsley, Central constituency.

The petition reads:

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray that your Honourable House will urge the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to take into account these factors when considering the desirability of such bids for the economy of the United Kingdom.

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

PETITION

Sunday Trading

11.20 pm

Mr. David Amess (Basildon): With your permission, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and that of the House, I beg leave to present a petition which has been signed by more than 1,000 of my constituents who are deeply worried about proposals for unrestricted trading on Sundays. They very much wish to keep Sunday a special day, and I entirely share their sentiments.

The petition reads:

To the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled. The humble petition of residents of Basildon constituency, sheweth that the undersigned are opposed to the provision for unlimited Sunday Trading in the Shops Bill currently before Parliament, recognising that Sunday has special characteristics as a day of rest, recreation and worship for the benefit of our family and community life.

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your Honourable House do maintain legal limitations on Sunday Trading to ensure that the special character of Sunday is protected.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Orsett Hospital

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Archie Hamilton.]*

11.22 pm

Dr. Oonagh McDonald (Thurrock): I make no apology for talking about the plight of Orsett hospital, which serves the majority of my constituents.

The hospital's future has been under discussion in the Basildon and Thurrock district health authority area for the past few months. Because so many doubts have been raised about some of the services offered there, my constituents made their views felt by a petition, which 55,000 of them signed. That constitutes almost the whole electorate.

A poll of 500 residents showed unanimous opposition to the removal of any services from Orsett hospital. On 27 February, the district health authority again considered the future of services in the area and proposed this time that all maternity, gynaecological and children's surgery should go to Basildon hospital, subject to a three-month consultation period.

Before I continue, I want to say that I am deeply concerned about the possibility of any cuts in hospital provision in the Basildon and Thurrock district health authority area. Nevertheless, at the moment it is the future of Orsett hospital which is causing me and my constituents great concern.

Although Orsett hospital is situated in the east end of the borough and is in fact in the Billericay constituency, it largely serves my constituency from the west end of the borough. Although Orsett and Basildon hospitals might appear to be not too far apart geographically, the journey from Basildon, from the west end of my constituenly, is very difficult. Constituents—mothers-to-be—travelling from Grays, Purfleet, Tilbury, West Thurrock, Aveley and South Ockendon, find the journey to Basildon hospital even more difficult than the journey to Orsett hospital. If an ambulance had to bring an emergency patient to the hospital, the additional few miles could cause tremendous problems. Traffic in the area is very bad and it would be possible for an ambulance to be held up, perhaps a little too long, to the detriment, even death, of a patient.

The hospital has been described as an excellent hospital in which the maternity unit and antenatal care form a good service for my constituents. About 40 per cent. of births in the area take place at Orsett hospital, and it has about 1,700 births per year. I asked the Department of Health and Social Security for figures and found that the number of births at Orsett hospital per year is about average when compared with other maternity units in England and Wales.

The maternity unit at Orsett hospital does not have a special care baby unit, which wouuld be desirabie. However, there are about 60 other hospitals with maternity units which do not have special care baby units. If my constituents are to be provided with a full and proper service, not only should the maternity unit remain, but the hospital should be provided with a special care baby unit so that the needs of my constituents can be fully met.

The district health authority has problems of staffing, but it is difficult to be sure what form those problems take. For example, the district health authority suggests that it wishes to phase out a particular grade of specialist in the maternity and gynaecological unit, but when I questioned the Department on that matter, I found that it was not Department policy for that particular grade to be phased out. Staffing problems are indicative of financial problems. Since 1982, the district health authority has had its budget reduced by £2·5 million—5 per cent. Some of that is due to the resource allocation working party formula and some is due to a reduction in efficiency.

Over the period 1984 to 1993 there is a planned reduction for the regional health authority in the long-term resource allocation. All of those cuts will mean not only the disappearance of the maternity unit at Orsett hospital, but the ear, nose and throat, children's services, pre-convalescent geriatric services, cuts in the family planning service and other general cuts. Those cuts are being made in an area which is growing. At present the need for maternity units at Basildon and Orsett hospitals is based on population figures that are somewhat out of date. In fact, the area is developing pretty rapidly. In Thurrock, my constituency, the number of houses has already increased substantially, and most of them are occupied by young families, many of whom will have children in future years. That feature of the area has been picked up by the local press. For example, the Basildon *Evening Echo* reported on 28 February:

> "Essex, already one of the largest shire counties in the country, will be the centre of another massive population explosion between now and the year 2001."

The paper goes on to comment that the prospective baby boom is one of the main problems worrying county hall officials, and that possibility should be worrying the district health authority more than it appears to be at the moment.

I also wish to refer to the accident and emergency unit. I have, of course, discussed the matter with the district health authority, including the district manager, Mr. Taylor. He has given me assurances that the district health authority has committed itself to two-centre planning for accident and emergency units—one at Basildon and one at Orsett. In my view, those two units are essential not only because of the population, but because of the serious risks from the industry in the area. Thurrock, in particular, is noted for oil refineries, power stations, petrochemicals and the docks, and the M25 and the dualled A13 are extremely busy roads. As I fear we know all too well, traffic on such roads can mean serious injuries in accidents.

Although I have been given assurances, I am extremely concerned about the future of the two units in view of the cuts in the resources of the district health authority. Some of the savings that the district health authority expects to make will come from competitive tendering for cleaning services and so on. Other savings are supposed to come from increased efficiency. I am sure the Minister knows that, as few services in the Basildon and Thurrock district health authority area have been put out to competitive tendering, the prospective savings from that can be only guessed at, and cannot be regarded as certainties. I do not expect the Minister to admit that, but, on the other hand, the efficiency savings are to be found more on paper than in actuality.

Therefore, I am concerned about the future of those services, in spite of the fact that I believe that the district health authority does not want to see the two accident and emergency units disappear. That point was also covered in the Basildon *Evening Echo* in some detail on 3 March, just this week.

I referred to the maternity unit, and that of course is my prime concern. It is an efficient and attractive unit.

Patients readily turn to it. They value the services provided by Orsett hospital very much, and many of the older residents in Thurrock regard Orsett as their hospital. Let me give the Minister a little history. The original hospital for Thurrock was in Tilbury, in the docks area. It was brought into being by public subscription. Eventually that hospital became out of date and was transferred to a new building at Orsett. The hospital is very much the result of past community effort. Any cuts in services, particularly in maternity services, would be bitterly resented by the whole community.

The Minister and other hon. Members have had experience of dealing with petitions. They will know that the obtaining of 55,000 signatures on a petition in a very short time, without any real effort by the organisers, shows the depth of feeling in the constituency about any threat to the maternity services and the accident and emergency units at Orsett.

The number of live births, 1,771 in 1984, means that the maternity unit is about the same size as other maternity units throughout the country. In regard to the views of the medical profession, Professor Sorors, professor of paediatrics at University College hospital, commenting on a suitable and viable size for a maternity unit, said:

"Not less than 2,000 deliveries a year would be ideal . . . but it is not practicable, I do not suppose, for every woman in this country to be delivered in a unit of that size."

The West Midlands regional health authority has said that a minimal work load of 1,500 deliveries per year is acceptable for a maternity unit. The professor suggested that a large unit was ideal, but he recognised that other considerations were important besides the mere number of deliveries per year. The maternity unit must be acceptable and accessible. Patients must be able to reach it easily, should they find that the birth is more imminent than expected, or is risky. If a patient has to be rushed to hospital, the accessibility of the maternity unit is important.

Because of the antenatal care provided at Orsett, a mother has her baby in familiar and friendly surroundings. I have visited the maternity unit more than once for constituency, not personal, reasons. I have also visited the prenatal unit. I was most impressed by the care and concern shown by the staff, by the brightness and friendliness of the surroundings and by the way in which people are treated in the maternity unit.

The maternity unit is a valued part of the community to which the residents feel they have contributed in the past. They are determined that it should remain. If the petition is anything to go by, my constituents will not accept the closure of the maternity unit. They find the journey to Basildon long, difficult and expensive by public transport. They want their familiar and friendly hospital. The medical and financial reasons are not adequate justification for refusing to let the residents of Thurrock have the service that they need and desire.

The present population want the services. Mothers who are moving into my constituency in large numbers want a convenient maternity unit. If the number of births is to be a consideration, the growth of the population will remove that as a justification for closing the maternity unit. To close the maternity unit only to find that the growth in population necessitated its reopening would be a grave error that would cause unnecessary anxiety and suffering. It would simply be a financial mistake.

I hope that the Minister will take account of what I have said and begin the consultation period, which will be completed in May. I know that my constituents are relying on me to present their views tonight, and they will no doubt present their views very forcibly indeed during the consultation period.

We expect the Government to ensure that a good maternity service will remain at Orsett hospital to serve my constituency. We hope that the Basildon and Thurrock district health authority area will not experience cuts and loss of services.

11.41 pm

Mr. K. Harvey Proctor (Billericay): *rose——*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Do I understand that the hon. Gentleman has the agreement of the hon. Lady and the Minister to intervene?

Mr. Proctor: Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

This is the third in a series of Adjournment debates on the reorganisation of health services by the Basildon and Thurrock health authority, and the hospital to which the hon. Member for Thurrock (Dr. McDonald) has referred is in my constituency. I ask the Minister to assure my constituents that Orsett hospital is quite safe. Such an assurance is needed for morale and recruitment reasons which my hon. Friend will readily understand.

Orsett hospital is a larger hospital than Basildon district hospital. It is providing substantially more general surgery and medicine than Basildon. It is the only ENT in-patient service in the Basildon and Thurrock district area. It is less than 15 years old, and in investment terms it is today worth between £30 million and £35 million. There is bound to be at least 60 years of life left in it, and it is needed to provide a substantial part of the acute services for my constituents.

I should be grateful for an assurance from my hon. Friend about the safety and the future of Orsett hospital, and I look forward to his response to the comments of the hon. Lady on the maternity and accident and emergency units.

11.42 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security (Mr. Ray Whitney): I recognise that the subject that the hon. Member for Thurrock (Dr. McDonald) has chosen is of great importance and concern to her constituents and to the constituents of my hon. Friends the Members for Billericay (Mr. Proctor) and for Basildon (Mr. Amess), whose presence I also welcome.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay said, this is the third debate in as many months on the organisation of NHS facilities within the Basildon and Thurrock health authority. The views of the constituents of my hon. Friends were represented in the debates in January and December. Following the earlier consultation — as the hon. Lady recognised — the district health authority decided not to proceed with its earlier proposals, but on reconsideration it has issued a further set of proposals relating solely to the provision of maternity services.

As in the previous debates, at the centre is the proposal that has been put out for public consultation by the health authority. I must emphasise that it is only for consultation. The proposal is for the centralisation of maternity, gynaecology and paediatric in-patient services on one site

[Mr. Ray Whitney]

in the district. If the community health council, which represents the views of the community, objects to the proposal, and if the regional health authority then supports the plans, it will come to Ministers for final decision.

The hon. Lady will well understand that it would not be appropriate for me to pronounce at this stage on the validity of the arguments either for or against the proposals that the district health authority put out only on 27 February for consultation. Therefore, as I hope the hon. Lady will understand, I cannot respond in favour or against her points. I achnowledge that she has properly used the procedures of the House to make clear her constituents' anxiety, which is shared by those of my hon. Friends, but I may not respond in a way that might prejudice the well established procedures for dealing with such important matters.

Comments on the consultation are required by 30 May 1986. All that is said in this debate, and all other relevant factors, will then be weighed carefully by the health authority to see what is best for the overall interests of all its patients. Therefore, the time for Ministers to play their part has not yet arrived, and there is no certainty that it will.

One issue is central to the proposal to relocate Basildon and Thurrock's in-patient maternity services upon which I can comment. It is not unique to this proposal, and it keeps cropping up wherever Health Service reorganisations are discussed. It is the question where best to locate services in a district with several large population centres. I reiterate the points made by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Health in the Adjournment debate in the House on 3 December, when my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon spoke so eloquently and movingly to express his great concern about the proposal at that time to withdraw in-patient maternity provision from Basildon hospital, and to concentrate maternity services at Orsett. Although the proposal now is to centralise these services at Basildon and not now at Orsett hospital, the points made then remain valid.

First, it would not make sense to provide all facilities come what may in every large town in a district. I hope that the House will accept that. It must be recognised that where it makes no medical or economic sense to preserve the status quo, change is essential and extremely difficult decisions must often be taken. That proposition finds wide agreement in principle, but in practice real and strongly held objections will arise when a town is chosen for a closure or major change of provision. But the health authority has a duty to make those difficult decisions, and to seek to get the balance and distribution of services right for the majority of its patients.

Secondly, I understand that the district health authority continues to believe that mothers and babies in the district will receive better and safer in-patient care, if they are cared for in a central unit where there is adequate paediatric cover. I understand that it is proposed that out-patient ante-natal and post-natal clinics will continue at both Orsett and Basildon, as will accident and emergency services. The authority has also said that it is committed to maintaining the integrity of both hospitals as acute hospitals. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay will accept that undertaking, which is not challenged.

I understand that there is also a genuine staffing resource problem over providing obstetric services at more than one hospital. The district reports an unstable and unsatisfactory medical staffing structure that would be brought up to standard by centralisation.

Those reasons together suggest to the district health authority that a safer, enhanced standard of service will be provided only if in-patient services for maternity, gynaecology and paediatrics are concentrated on one site. The future organisation of those services are now being considered on their own, and not, as previously, as part of a package covering other services. As a result, the district believes that the services should be centralised, not, as the hon. Member for Thurrock has argued, at Orsett, but at Basildon. I stress that that proposal is service-led and revenue-neutral and does not stem from a desire to save money.

In response to the hon. Lady's point about funding, I hope that she accepts that the issue here is how best to provide maternity cover of the highest quality for her constituents and those of my hon. Friends. It is not a matter of finances. Inevitably, there are financial problems, of which we are all aware, but I repeat—as I have done many times during debates on changes in health provision—that it is important to recognise that the proportion of resources, in real terms, devoted to our health services is steadily increasing. Next year, there will be an increase of no less than 6·7 per cent., with forecast inflation of 4·7 per cent. Of course, RAWP also has an impact here, but North-East Thames regional health authority will receive an increase of 5·7 per cent.—significantly above the forecast rate of inflation.

The district health authority has problems, but here, too, I hope that hon. Members will recognise and acknowledge the achievements of the district authority in treating more patients. For example, between 1982 and 1984, in-patient treatment increased by no less than 12 per cent., and the number of day cases treated increased by 24 per cent.

The district health authority is managing its resources well and is extremely sensitive to the needs of the community. It is seeking better provision, and I hope that the consultation exercise will achieve that. I assure the hon. Lady and my hon. Friend that their contributions to the debate will be taken carefully into account as part of the consultation exercise which an issue of this seriousness and importance merits.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at nine minutes to Twelve o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 6 March 1986

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

TEIGNMOUTH QUAY COMPANY BILL *(By Order)*

COUNTY OF SOUTH GLAMORGAN (TAFF CROSSING) BILL *(By Order)*

SOUTH YORKSHIRE LIGHT RAIL TRANSIT BILL *(By Order)*

BEXLEY LONDON BOROUGH COUNCIL BILL *(By Order)*

SHOREHAM PORT AUTHORITY BILL *(By Order)*

ABERYSTWYTH HARBOUR BILL *(By Order)*

HARWICH PARKESTON QUAY BILL *(By Order)*
Orders for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time upon Thursday 13 March.

MILFORD HAVEN PORT AUTHORITY BILL *(By Order)*
Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [18 February], That the Bill be now read a Second time.
Debate to be resumed upon Thursday 13 March.

BRITISH RAILWAYS (STANSTED) BILL *(By Order)*
Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [24 February], That the Bill be now read a Second time.
Debate to be resumed upon Thursday 13 March.

LOTHIAN REGION (EDINBURGH WESTERN RELIEF ROAD) ORDER CONFIRMATION BILL
Order for Third Reading read.
To be read the Third time upon Thursday 13 March.

Oral Answers to Questions

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Common Agricultural Policy

2. **Mr. Marlow** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food by what date he anticipates that the reforms he seeks in the common agricultural policy will be implemented.

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Michael Jopling): We have made progress in agreeing the financial guideline, milk quotas and measures for the wine sector. We must make further progress this year, particularly with cereals and beef, in limiting the production of surplus commodities and the burden that they place on the budget.

Mr. Marlow: A generation ago Professor Mansholt promised reforms of the common agricultural policy, yet this year we seem to have the highest prices, the highest subsidies and the lowest farm profits since the war. What will the Government do about that? Last year, for example, we gave away the 1 per cent. VAT limit, on the basis that the financial mechanism would work. If the financial mechanism does not work — many of us believe that it will not and said so at the time, when we also said that the dollar might go down—will my right hon. Friend put radical alternatives before the House, including the repatriation of our own agricultural produce?

Mr. Jopling: My hon. Friend is a well known merchant of gloom and doom on these matters. I remind him that since the United Kingdom joined the Community productivity per person in agriculture has risen by more than 70 per cent., that the volume of output has risen by more than 18 per cent., that the volume of our exports of agricultural products, food and drink has risen by more than 25 per cent., and that we now produce 80 per cent. of our needs in temperate foodstuffs compared with 60 per cent. in 1972.

Mr. Freud: At the annual general meeting of the National Farmers Union the Minister told the farmers that he would not agree to anything that would discriminate against the British farmer. Did he say that to stop the farmers lynching him, or did he mean it? If he meant it, will he repeat it now at the Dispatch Box?

Mr. Jopling: I have said many times that there are elements in the current price proposals which discriminate seriously against Britain's interests. I told the Council of Ministers in Brussels only last week that some of them were unacceptable.

Mr. Forth: What is the estimated impact of the movement of the exchange rate with the dollar? Does my right hon. Friend expect a supplementary budget in the EEC this year? Does he believe that the chronic surpluses in the CAP are a root cause of the problems? If so, what will he do about them?

Mr. Jopling: The Commission and the Council are committed to the financial guidelines. It will be an important objective to ensure that it is held to in the coming negotiations on the CAP.

Mr. John: In the *Financial Times* this morning we read that the extra agricultural budget is likly to be not £450 million, but £1 billion. Is that what the Minister calls financial discipline?

Mr. Jopling: In the negotiations that lie ahead of us we have to seek further savings so that we can live within our financial guideline.

Food Manufacturers

3. **Mr. Tony Lloyd** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he has any plans to meet representatives of food manufacturers.

Mr. Jopling: I am regularly in touch with representatives of food manufacturers. Whilst I have no immediate plans to meet them, I am ready to do so on specific problems at any time.

Mr. Lloyd: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for that answer. I am glad to learn that he is ready to meet the food manufacturers to discuss specific matters. Is he aware that they now accept the need for, and the desirability of, the removal of the Official Secrets Act as it applies to the food advisory committees? Will the Minister meet representatives of the food industry so that he can discuss this matter with them and tell them when he intends to legislate on the issue, so that the secrecy surrounding the use of additives to food can be broken and the public can have access to and knowledge of what takes place?

Mr. Jopling: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman is still pursuing a very old story which I thought had been put to rest. He should know, and I am surprised that he has not seen the statements which have been made, that members of the committees do not have to sign the Official Secrets Act. However, some information which comes their way is commercially sensitive and they are asked, in the same way as any Government Department is, to observe the need to keep it confidential.

Mr. Meadowcroft: Is the Minister not aware that his hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, whose absence we regret and who is our sparring partner on these matters, has said that there are some formal limitations on secrecy in the advisory committees? Can the right hon. Gentleman say what is the formal thing that the members are asked to sign, even within the parameters that he has outlined to us about the confidentiality of business agreements?

Mr. Jopling: As I said earlier, members of the committees are not required to sign the Official Secrets Act. However, certain information is given which is commercially private and the committees are asked to keep it that way. I think that that is the only reasonable way in which to proceed. I hope that at some time the hon. Gentleman will look at the huge mass of technical material which these committees churn out. We are trying to make further information available through the British Library in the immediate future if we can arrange it.

Common Agricultural Policy

4. **Mr. Eastham** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will seek to ensure that the price proposals agreed by the Counicl of Ministers encourage a reduction in surplus commodities within the common agricultural policy.

11. **Mr. Hardy** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what changes in agricultural policy he is seeking in order to respond to the present and prospective levels of food production in the United Kingdom and the European Community.

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. John Selwyn Gummer): In order to tackle the problems of the CAP we are seeking in this year's price negotiations and over a period of years to secure price proposals and other measures to limit the production of surplus commodities and the burden that they place on the budget.

Mr. Eastham: I am glad the Minister recognises that there are serious problems in the CAP. May I remind him that in Europe in 1985 we had surpluses of 10·5 million tonnes of wheat, 2 million tonnes of barley, 0·5 million tonnes of beef and 1 million tonnes of butter? What does the Minister propose to do to remove these surpluses? Can he not give them to the pensioners or pass them on to the Third world?

Mr. Gummer: No one who has followed any of the speeches, comments or work done by Ministers could possibly ignore the fact that we want to reduce these surpluses. The hon. Gentleman would make a great deal more fuss if there was shortage of food.

Mr. Hardy: Is the Minister aware of the deep and intensifying anxiety which is felt in the farming community, which has been illustrated by the substantial fall of 40 per cent. in the price of land in some areas? Is he aware that farmers believe that his right hon. Friend is guilty of serious intertia, which was illustrated during the previous Question Time when he said that he had been looking at the matter urgently for months?

Mr. Gummer: I do not think that the farmers would hold that view. They know perfectly well that we are now living in a world of surplus, rather than of shortage, and if the hon. Gentleman looks back at his Government's performance he will see that they did nothing to prepare the country for it.

Mr. Colin Shepherd: Will my right hon. Friend recognise that the farming industry is worried that it might be unreasonably discriminated against in the search to find ways in which the surpluses can be reduced? Will he take special care in his negotiations in Brussels to ensure that British agriculture is not disadvantaged?

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend has put his finger on one aspect which has to be part of the negotiations. It is right to expect the farming industry throughout Europe to bear the burden of dealing with surpluses. The burden must be borne fairly. It must not land unfairly on the backs of farmers in Britain compared with what happens to their neighbours in Europe.

Mr. Jackson: Does my right hon. Friend consider that the recent downward movement of the dollar could count as an exceptional circumstance?

Mr. Gummer: I do not believe that we can solve the problems of agriculture unless we are prepared to adhere to the financial guidelines which have been agreed.

Mr. Foulkes: What action is the Minister taking within the Council of Ministers to stop the dumping of subsidised surpluses in Third world countries? Is he aware that sugar

is being sold below the market price in Jamaica, thus causing great devastation to the economy of that country and making it much more difficult for countries such as Jamaica to repay their debts?

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman should be a little more careful about the detail of what is happening to the sugar market in Jamaica and other countries, because the situation is much more complicated than he suggests. I hope that he will have a word with his hon. Friend the hon. Member for Manchester, Blackley (Mr. Eastham) about the supply of surpluses to developing countries.

Mr. Philip Oppenheim: Can my right hon. Friend arrange for a study trip to be organised for Labour Members who complain about surpluses? I suggest that there should be a study trip to examine food production in the Soviet Union, where I understand they have overcome the problems of surpluses quite successfully.

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend is right. Almost every major part of the world produces enough food to feed its people, except the Soviet Union and the Soviet bloc, which are incompetent.

Mr. Torney: Will the Minister consider instituting research into breadmaking wheat, so that it can be grown in Britain instead of being imported from abroad, and so reduce the massive surpluses of cereals in this country and in the Common Market generally?

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman is a little behind the times, and he does down the previous Labour Government. Over the past few years the Chorley Wood process has made it possible for us to use to a large extent breadmaking wheat which has been grown in Britain. It is only the particularly bad weather of this year that has meant that the quality of our wheat, unusually, has not been suitable for breadmaking, and as a consequence we have had to import suitable wheat.

Mr. Torney *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman may shake his head, but it is clear that he does not know the facts.

Mr. Budgen: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that no matter how much the dollar falls and thus creates greater expenditure in disposing of surpluses, this will not be used by the Government as an excuse for asking for an increase in the VAT contribution to the EEC?

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend is the last person in the House to demand that any member of the Government answer a question which begins, "No matter what happens to something, will he confirm?" I shall therefore not confirm.

Mr. Skinner: Is the Minister aware that one reason for the chaos in the CAP is all the fiddling and fraud that takes place in the Common Market? Is he further aware that last night the Minister of State, Treasury admitted that the Mafia was being investigated because it was saying that there were so many hundred olive trees in Italy, when they existed on paper only? Is he aware also that Northern Irish farmers are sending cattle across the border so many times in order to get increased export rebates that the cattle almost know the way themselves?

Mr. Gummer: It must be an amazement to the House that the hon. Gentleman belongs to a party which had a reputation for being internationalist. His constant attacks on anyone who happens to live abroad are becoming bywords.

Mr. Marlow: In which areas in which the Community is currently in surplus does my right hon. Friend expect surpluses to be reduced this year?

Mr. Gummer: One would not expect changes in agriculture to take place rapidly. Any one who understands the farming industry realises that the crops for this year have already been planted. Therefore, my hon. Friend will accept that the changes that will be made, and the attack on the surplus that will take place, cannot result in a change in this year's harvest.

Mr. Deakins: Will the Minister condemn the European Commission for putting forward price proposals which break the financial guidelines which the House was told by the Government last year were binding on the Council and the Commission?

Mr. Gummer: We are in the business of winning the point. We have to solve the problems of surpluses within the financial guidelines laid down and within the competence of British farmers to provide their fair share of the burden. I am not one of those who go around condemning what has been done. I am seeking an answer.

Mr. Livsey: Does the Minister agree that one of the most effective ways of controlling surpluses is through variable premiums, such as is used in the beef sector? Can he assure us that the beef variable premium will be negotiated successfully at this round?

Mr. Gummer: As we are in the business of negotiating the kind of assurance which the hon. Gentleman wishes in advance, he cannot expect me to sum it up in those words. We are going into these negotiations intending, as we have in the past, to defend the beef variable premium, which is of great importance to the British farmer.

Mr. John: Will the Minister tell the House, in whatever time scale crops need to be harvested, whether cereal surpluses will come down within the next three years?

Mr. Gummer: It is the Government's firm intention to fight for policies which will bring down cereal surpluses, not just in three years, but as soon as possible. That means that we must start on it now. The hon. Gentleman must accept——

Mr. Torney: We want facts.

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman asks for facts, but one of the facts of farming life is that one does not know what the weather will be like. It shows how little Opposition Members know about agriculture. The fact is that surpluses can be fundamentally altered by whether or not we have a good grain growing period.

Food from Britain

5. **Mr. Maclennan** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about the future funding of Food from Britain.

Mr. Jopling: I have made clear the extent of Government support for Food from Britain until 1991 provided industry is also willing to contribute. Discussions on industry funding are continuing and I am hopeful that satisfactory arrangements will be agreed soon.

Mr. Maclennan: Does the Minister regard it as satisfactory that the budget for Food from Britain is being cut from £6·3 million to £4·8 million in the forthcoming year? Will the Minister step in to make good this shortfall, or will he allow this attempt to promote British foods abroad languish through lack of finances and lack of Government backing?

Mr. Jopling: The hon. Gentleman has not done his homework. He will remember that originally the Government promised £14 million over the first five years as pump-priming funds. Out of that arrangement, there remains for 1986-87 the £3 million that was promised, and that will be paid. For 1987-88 there is £2 million, which will be paid.

Mr. Ashton: Is the Minister aware that in agriculture there is always satisfactory funding for everyone except farm workers? Is he aware that farm workers now receive a basic wage of £89 a week? That is for a week, not the figures which are usually given for a week and a half, including overtime. When will the Minister answer the justified demands of the farm workers union for a decent living wage for the profits that its members have created?

Mr. Speaker: That was a bit wide of funding Food from Britain.

Mr. Jopling: I was wondering by what stretch of the imagination that supplementary question could attach itself to this question, which is about Food from Britain. If Food from Britain is allowed, as I hope it will be, to continue its good work, that will be in the interests of farmers, farm workers, the consumer and the taxpayer alike.

Sir John Farr: I remind my right hon. Friend that Food from Britain was launched when our food supply was more or less in equilibrium. Is there not now a need to strengthen our export efforts as we have a large surplus in most commodities?

Mr. Jopling: I agree with my hon. Friend. He has put his finger on it. It is important, as marketing becomes more and more essential, that the industry should—as I know it is trying to do—give Food from Britain its full support so that it may do its job properly.

Mr. Home Robertson: How can Food from Britain survive as an effective organisation in the present circumstances? I agree with the Minister that the industry ought to provide more funds for it, but failing that, how can it survive? Is it the Department's intention to guarantee the future of Food from Britain? If not, how can we have an effective organisation to promote the sale of food from Britain at home and abroad?

Mr. Jopling: The hon. Gentleman should recall that last October I announced that when the £14 million pump-priming funds ran out in 1987-88, up to £2·5 million would be available in each of the subsequent years to 1990-91, and that would be done on the basis of £1 for every £2 from industry. The industry greeted the announcement with a great deal of enthusiasm and gratitude, and I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman is so carping about it.

Fisheries Protection

6. **Mr. Terry Lewis** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many boardings by United Kingdom fishery protection vessels took place in the month of January.

Mr. Gummer: During January 1986, 115 vessels were boarded by United Kingdom fishery protection vessels.

Mr. Lewis: Does the Minister accept that those figures include only 17 boardings of Spanish vessels, but 56 boardings of British vessels? Does that not give the impression that British fishing is not being adequately protected by the Minister, despite all the promises that he has made?

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman, who relies on such an impression, has not looked at the facts. The system that we have imposed is widely accepted by fishermen as being extremely effective. One of the fishing vessels which was boarded and found guilty was fined heavily. The French give us information about every boat that passes through their waters, so that we can track them extremely carefully. There is no doubt in my mind that we can control the entry of Spanish fishing vessels into our waters, and that the common fisheries policy is a major success.

Mr. Harris: I applaud the attitude of my right hon. Friend in trying to clamp down on illegal Spanish fishing, especially off Cornwall, but will he confirm my impression that there has been a sharp decrease in the number of arrests during the past few weeks, and give an assurance that there will be no let-up in the drive against illegal fishing by Spain in the south-west?

Mr. Gummer: There will be no let-up whatsoever. That is why we have increased the number of surveillances and the amount of resources available. My hon. Friend has pressed me on the matter, and I continue to say that. The fact is that if people keep the rules and we have tight rules, and if our system works closely with that of our French and Irish colleagues, we can stop ships breaking the law and bring them to court. That is what has been happening.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: Is the Minister aware of the Scottish Affairs Select Committee report on fishery protection, which recommends that Scottish courts should punish illegal fishing with the same severity as the Norwegian courts do? What does he think about that recommendation as applied to English courts?

Mr. Gummer: If the hon. Gentleman studies recent fines imposed by English courts, especially in the south-west, he will see that they have been exemplary and heavy and have caused a decline in the amount of illegal fishing. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) will agree on that. I cannot comment on the effects in the Scottish courts, because that is a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Mr. Wigley: In view of the importance of fishery patrols, can the Minister give an assurance that with the disappearance of the metropolitan authorities, either bodies such as the Lancashire and North-Western Sea Fisheries will receive alternative funds, or there will be alternative structures to safeguard their activity?

Mr. Gummer: It is for members of the body to decide whether they wish to continue on it. We have examined

the activities of that body carefully, and, we will ensure that none of the necessary activities for the proper control of fisheries will fall into desuetude if they are not covered elsewhere.

Dr. Godman: Is the Minister aware that one of the recommendations in the Scottish Affairs Select Committee report on fisheries protection refers to the replacement of the fisheries protection vessel Norna? Will the Minister urge on his right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland the advisability of that replacement vessel being built by Ferguson Ailsa in Port Glasgow?

Mr. Gummer: I am sure the hon. Gentleman will accept that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State will have to make up his mind on that, and that it is not an area in which I can make recommendations to him.

Mr. Kennedy: When the Minister considers his Department's response to the Scottish Affairs Select Committee report which was published yesterday, will he, in particular, adopt the practice in Norway, so that third country vessels must notify the DAFS direct, instead of simply notifying Brussels, so that a more efficient, but not over-bureaucratic, scheme can monitor foreign vessels near our shores?

Mr. Gummer: I will look at that point. I remind the hon. Gentleman that European Community vessels, including Spanish vessels, have to give direct information as they pass into the British sector from the French sector, and they provide similar information to the French. In that way we have been able to keep very close control over their movements. I will certainly examine the matter closely.

Mr. Randall: Does the Minister agree that his attack on my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley (Mr. Lewis) was totally unjustified, as the figures that my hon. Friend quoted were given to me by the Minister in a written answer on 24 February? Will he confirm that the number of boardings of United Kingdom vessels in January was comparable to the number of boardings of the rest of the EEC fleet put together? Should the Minister not be directing his attention and efforts towards the countries which have a track record of abuse, rather than bashing British fishermen?

Mr. Gummer: My answer and the figures were absolutely correct. I welcome the hon. Gentleman's presence today. He was absent from the debate on salmon fishing earlier in the week, which appeared to have been hi-jacked by the Scots. There are two ways of ensuring that we are successful in our policing. The first is to bring large numbers of people before the courts. Alternatively, people should obey the law. I was right to tell the hon. Gentleman that his impression was wrong and that he does not know the facts.

Intervention Board for Agricultural Produce

7. **Mr. Fallon** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will relocate the Intervention Board for Agricultural Produce.

Mr. Jopling: I am currently considering this question.

Mr. Fallon: Why have so many of these quangos been allowed to set up camp along the Thames Valley? Would it not be cheaper to move the board to the north of England and thereby provide much-needed jobs into the bargain?

Mr. Jopling: I rather guessed that my hon. Friend would ask that question. I assure him that if a move were proposed, the merits of alternative locations, including the north-east of England, would be considered.

Mr. Home Robertson: As the board's stocks of cereals doubled to 5·7 million tonnes and its stocks of beef increased to 85,000 tonnes last year, will the Minister reconsider the way in which those stocks are relocated? Why not give the British consumer the benefit of some of those stocks instead of handing them out cheaply to the Russians?

Mr. Jopling: The hon. Gentleman will know very well that I have for a long time expressed similar concern about the level of surplus stocks within the Community. However, that matter is not within the question, which is about relocating the intervention board.

Agricultural Land

8. **Mr. Kenneth Carlisle** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what percentage of land at present farmed he estimates will be surplus to agricultural needs by 1990.

Mr. Jopling: Further measures clearly need to be taken within the Community to cut back production of commodities now in surplus. I see this as leading to changes in the existing pattern of land use in agriculture and forestry, rather than to the creation of substantial areas of land which are no longer in production.

Mr. Carlisle: Does my right hon. Friend accept that many authorities in the industry believe that about 10 per cent. of current production will be surplus to requirements by 1990? Will that not present the farming industry with its greatest challenge and opportunity for more than half a century? Will it not need a structure on which it can plan for the future, and will my right hon. Friend provide such a structure?

Mr. Jopling: Yes, I think that we must give serious thought to the possibility that there may be a need for a change of land use in that way. It is very dangerous to be too specific about that. Any changes will depend on a number of factors, such as the nature and level of Community support, the level of Community and world demand for temperate foodstuffs, the relative efficiency of our industry, technological improvements that might take place and the extent to which other countries outside the community, particularly the United States, are successful in developing their agricultural policies.

Mr. Ralph Howell: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the fact that he is dealing with the problem of food surpluses without mentioning cutting prices. I urge him to persuade the Government to call for a world food conference to try to deal with this problem, which cannot be dealt with either in the United Kingdom or in Europe alone.

Mr. Jopling: I shall certainly bear my hon. Friend's point in mind. If I have not said it already, I fear that I must

tell my hon. Friend now that I see no prospect of reducing the huge surpluses of foodstuffs in the Community unless we have a stringent price policy.

Mr. Hardy: Is there not a case for substantial and immediate higher priority to be conferred on conservation? Does the situation not justify serious consideration being given to the additional production of cellulose on non-arable land?

Mr. Jopling: The hon. Gentleman is right to think that environmentally sensitive areas should play an important part in the business of land use. The hon. Gentleman knows as well as any other hon. Member the initiatives that the Government have taken in the Community and which are enshrined in the legislation before the House to provide for environmentally sensitive areas. I hope that we shall be able to set the ESAs before too long. I think that that goes a long way towards meeting the hon. Gentleman's point.

Mr. Hicks: If consideration is to be given to taking land out of production deliberately, does my right hon. Friend agree that attention must be given to the impact of that on the stability of rural areas?

Mr. Jopling: That is correct. That is why I said in my original answer that we should look for changes in the existing pattern of land use rather than to the creation of substantial areas of land which are no longer in production.

Mr. John: Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that in 1990, which is the year to which the hon. Member for Lincoln (Mr. Carlisle) referred, only five ESAs will exist? In view of the difficulties in changing agriculture production patterns, is it not time that the Minister stated the level of forestry and alternative crops that will be available to farming at that time?

Mr. Jopling: We have said that we hope, in the first instance, to set up five ESAs. The hon. Gentleman has welcomed that move. That is for this year. What may be done in future years is a matter for future decision.

Mr. Rathbone: Whatever the surpluses may be, will my right hon. Friend reconsider the policies presently applied to encourage — not to allow — the growing of opium-producing poppies as a cash crop in Britain without any sense of responsibility in relation to how that crop might encourage the misuse of drugs? The rest of the Government are trying to contain that problem.

Mr. Jopling: We are looking into these matters. I am sure the House agrees that we must not do anything that allows illegal drugs to become more freely available.

Mr. Latham: What does my right hon. Friend expect farmers to grow instead of surplus barley — trees or caravans? Is it not high time that we had a strategic document spelling out the way in which agriculture is supposed to go?

Mr. Jopling: I am sure that my hon. Friend has heard me say on many occasions that I believe that it is necessary for us to consider carefully the opportunity to grow more trees. I hope that he has seen the consultative document that we issued some months ago on encouraging more farm woodlands.

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Maclennan.

Mr. Maclennan *rose*——

Hon. Members: Oh!

Mr. Andy Stewart: Does my right hon. Friend agree that allowing every village and small town of fewer than 7,000 people to expand its housing stock by 10 per cent. would be the most advantageous way of using our surplus land?

Mr. Jopling: Yes, I am sure that every hon. Member will agree that where housing needs to be provided, one should go to every possible extent to find suitable land for development.

Land Drainage and Coast Protection

9. **Mr. Campbell-Savours** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when his review of finance and administration of land drainage and coast protection will be complete.

Mr. Gummer: Our aim is to complete the review as soon as possible.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Why were the conservation aspects of land drainage not addressed in the Government's most recent Green Paper on land drainage? Could the reason be that the argument between the Department of the Environment and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food still rages and, as a result, no clear decisions can be taken? As privatisation now seems to be on the agenda, may we have assurances that there will be a new Green Paper and the fullest possible consultation on conservation aspects?

Mr. Gummer: The answer to the first part of the question is no, Sir. The answer to the second part is that there will be the fullest possible consultation on conservation interests.

Mr. Rathbone: Contrary to the politically inspired question by the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours), may I ask what my right hon. Friend is doing about the pressing need for coastal defence work along the coastline in Sussex around Seaford? This community is waiting upon certain bodies. Will my hon. Friend reconsider the parsimonious allocation this year?

Mr. Gummer: I shall look carefully at this matter. In my area of Anglia similar problems arise, and no firm decisions have yet been taken, but we are aware of my hon. Friend's concern and that of local authorities.

Mr. Home Robertson: As the Secretary of State for the Environment told the House on 5 February that land drainage and flood protection were the one responsibility of local authorities that would not be privatised, what residual public water authority will assume these responsibilities? I presume that the right hon. Gentleman must have a considerable constituency interest.

Mr. Gummer: I have important ministerial and constituency interests. When the time comes for us to continue our discussions, we shall produce some answers to that question.

Mr. Freud: When it comes to coastal protection, would it not be infinitely fairer if this were charged on central Government funds instead of on local ratepayers and water authorities?

Mr. Gummer: There are those who put that view, but there is also an argument and a case to say that those who benefit most particularly should make some major contribution towards it.

Mr. Ralph Howell: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the serious situation in my constituency, at Horsey? Will he give urgent attention to the problem of coastal protection there?

Mr. Gummer: This is primarily a matter for the Anglian water authority, but I shall look particularly at my hon. Friend's concern.

COMA Report

10. **Mr. Jim Callaghan** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he intends consultation on his proposals following the COMA report to be concluded; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: We have asked for comments on the labelling proposals announced on 13 February to be submitted by 1 May of this year.

Mr. Callaghan: I thank the Minister for his answer, but will he consider requesting, by law, manufacturers to label foods with polyunsaturated fats, as recommended in the COMA report?

Mr. Gummer: We have, of course, already accepted that it will be necessary by law to insist on fat content labelling, but one cannot restrict it to that. The intention is to provide the housewife or consumer with a range of information, much of which will be given voluntarily by food manufacturers. We hope to provide in this consultation a framework so that information given on different products will be readily understandable. The Ministry and the hon. Gentleman are very much on the same side.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Do we not spend billions of pounds on eating to make ourselves unhealthy, and then spend billions of more pounds, which we find increasingly hard to muster, on patching ourselves up after these excesses? Therefore, will my right hon. Friend undertake to have a word with my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State for Social Services and the Chief Secretary about these "Ubuesque" arrangements, and put it to them that a rather more generous budget for research into how we can produce the elements for a healthy diet, vegetables for example, might rapidly be justified by significant, consequential savings on expenditure on the Health Service?

Mr. Gummer: I have not noticed any shortage of healthy food. Healthy food is available. However, the housewife and the consumer must be in a position to choose what he or she wants to buy. This Government are concerned about providing them with that information. The choice must be theirs. We do not want a nanny state which tells people what they ought to eat.

Poultrymeat

12. **Mr. Cockeram** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the arrangements for poultrymeat exports to the United States of America.

Mr. Gummer: Discussions with the United States authorities on access to their market are proceeding.

Mr. Cockeram: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the importance of this industry to rural areas such as Ludlow, where poultrymeat exports provide a substantial element of employment? Will he bear this in mind during the negotiations?

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend is quite right when he speaks of the importance of this country's poultry industry and its need to secure access to the largest number of markets. During his recent visit to the United States my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food raised these matters with the Agriculture Department there. We shall seek to do our best to defend and extend the opportunities for the British poultry industry.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Bidwell** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 6 March.

The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher): This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House, I shall be having further meetings later today, including one with the National Pensioners Convention.

Mr. Bidwell: Does the right hon. Lady realise that the pensioners' lobby today indicates not only deep anxiety among our old folk but deep anxiety about them in the nation as a whole? Does she further realise that if the Government had clung to the Labour Government's formula of uprating pensions according to the cost of living or national average earnings, the pensioner and his dependent wife would be £6·50 better off today? Why does the hon. Lady not address her mind to this question? She will hear about it later from the Trades Union Congress. Would this not be a handy sum with which old people could meet their fuel bills instead of freezing to death?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman is aware that the previous Government's policies led to the International Monetary Fund and to peak inflation, the highest that this country has ever known. This Government kept their pledge to protect pensions against the rise in prices. In fact, pensions have increased by nine percentage points more than prices and we have brought down the inflation that destroyed the savings of pensioners in the 1970s.

Mr. Dorrell: Will my right hon. Friend take time today to consider whether sterling should join the exchange rate mechanism of the European monetary system? Is she aware that Mr. Sam Brittan has argued that this could allow us to reduce the level of interest rates prevailing in Britain? Does she agree that, by any definition, sterling is now more competitive since the decline in the exchange rate in recent weeks and that it may therefore be, in the time-honoured phrase, that the time is ripe for sterling to become a member of the exchange rate mechanism?

The Prime Minister: As my hon. Friend knows, I am asked this question regularly, usually on the basis that "now" is the time to go in. I was asked it when the pound bought DM 3.70. It now buys about DM 3.20. Those who asked that question then must be rather glad that we did not go in, because we should have suffered rather

grievously if we had. One day, when we think that the time is appropriate, we shall join the EMS. We do not think that it is appropriate to do so at the moment.

Mr. Kinnock: When the Prime Minister meets the pensioners' delegation this afternoon, will she explain to them why she is deliberately ensuring that the value of the old-age pension next year will be 3 per cent. less in real terms than it is this year? Is that not a deliberate betrayal of her pledge to protect the poor and those who are most in need?

The Prime Minister: I shall explain to them that the pension has gone up by nine percentage points more than prices, that we have kept our pledges to the pensioners and that if we were to accept all of the National Pensioners Convention proposals the cost would be at least £20 billion a year. That would add at least £16 a week to the national insurance contributions of those on average earnings as well as requiring substantial increases in income tax and value added tax. That, and a lot more, I shall explain.

Mr. Kinnock: The Prime Minister must surely know that if she claims that pensions have gone up in real terms by 9 per cent. under her Government, they went up by 20 per cent. in real terms under the last Labour Government. As she is so fond of referring to the record of the last Labour Government, why does she not have the decency to match it?

The Prime Minister: I am not prepared to go back to the inflationary policies of the last Labour Government. That is the way to destroy the savings of pensioners. What the last Labour Government were prepared to do was to create inflation, claim big pension increases and pay for those pension increases by debasing the savings of pensioners. We will not carry out such a dishonest policy.

Q2. **Mr. Forth** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 6 March.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Forth: Does my right hon. Friend welcome the statement by President Botha of South Africa on the ending of the state of emergency in his country? Does she believe that this vindicates our policy of continuing to talk to the South Africans, and does she now expect the Opposition parties to welcome the statement as a further advance in the country of South Africa?

The Prime Minister: I welcome very warmly President Botha's decision to lift the state of emergency in South Africa. I hope that it will lead to reduced tension and that it will bring nearer the prospect of a genuine dialogue between the South African Government and black South Africans.

Mr. Loyden: Is the Prime Minister aware that many people will view the decision taken in the High Court yesterday as a further attack on local democracy — *[Interruption.]* It is she and her Government who should be before the courts to answer for the misery and hardship which she and her Government have imposed upon 750,000 people in Lambeth and Liverpool by savage cuts in the local government expenditure of authorities which are trying to remedy the damage which she and her Government are doing to inner cities.

The Prime Minister: Government and local government are answerable to the courts, as everyone who believes in the rule of law knows.

Mr. Grylls: If I may revert to the question of pensions, does my right hon. Friend agree that the Government's policy on inflation is the best way of protecting pensioners and their savings, and that we should not be deflected from sticking to that course, which is a way of giving them honest money?

The Prime Minister: I agree wholly with my hon. Friend. There has to be the certainty that Governments will run prudent financial policies and therefore get stability in their financial dealings.

Mr. J. Enoch Powell: When suggestions are again made, as they already have been made this afternoon, that we should return to the miseries and follies of a fixed exchange rate for sterling, will the Prime Minister remain deaf to these unwise promptings?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman heard my reply earlier. These suggestions are made regularly. I think that, had we listened to them earlier, we would have found ourselves in some difficulty in view of the fluctuation in exchange rates which inevitably comes through having a currency rather different from those in the rest of Europe. We must continue to take that factor into account.

Q3. **Mr. Proctor** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 6 March.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Proctor: When my right hon. Friend meets the National Pensioners Convention this afternoon, will she explain to it that the inflationary policies of Her Majesty's Opposition will crucify the savings of pensioners?

The Prime Minister: Yes, Mr. Speaker, they will do just that. Not only that, but if we ever returned to a period when inflation went up sharply by 25 per cent. or so, to put up the pension by that amount may increase its value for a few days, but it would rapidly lose that value as inflation ate away the increase.

Dr. Owen: Does the Prime Minister draw no lessons from the last couple of months from the way that many pensioners did freeze in the very cold spell when heating allowances were shown to be inadequate? *[Interruption.]* Hon. Members can jeer but there must be many of their constituents who suffered greviously. Surely the Prime Minister will at least try to change this situation by next year.

The Prime Minister: As the right hon. Gentleman is aware, the Government's record on payments for heating is far better than that of the Government of which he was a member. The facts show that. He cannot possibly get over that, no matter how much he trys to wave it away with his hand. It is because he has not got the answer that he asks such stupid questions.

Mr. Ottaway: My right hon. Friend will be aware that the projected population increase in Britain to the end of the century is 1 million. Is she aware that the population of the world has risen by 1 million in the past five days? What plans does she have to meet that growing demand for the world's resources.

The Prime Minister: The growth of world population is discussed in international forums, particularly when we deal with our aid programmes. My hon. Friend will understand that we try to help those programmes that are designed to reduce the increase.

Mr. Ashton: Is the Prime Minister aware that every hon. Member is being badgered every day about the Shops Bill? In order to influence hon. Members before they vote, will she arrange for the Second Reading of the Bill to take place at 9.30 am on a Sunday, in the same way as we meet on a Friday, and, so that we may experience the effects of the Transport Act 1985, will she arrange for everybody to get here by public transport?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman makes his point. I think that I have got it. I think that it was in favour of extra choice in Sunday trading.

Mr. Rathbone: Will my right hon. Friend find a moment today, or before the end of the week, to have a word with my right hon. Friend sitting on her right, the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, and inquire of him why in the world British farmers are encouraged to grow opium poppies as a cash crop in the face of all the other admirable activities of her Government to fight drug misuse?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend says that he is looking into it. Strenuous efforts are made to ensure that the growth of that crop, necessary for pharmaceutical drugs, cannot be turned to illegal use.

Q4. **Mr. Dormand** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 6 March.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Dormand: Will the Prime Minister give urgent attention to the plight of sacked miners? Is she aware that there are 11 from my constituency, 74 from my county of Durham and 520 nationally, that many of them have won their appeals through industrial tribunals and that many have been acquitted by the courts? Before she adopts a Pontius Pilate role, saying that is a matter for the National Coal Board, will she realise that the re-employment of those miners will be the biggest single step that can be taken to begin to restore good relations in the coal industry, and will she bring pressure to bear on the Coal Board to do that?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman in part anticipated my reply. Of course it is a matter for the NCB, but I understand that one case is before the courts, to which I can make no reference. That is a matter for the courts to decide. The hon. Gentleman is aware that the important thing is to have an efficient coal industry. Productivity has increased enormously. It needs to increase a good deal further, particularly with the fall in the price of oil, which has to compete with coal. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that, despite the improved performance, the taxpayer will still put about £1·5 billion into the coal industry this year.

Q6. **Mr. Martin** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 6 March.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Martin: Does the Prime Minister agree that it is a scandal that some pensioners have died from hypothermia, some are living below the poverty line and some cannot turn on the heating because they fear the very high electricity and gas charges? What will the Prime Minister do for our elderly citizens?

The Prime Minister: I gave the figures in answer to another question, but I shall repeat them. When the Labour Government were in power, the amount available for heating addition was £90 million. In 1979 deaths from hypothermia were at the highest level ever. Since then we have increased the amount available for heating to £400 million and there are amounts for severe weather payments. May I also remind the hon. Gentleman that in the lifetime of the Labour Government the price of electricity went up by 6 per cent. every four months and that under this Government the price of electricity has gone up only by 6 per cent. in three years? So pensioners have had a far better deal under this Government than they ever had under a Labour Government.

British Leyland

3.30 pm

Mr. Stan Thorne (Preston) *(by private notice)* asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement regarding Lancashire Enterprise Ltd.'s firm indication of interest in respect of the purchase of British Leyland.

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Paul Channon): I understand from BL that Hill Samuel has offered a meeting this week with Lancashire Enterprise Ltd. to explore further the nature of its proposals following its preliminary expression of interest indicated to Hill Samuel on 4 March.

Mr. Thorne: That reply comes to me as a surprise, particularly if we refer to the statement made yesterday in the House by the Secretary of State, from which I quote:

"The deputation was given a full opportunity to declare a firm indication of interest but it did not do so."

In reply to my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith)——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Will the hon. Gentleman please paraphrase?

Mr. Thorne: By inviting me to paraphrase, Mr. Speaker, you are inviting me to do what the Secretary of State did yesterday — deliberately or otherwise to mislead the House. I do not wish to do that, so I am quoting what the Secretary of State said.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must stick to the rules.

Mr. Thorne: I shall read, because I am talking about what the Secretary of State said.

Mr. Ivor Stanbrook (Orpington): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Gentleman is out of order.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Preston (Mr. Thorne) knows that we have a very busy day ahead of us. Will he please get on with his supplementary question?

Mr. Thorne: I am doing my best to be brief, Mr. Speaker, but if you continue to interrupt I shall be in difficulty. In regard to LEL, the Secretary of State said: "every assistance was given to it to try to get it into a position to make a firm indication of interest, but I understand that by last night it had not given any such indications." — [*Official Report*, 5 March 1986; Vol. 93, c. 312-16.]

That statement was made by the Secretary of State in spite of the fact that LEL, the firm I am talking about, had already sent a telex to Hill Samuel which read as follows——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I granted the hon. Gentleman a private notice question, not an Adjournment debate. He must ask a question, please.

Mr. Thorne: You draw attention to the fact that you granted the private notice question, Mr. Speaker. I assume that you did so on the basis of my being able at least to give the facts to the House——

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is a private notice question. Will the hon. Gentleman please ask a question?

Mr. Thorne: If I were to ask a short question of the Secretary of State, it would be why he misled the House yesterday but, to do that, I have to demonstrate the basis for my claim that he misled the House. That is why I shall read to you, Mr. Speaker, the telex that was sent to Hill Samuel at 6.25 pm on 4 March. It said:

"This telex is intended to formally confirm that interest prior to tonight's deadline".

In other works, LEL got its name before Hill Samuel before the midnight deadline on 4 March.

Mr. Channon: I did not mislead the House yesterday. I have checked carefully what I said yesterday, and it was wholly accurate. By the appropriate night, Lancashire Enterprises Ltd. had not put in a firm intention to make a bid which those whom I described to the House yesterday had done. Nevertheless, Hill Samuel has helpfully offered a meeting. It seems to me that that is a helpful suggestion, not an unhelpful one, and I cannot understand why the hon. Gentleman is making a fuss.

Mr. Robert Atkins (South Ribble): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the pressure for consideration of LEL's offer has the support of all parties on Lancashire county council, including the Conservative party, and the support of my Conservative-controlled borough council? Does he agree that, in view of the wide disparity between the time allocated for General Motors to consider the matter and that available for other bidders, some flexibility should be granted when a definite interest is involved, such as my right hon. Friend has generously been able to do in relation to Leyland Bus?

Mr. Channon: There should be the meeting which Hill Samuel has suggested with LEL, and then all these matters can be examined.

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): Is not the Secretary of State aware that one of the reasons why Lancashire Enterprises Ltd. was not able to declare a "firm indication of interest"—the right hon. Gentleman's words—until late on Tuesday night was that Hill Samuel had repeatedly refused to grant it the necessary documentation to put together proposals? Although we are glad to learn that, at this late stage, the Secretary of State has relented, as has Hill Samuel, to declare that negotiations with LEL must go ahead, will he instruct Hill Samuel to give LEL exactly the same documentation as was received by General Motors?

Mr. Channon: With respect to the hon. Gentleman, that is not exactly true. Unlike all the other people, LEL has not signed a confidentiality agreement — [HON. MEMBERS: "It has not been asked."] It most certainly has been asked. There were telephone conversations last week, and still no action was taken. With respect to the hon. Gentleman, I am afraid that he is grossly exaggerating the situation. Nevertheless, Hill Samuel has offered a meeting. That seems an extremely helpful way forward. We should see what happens.

Mr. John Mark Taylor (Solihull): Of the offers that were in by the deadline, especially that of Lonrho, did any involve the introduction to Land Rover of a high technology plant?

Mr. Speaker: Order. That question is out of order. The private notice question relates to Lancashire Enterprises Ltd.

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil): Will the Minister now answer this question directly? As the giant American consortium General Motors has had 18 months to put its

bid together, will he give the House a clear indication that this bid, which is British and local, will not be — *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. All this takes up a great deal of time.

Mr. Ashdown: I will have my question. Will the Secretary of State give an undertaking that the bid, which is British and local, will not be decided on the grounds of a technicality?

Mr. Channon: I made the position clear regarding General Motors yesterday. Nothing has changed since 3.30 yesterday afternoon. In fact, Hill Samuel offered a meeting with Lancashire Enterprises Ltd. at 11 o'clock yesterday morning. When I came into the Chamber, no reply had been received. It seemed to me a helpful step that there should be a meeting to allow them to get on with it.

Mr. Robert Adley (Christchurch): My right hon. Friend might agree that there are few more nauseating noises than those made by someone who wants an American takeover one week and a British flag-waving operation the next. Leaving that aside, can my right hon. Friend help me? He has not yet managed to convince me that the Government are genuinely even-handed in their assessment of the General Motors bid as opposed to this bid and the other British bids. He has not yet managed to convince me that genuine equality of information has been offered for this bidder and for the other British bidders as opposed to the information offered to General Motors. Could he please try harder?

Mr. Channon: I tried hard at the same time yesterday afternoon to satisfy my hon. Friend. I am happy to come down every afternoon and do my best. I can only repeat the answer that I gave my hon. Friend yesterday, which assured him that we were treating all the firm indications of bids with extreme care.

Mr. John Smith (Monklands, East): The Secretary of State will understand that we are looking forward with interest to his daily appearances next week. Before then, can he answer two simple questions? First, is it not the case that Lancashire Enterprises Ltd. showed its firm interest before what he called the "close of play"? Secondly, what is the purpose of this meeting? Will it be open to the Government to receive a bid from Lancashire Enterprises Ltd. as a result of what transpires at the meeting? Will he please answer that yes or no?

Mr. Channon: It is clear that LEL did not put in a firm intention to make a bid by the appropriate time. However, at the same time, it did put in a telex which I have described to the House and to the right hon. and learned Gentleman. I understand from Hill Samuel that the purpose of the meeting which it suggested was to explore all those points. If suitable assurances can be found, I would not wish to rule out anyone on a technicality.

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Does it arise directly out of questions?

Mr. Butterfill: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: I shall take it, then.

Mr. Butterfill: You will have heard the question from the hon. Member for Liverpool, Garston (Mr. Loyden), Mr. Speaker, relating to the dismissal of local councillors and you may have seen early-day motion 547 in the name of the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mr. Parry) calling for the dismissal of the judges who disqualified those councillors.

[That this House regards with grave concern the decision of Mr. Justice Glidewell, Mr. Justice Caulfield and Mr. Justice Russell to disqualify democratically elected councillors from Liverpool and Lambeth; notes that judges are themselves appointed and not elected; and calls for the immediate dismissal of these judges.]

Is it not a gross abuse of this House to use an early-day motion to call for the dismissal of judges whose duty it is to uphold the laws made by the House?

Mr. Speaker: It is perfectly in order. In fact, the only way in which it is possible to criticise a judge is to put down a motion.

Business of the House

3.44 pm

Mr. Neil Kinnock (Islwyn): May I ask the Leader of the House to state the business for next week?

The Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Biffen): Yes, Sir. The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 10 MARCH—Debate on a motion to take note of the 1986 farm price proposals and the proposed milk outgoers scheme. Details of relevant EC documents will be given in the *Official Report*.

Debate on a motion on the second report of the Privileges Committee in Session 1984-85 (House of Commons paper No. 555).

TUESDAY 11 MARCH—Until about Seven o'clock debate on a motion to take note of EC document 5635/85 relating to a common policy and liberalisation of shipping. Details of relevant documents will be given in the *Official Report*.

Motions on the Local Government (Temporary Provisions) (Northern Ireland) Order and the Appropriation (Northern Ireland) Order.

At Ten o'clock the Question will be put on all outstanding supplementary Estimates and Votes.

WEDNESDAY 12 MARCH — Opposition Day (10th Allotted Day). Until about Seven o'clock a debate entitled "The City" followed by a debate entitled "Support for Students in Further and Higher Education". Both debates will arise on Opposition motions.

Afterwards, a debate on a motion to take note of EC documents relating to Community steel. Details of the documents concerned will be given in the *Official Report*.

THURSDAY 13 MARCH — Proceedings on the Consolidated Fund (No. 2) Bill.

FRIDAY 14 MARCH—Private Members' motions.

MONDAY 17 MARCH—Progress on remaining stages of the Gas Bill (1st Allotted Day).

The House will wish to know, Mr. Speaker, that it will be proposed that the House should rise for the Easter Adjournment on Thursday 27 March until Tuesday 8 April.

[Monday 10 March

CAP PRICE FIXING

Relevant European Documents

(a) 10174/85	*Milk production: outgoers scheme*
(b) 8480/85	*Reform of the Common Agricultural Policy*
(c) 5098/86	*Corrigendum to 8480/85*
(d) 4130/86	*Future of Community Agriculture*
(e) 10492/85	*Reform of Cereals Regime*
(f) 4150/86	*Beef Regime*
(g) 4075/86	*Report on situation in agricultural markets 1985*
(h) 4963/86	*CAP Prices 1986-87*

Debate on Tuesday 11 March

SHIPPING

Relevant European Document

(i) 5635/85	*Maritime transport policy*

Wednesday 12 March

STEEL OBJECTIVES

Relevant European Documents

(j) 5194/84	*Steel industry objectives for 1985*
(k) 8293/85	*Community steel policy after 1985*
(l) 9300/85	*Steel production quotas*
(m) 9301/85	*Aid to the steel industry after 1985*
(n) 8779/85	*Social measures in the coal and steel industries: Contributions to the ECSC Budget, 1985–1987*
(o) 4493/86	*Compensatory measures against United States restrictions on certain steel imports*

Relevant Reports of European Legislation Committee

(a) HC 21–iii (1985-86) paragraph 2.
(b) HC 5–xxx (1984-85) paragraph 10.
(c) HC 21–xiii (1985-86) paragraph 1.
(d) HC 21–ix (1985-86) paragraph 1.
(e) HC 21–vii (1985-86) paragraph 2.
(f) HC 21–x (1985-86) paragraph 3.
(g) HC 21–xiii (1985-86) paragraph 1.
(h) HC 21–xiii (1985-86) paragraph 1.
(i) HC 5–xxi (1984-85) paragraph 5.
(j) HC 78–xxii (1983-84) paragraph 2.
(k) HC 5–xxx (1984-85) paragraph 9.
(l) HC 5–xxxi (1984-85) paragraph 6.
(m) HC 5–xxxi (1984-85) paragraph 6.
(n) HC 21–iv (1985-86) paragraph 1.
(o) HC 21–viii (1985-86) paragraph 2.]

Mr. Kinnock: I am tempted to ask the Leader of the House whether he will take up the kindly offer of the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to provide us with daily statements on the continuing saga of the British Leyland affair. If we have daily statements, they will have to be made before the close of play and we shall have to call the period injury time.

In answering questions yesterday, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry refused repeatedly to give a time scale or timetable for the sale of Land Rover, Freight Rover, Leyland Trucks and related businesses. Today's press reports suggest that the Government plan to complete the sale by Easter. Can the right hon. Gentleman tell me whether that is true? Will he ensure that in any event the House is given time to debate the matter before we rise for the Easter recess on 27 March?

In view of the sentiments expressed by a senior spokesman for the President of the United States about that Administration's hostility towards Nicaragua and its readiness to contemplate the use of military force against that country, will the right hon. Gentleman ensure that the Foreign Secretary makes a statement next week on the Government's attitude towards President Reagan's policy? If his policy was carried into effect, it would pose a further threat to the stability of the central American region.

In view of the apparently well-founded story in this morning's edition of the *Financial Times* about proposals for narrowly limiting the future programme content and powers of the BBC, will the right hon. Gentleman give an assurance that no action will be taken in that direction until the House has had a chance to consider it and to raise objections to it?

Mr. Biffen: The time scale and timetable, to quote the words of the Leader of the Opposition, for the handling of Leyland were outlined yesterday in the House by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry.

As for a debate on the matter this side of the Easter recess, perhaps that is something that we can consider

through the usual channels. I shall convey to my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary the right hon. Gentleman's anxiety that he should make a statement on the policy of the United States towards Nicaragua.

Finally, I must confess that I do not have the same zeal for reading the capitalist press as the right hon. Gentleman and I have not seen the references in the *Financial Times* to the future of the BBC. However, I am sure that it is a subject that would merit debate in the House.

Mr. Tom Sackville (Bolton, West): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the House has not yet received satisfactory answers to the issue of the 200 acres of opium poppies that are said to have been grown experimentally this year? Does not this growing of opium poppies make nonsense of the Government's eradication programme overseas as well as of the attempts of the police and Customs and Excise to interdict the importation of heroin? Will my right hon. Friend allocate time to debate this issue fully?

Mr. Biffen: I must confess that I came into the Chamber with a virginal innocence about opium poppy growing in the United Kingdom. It seems pre-eminently a matter to be raised during the proceedings on the Consolidated Fund Bill.

Mr. David Alton (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): Although I regret the official Opposition's decision not to support our request for a debate on the future of historic buildings and monuments, especially Kenwood House at Hampstead heath, will the Leader of the House arrange for a debate on our prayer in a Committee of the House?

Mr. Biffen: I certainly hope that we could make arrangements for it to be debated upstairs.

Sir John Biggs-Davison (Epping Forest): Is my right hon. Friend aware that I am not asking for a debate next week on early-day motion 280 which now has the support of 170 hon. Members—

[That this House notes the widespread concern felt in Parliament by eminent scientists, by other responsible observers and by members of the public who have viewed programmes on the matter screened by Channel 4, that Anne Maguire, Patrick Maguire (senior) Vincent Maguire (then aged 17), Patrick Maguire (then aged 14), Sean Smyth, Patrick O'Neill and the late Giuseppe Conlon, sentenced in 1976 to long terms of imprisonment since served, now appear, despite confirmation of their convictions at the time by the Court of Appeal, to have been entirely innocent of the crime with which they were charged; further notes at the conclusion of debate in the other place on 17th May 1985, the recognition by the Parliamentary Under Secretary at the Home Office of the strength of feeling on this matter in that House and his pledge to draw the attention of the Secretary of State for the Home Department to what had been said; and therefore earnestly urges the Secretary of State for the Home Department in the interests of the highest standards of British justice of which this country needs to feel rightly proud, to move without delay for a review of these convictions, either under the provisions of section 17 of the Criminal Appeal Act 1968, or by such other public process of review as he may deem appropriate to this disturbing case.]—

but I am asking him to ensure that we have an early statement from the Home Secretary or perhaps a Law Officer of the Crown to allay the growing misgivings in the House and the country about the miscarriage of justice in the Maguire case?

Mr. Biffen: I acknowledge my hon. Friend's central role in raising a wide degree of parliamentary interest in this topic. I will refer his request to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department. Meanwhile, I hope that he will not totally dismiss the possibility of using the Consolidated Fund as providing an opportunity to raise the matter.

Mr. Guy Barnett (Greenwich): As joint treasurer of the United Kingdom branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, of which you, Mr. Speaker, are president and the Prime Minister is the chairman, may I draw attention to early-day motion 528?

[That this House joins with all other parliaments throughout the Commonwealth in the observance of Commonwealth Day on Monday 10th March 1986; and recognises the importance of the work of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association which brings together parliamentarians throughout the Commonwealth who share a community of interest and the positive ideals of parliamentary democracy.]

Is the Leader of the House prepared to associate the Government and this House with that expression of Commonwealth good will in connection with Commonwealth day on Monday? Will he take this opportunity to welcome Commonwealth parliamentarians from all over the world who are presently our guests?

Mr. Biffen: As long as we understand that the Commonwealth is fairly intangible in its implications, I shall be very happy to give my good will to the motion.

Mr. Geoffrey Dickens (Littleborough and Saddleworth): Will my right hon. Friend consider providing time for an urgent debate on the vexing question of the entry of child brides into the United Kingdom? When my right hon. Friend is considering such a debate, will he bear in mind that the British section within the Swedish embassy in Tehran, by issuing the visa, has knowingly commissioned a crime in the United Kingdom of unlawful sexual intercourse with girls under the age of 16? It is therefore an accessory before the fact. Such a debate would give us the opportunity of expanding more fully the notion "When in Britain do as the British do or go back to your country of origin."

Mr. Biffen: I note what my hon. Friend says. The Home Office has already said that it intends to take action in respect of the child bride issue which has recently become topical. I advise my hon. Friend to seek the many opportunities that he will have to raise this issue on his own account.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): Will the Leader of the House find time in the not-too-distant future for a debate on the subject of building safety standards? A recent written answer I received stated that no fewer than 25,000 people were injured last year in their own homes by coming into contact with glass in door frames, window frames or other matters. It seems clear that the glass is too thin and that our standards are wholly inadequate.

Mr. Biffen: The hon. Gentleman raises a point which probably falls within the authority of the Department of

[Mr. Biffen]

my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment. I will certainly make sure that my right hon. Friend is made aware of the matter.

Mr. Michael Latham (Rutland and Melton): Does the ewelcome absence next week of the Second Reading of the Shops Bill mean that my right hon. Friend might be thinking again on this matter and that it might go down the black hole along with the Education (Corporal Punishment) Bill?

Mr. Biffen: That is an interesting speculation. Whatever I say will be read as a coded language to the world outside, but I have to say to my hon. Friend that the answer is, purely and simply, no.

Sir Adam Butler (Bosworth): May I press my right hon. Friend on the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Latham)? There have been newspaper reports to the effect that the Government are having second thoughts. I must ask him to recognise the very strong opposition to the Shops Bill. That opposition has been expressed to almost all Members of this House who have received many letters from their constituents, and there is also opposition within the House.

Mr. Biffen: The planned progress of this legislation is the very opposite of suggesting that the Government propose to abandon it.

Mr. Roland Boyes (Houghton and Washington): Does not the Leader of the House consider it sad that the Government have not made a statement in this House on the assassination of Mr. Olof Palme, the Prime Minister of Sweden? He spent his life striving not only for the betterment of the Swedish people but internationally for peace, justice and the cause of peoples in the Third world.

Mr. Biffen: The precedents that have been observed in this case are absolutely consistent with what has happened on many occasions hitherto. I am sure that in all quarters of the House there will be deep regret about the assassination, and gratification that the British Government were represented at the funeral.

Sir Anthony Grant (Cambridgeshire, South-West): I note that the Opposition have, rather surprisingly, chosen a different subject for their Supply day next week, but will my right hon. Friend look favourably on the possibility of a debate in which the Leader of the Opposition will have the opportunity to express his profound thanks to the High Court for doing the job with the loony council that he wanted done?

Mr. Biffen: Given the many roads that I must tread in contrary directions, the best way to answer that is to congratulate my hon. Friend on his ingenuity.

Mr. John Ryman (Blyth Valley): The Leader of the House has often been asked questions about scandals in the City of London. Could he arrange for a debate to be held in the near future on the Government's competition policy, bearing in mind the chaos in connection with takeover bids, and the extraordinary decisions that are being made by the Director General of Fair Trading? I am thinking in particular of both of the Guinness bids and both of the Argyll bids for Distillers, and the Hanson bid—Lord Hanson happens to be a staunch supporter of the Prime Minister—the Sikorsky-Westland deal, United Biscuits and many other decisions. They are wholly inconsistent with the avowed policy of first taking public interest into consideration. Will the Minister look into that because it is a serious matter which smells and savours of fraud?

Mr. Biffen: Leaving aside the innuendo, which is unworthy of the hon. Gentleman, if he genuinely wishes to attend to this topic, he will certainly have a chance next week during questions to the Department of Trade and Industry.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): Has my right hon. Friend noticed that various London boroughs, including Ealing, Chelsea, and Fulham and Hammersmith, have announced substantial rate reductions following the abolition of the GLC, which doubled the rates when the present Labour group took it over in 1981? May we have an early debate on the matter, and include in it the fact that the GLC is at present giving £81,000 to Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament groups to set up spurious nuclear-free zones in London, and is fighting in the courts to give away £96 million to various other spurious groups? Would not that £96 million be handy in the hands of pensioners to assist in solving their heating problems?

Mr. Biffen: I am sorry to disappoint my hon. Friend, but I can hold out no prospect of such a debate in Government time in the near future. I hope that he will feel that he has the consolation that by the skilful way in which he put the question he has practically made the speech that would have occurred to him if such a debate were held.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): In view of the earlier comments on the surcharges on Lambeth and Liverpool councillors and in the absence of a statement or debate on the matter, the Leader of the House will not be surprised to learn that in the City debate contrasts could well be drawn between the way in which the Prime Minister and Chancellor of the Exchequer protected the villains of the Johnson Matthey bank, and gave aid and succour to the crooks at Lloyd's who are now in America and elsewhere, having got away with £13 million, and the way in which the 80 councillors stood by their promises, mandate and people and gave the services to their electors which the Government failed to provide.

Mr. Biffen: I note that the hon. Gentleman kindly gives me an indication of what I might hear if I am in my place during next Wednesday's debate, should he be called. He will do the Conservative party a great service if he sets out to be the protector of those who have recently been found guilty in the courts.

Sir John Farr (Harborough): Can my right hon. Friend say how the House is to be kept informed about the critical multi-fibre arrangement negotiations? Will there be a statement in the House next week after the meting of the Council of Ministers on Monday and Tuesday? If the House is not satisfied that the Government's attitude is sufficiently robust, will he promise an opportunity for an early debate?

Mr. Biffen: My hon. Friend will be aware that we have frequently had negotiations about the multi-fibre arrangement and I am certain that the same parliamentary formality will apply on this occasion as has applied hitherto. I will certainly draw the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to the anxiety that has just been expressed.

Mr. Laurie Pavitt (Brent, South): The last time that the Leader of the House looked at my early-day motion on Sadler's Wells he made a claim for entry in the "Guinness Book of Records" as the greatest philistine in the House. However, at the same time he said that there was a possibility that he would discuss the matter with the Minister for the Arts. Has he done so?

Mr. Biffen: Yes, and I will be in touch with the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Ivor Stanbrook (Orpington): Bearing in mind that the Shops Bill will arouse great bitterness and will be strongly contested in this House, does my right hon. Friend plan that, when the Bill comes before the House, the Government will announce that they are prepared to accept a concession of substance which, while reconciling the law with modern needs, will nevertheless preserve the special character of Sunday?

Mr. Biffen: My hon. Friend will be the first to appreciate that that is a responsibility of the Minister in charge of the Bill. I will certainly draw the Minister's attention to that point.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I draw the attention of the House to the fact that there is an Opposition day ahead of us, and it is only a half day. A large number of right hon. and hon. Members wish to take part. Will hon. Members please put their questions very briefly?

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Has the Leader of the House seen the report in *The Guardian* today suggesting that Trafalgar House has been given the green light to take over Vickers of Barrow? As that has implications for thousands of jobs in the county of Cumbria, will he ensure that a statement is made next week which will set out precisely what the position is in relation to these negotiations?

Mr. Biffen: I will draw the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to that point. I appreciate its importance. Meanwhile, the hon. Gentleman will be aware that that Department will be answering questions on Wednesday.

Mr. Tim Rathbone (Lewes): Will my right hon. Friend, in his new-found wisdom, reconsider his suggestion that the Consolidated Fund would provide an appropriate opportunity to debate the question of growing opium poppies? Will he find time for a major debate in Government time to discuss drugs misuse about which the Government are doing so much in so many ways and yet, in this particular area, are running contrary to their own thrust?

Mr. Biffen: I am grateful for the fact that my hon. Friend attributes wisdom to me, although it is slightly tarnished by the suggestion that it is newly found. However, I cannot reasonably and helpfully say more than I have about the possibility of a debate in the next few days.

Mr. Stephen Ross (Isle of Wight): As the Leader of the House confirmed on the radio last Sunday that the buck finishes with him in the way that we run this place, will he find time next week to come to the third floor of Norman Shaw North and inspect the loos and the windows, and witness the draught from the windows and the lifts that do not work, and do something about them?

Mr. Biffen: I am not intimidated by a question like that. I will gladly do what the hon. Gentleman suggests.

Mr. Tim Yeo (Suffolk, South): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it might be an instructive experience for the House and particularly for Oppositon Members to debate matters in which Government policy has been conspicuously successful? Does he feel that a few hours of Government time could be agreeably passed in debating the way in which the fall in the price of oil has been weathered without any catastrophic rise in interest rates or a collapse in sterling?

Mr. Biffen: My hon. Friend makes an extremely pertinent point and underlines the importance of having a liberal economic structure and liberal foreign exchange rates. I will bear in mind my hon. Friend's points, although I confess that I cannot offer an immediate prospect of a debate in Government time. Whenever there is Government time available, his suggestion will be an early candidate for debate.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Will the Leader of the House ensure that before the House rises for the Easter recess a full and thorough debate is held on the Government's immigration and refugee policy, particularly in the light of revelations earlier this week that one Conservative Member claimed that the real purpose of the Home Secretary's proposed guidelines to immigration controls is to prevent Members of Parliament from taking up immigration cases? Does he not think that that is an extremely serious matter and that the experience of many hon. Members during the Christmas recess, when there was clearly a difference in attitude expressed by the immigration authorities, should not be repeated during the Easter recess? For that reason alone, an urgent debate is necessary.

Mr. Biffen: The way that the hon. Gentleman has put his case does not make me an immediate captive of it. I do not accept in any sense his premise. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has already said to the House that he would like an early opportunity to debate the proposals on the new guidelines on immigration. The timing of any debate on that topic is perhaps best left for discussion through the usual channels.

Mr. Derek Spencer (Leicester, South): When the Local Government Bill returns to the House, will my right hon. Friend ensure that steps are taken to toughen the Bill? The idea that local government proceeds in a spirit of gentlemanly co-operation is not widely shared by the Labour councillors on Leicester city council. They recently voted another £2,500 to the Labour national local government unit and a similar sum to the local peace action group.

Mr. Biffen: I am sure that my hon. and learned Friend will appreciate that his remarks are better directed at the Minister in charge of the Bill. I will draw the Minister's attention to his point. Opinions expressed in another place properly have a call upon the time of this House.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): Has the Leader of the House had time to study early-day motion 500 signed by 126 hon. Members from both sides of the House and the amendment of my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner)?

[That this House expresses concern at the recently published consultation documents relating to the Disabled

[Mr. Tom Clarke]

Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Bill; would regret any steps that might remove or emasculate vital clauses of this Bill, including those which safeguard the interests of carers of persons leaving long-stay hospitals or leaving full-time education by providing a coherent personal plan to meet their individual needs; and while accepting the duty to avoid unnecessary bureaucracy, declares that it is inconceivable that services to meet the needs of disabled people can be adequately planned if they are not subject to prior assessment; recognises the overwhelming support for these objectives of the Bill amongst disablement organisations; and calls on the Government to allow the Bill to reach the Statute Book without weakening its provisions.]

Does he appreciate that the Government's consultation document which invited a response received that response yesterday and that the overwhelming reaction of the people consulted and chosen by the Government supported the Bill in its present form? Will he use his considerable influence to ensure that the Bill is undiluted on report and is given the Third Reading which public opinion expects?

Mr. Biffen: I believe that we had this identical exchange a week ago——

Mr. Clarke: No, we did not.

Mr. Biffen: It sounded the same. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman understands that I am obliged to take a muted view about what happens upstairs in Standing Committee, but I note what the hon. Gentleman has said.

Sir Kenneth Lewis (Stamford and Spalding): My right hon. Friend may recall that from time to time he receives complaints about the leaking of Minister's speeches or Minister's statements. Of course that never happens, but he does receive complaints about it. Is he aware that I have a copy of the speech which the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) will make this afternoon? The deadline for release of that speech is 3.30 pm. The hon. Gentleman has not been in the Chamber and he is not in the Chamber now. Is that an abuse of the House, or is the hon. Gentleman simply being opimistic in believing that anybody will be bothered to read his speech?

Mr. Biffen: My hon. Friend raises an interesting point. I am stricken to know whether it has such novelty as to require consideration by the Procedure Committee or such outrage as to require examination by the Privileges Committee.

Mr. John Stokes (Halesowen and Stourbridge): In view of the physical attacks on Her Majesty's Ministers and Members of Parliament at universities and colleges during the past few months, will my right hon. Friend arrange a debate on that matter? Will he arrange for a statement to be made by the Secretary of State for Education and Science about discipline in universities and a statement by the Home Secretary about what assistance the police can give in such situations?

Mr. Biffen: It is obviously improper for me to suggest what may or may not be in order in the second of the debates chosen for Wednesday. I should have thought that any discussion on higher education could well cover the points raised by my hon. Friend as they are very pertinent.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels (Leicester, East): As a member of the General Synod, may I welcome, for a change, my right hon. Friend's business statement? Presumably he has read early-day motion 90, which has been signed by more than 90 Members.

[That this House, noting the strength of feelings on the issue of the liberalisation of Sunday trading laws, believes that any votes on this subjct should not be the subject of a whip.]

I assume that my right hon. Friend has also seen early-day motion 538.

[That this House calls upon the Government to seek to amend the Shops Bill [Lords] *so as to preserve the special character of Sunday and to have regard for the principles and conscience of those who would be affected by the total de-regulation of Sunday trading.]*

The motion, signed by my right hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (Sir A. Butler), calls for a traditional Sunday. Will he ensure that the debate in the House on the Second Reading of the Shops Bill is postponed for as long as possible? In looking at traditions in society, will he spare a thought for the people of Leicester who, for 50 years, have had alternating Conservative and Labour lords mayor each year? Suddenly, because there are 42 Labour council members, the Leicester people have been told they cannot have a Conservative lord mayor again. I hope that we will return to the traditional Sunday and to traditional ways of life, with alternating Conservative and Labour lords mayor each year.

Mr. Biffen: I must say that the traditional Sunday as observed on the Welsh border never gets entangled with mayoral politics. I am sorry that that should be so in Leicester. On the wider issue, may I say to my hon. Friend that, if I note with respect and almost reverence his points about Sunday, it is not to imply that there is any alteration whatsoever in Government policy. I must emphasise that whipping is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Patronage Secretary.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): Will my right hon. Friend be kind enough to read the eloquent speech of the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) during last night's European debate in which he set out, as only he could, the procedure whereby, when we considered the European Communities Bill, the House was able to look at the legislation line by line and to amend it bit by bit, because it transferred powers from the House of Commons to other institutions? As we shall shortly consider the Single European Act, does my right hon. Friend agree that it would be totally wrong not to allow an identical facility for amendment to the House when it is considering further transfers of powers?

Mr. Biffen: I shall certainly look at that point.

Teachers' Dispute (Scotland)

4.11 pm

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Malcolm Rifkind): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement about the teachers' dispute in Scotland.

This dispute has now run for nearly 19 months. The education of pupils is suffering increasing disruption, and continuation of the dispute can do nothing but harm. The Government have made repeated efforts to find an acceptable basis on which teachers and their employers could negotiate a settlement, yet formal negotiations have not even begun.

This situation is unsatisfactory from any point of view. It is also in marked contrast to events in England and Wales, where, as the House will be aware, an agreement for the current year has been reached and constructive negotiations on pay, pay structure and related matters are about to begin under the auspices of the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service. I very much regret that there is no sign of a similar initiative in Scotland. The statutory negotiating machinery has failed to function and it is therefore necessary to find some means of breaking the deadlock. I therefore propose to set up an independent committee of inquiry with wide-ranging terms of reference in an effort to bring this dispute to an end and establish a basis for the pay, conditions of service and management of the teaching profession in Scotland which is appropriate to the conditions of today.

The inquiry will accordingly be given the following terms of reference:

In the light of the Government's education objectives and the need to observe continuing public expenditure restraint in the interests of taxpayers and ratepayers, to consider:

(a) the duties, pay structure, pay levels and other conditions of service of school teachers, with particular regard to the need to recruit, retain and motivate teachers of the right quality, to address staffing difficulties in shortage areas such as mathematics and science and in particular localities, and to improve the promotion and career prospects of effective teachers, particularly experienced teachers of proven ability who remain in the classroom;

(b) teachers' duties and responsibilities and their definition in contracts of employment;

(c) the arrangements for managing schools and the teaching service;

(d) future arrangements for determining teachers' pay and structure, duties, responsibilities and conditions of service;

(e) the mechanisms for implementing and enforcing the above arrangements;

(f) in all respects the need to take into account what can be afforded;

and to make recommendations.

I hope to announce the names of the chairman and members shortly. The committee will be asked to begin work as soon as possible and to report by the end of the summer so that its findings can be taken into account in the 1986-87 pay settlement. The committee will take evidence from all interested parties and will give the teachers the hearing for which they have asked since the beginning of the dispute. I therefore expect—I believe I shall be supported by both sides of the House in this—that the teachers' unions will call off their industrial action forthwith and allow the life of the schools to return to normal. I hope that teachers and employers will in the meantime agree on a pay settlement for 1985-86 in the normal way while they await the committee's findings on the wider issues.

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): As one who complains when the Secretary of State or his Ministers make statements not to the House but outside the House, may I make it clear that I welcome the fact that the right hon. and learned Gentleman has made this important statement to the House, giving himself the opportunity to be asked and to answer questions and to recognise, as the right hon. and learned Gentleman obviously does, the serious damage that he and his Government have done to education in Scotland during the past 19 months. I thank the right hon. and learned Gentleman.

Is the right hon. and learned Gentleman aware that it is incredible that teachers asked in June 1984 for an independent committee of inquiry and that it took the right hon. and learned Gentleman's predecessor, the right hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Younger) until November 1984—six months—to respond by refusing that request? Is the right hon. and learned Gentleman aware that everything that has happened since is a direct consequence of the way in which the then Secretary of State dealt with the request? The right hon. Gentleman and the Government are entirely responsible for today's crisis in Scottish education.

How independent does the right hon. and learned Gentleman think the inquiry will be, in view of the fact that he has imposed two major restraints on it:

"the need to observe continuing public expenditure restraint"

—

applied by the Government at the beginning of the terms of reference—and

"the need to take into account what can be afforded"

at the end of the terms of reference? Who will tell the inquiry what can be afforded? At what stage during its deliberations will it be told? Surely the right hon. and learned Gentleman will accept that no inquiry can possibly be independent if it works within such tight constraints.

I fully accept that this is a wide-ranging inquiry. I welcome that fact. Will the Secretary of State take account of the wide-ranging nature and detail of the inquiry in determining the date by which it should report? Because of its wide-ranging nature, it may well be that the right hon. and learned Gentleman is asking too much of the inquiry in requiring it to report by the end of the summer. Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman assure me that the criterion for the inquiry will be that of thoroughness rather than speed? The inquiry's recommendations may well have to endure for a long time. I assure the right hon. and learned Gentleman that I, for one, would not want thoroughness to be made the victim of speed so that he can have his report quickly.

Is the Secretary of State aware that a great deal will depend on the chairmanship and membership of the inquiry? I plead with him to take fully into account the backgrounds of the people he decides to appoint as the chairman and members of the inquiry, in terms of their knowledge of education and wage negotiations. Bearing in mind that this dispute relates to the salary year beginning 1985, will the right hon. and learned Gentleman explain why the inquiry's pay recommendations will be implemented only from the pay year beginning 1986? Why will it not be backdated to the pay year 1985, the date of the dispute?

In suggesting to the teachers and management that they should negotiate a settlement for 1985-86, is the Secretary of State asking that this settlement should be negotiated within the current pay guidelines, or is he prepared to give

[Mr. Harry Ewing]

some of the £125 million about which he has been telling us for the past year to the local authorities to supplement a pay settlement for that year?

To put the minds of Conservative Members at ease, I make it clear that I welcome this inquiry and I welcome the courage that has been shown by the Secretary of State. However, I condemn most strongly the way in which the Government have handled this dispute, thereby seriously damaging the education prospects of our children. Contrary to what is believed, the Secretary of State looks a pretty sight standing on his head, and he should do it more often.

Mr. Rifkind: I thank the hon. Member for his welcome of my statement, although I regret that he has not yet echoed my call for the unions to withdraw all industrial action. I am sure that he will want to do that and I hope that he will find an early opportunity to do so.

Any fair-minded person would take the view that the damage caused to the education fabric of Scottish schools over the past 18 months must be the responsibility of those who have put the interests of the youngsters second to their industrial dispute. I think that the vast majority of Scottish people will believe that.

The hon. Member referred to the EIS demands over the past 18 months. He will be aware that it has been seeking an inquiry into pay. There will be one but, as I said in the statement, it is also appropriate that there should be an inquiry into conditions of employment, contracts of service and the whole range of issues referred to in my statement. That is not something that the Government alone believe; as the hon. Gentleman well knows, the education authorities, Labour-controlled as well as Conservative-controlled, have insisted that any outcome to this dispute must involve a package that covers conditions of service as well as pay. It is unfortunate that, up to today, the EIS has refused to acknowledge that fact. I believe that the whole spectrum of political opinion in Scotland has associated itself with that view, as has the hon. Member on a number of occasions.

The hon. Gentleman asked how independent the inquiry will be. The members of the inquiry will be free to make whatever recommendations they believe appropriate. He tried to take issue with the fact that the terms of reference refer to public expenditure restraint and the need to take into account the interest of taxpayers and ratepayers. The general public will not find that inappropriate or unreasonable. It is right, in determining the education objectives that we have at any given time, that we also take into account what can be afforded by the country at that time. I emphasise that the members of the inquiry will be free to make any recommendations that they feel are appropriate, having heard the evidence put to them, and that freedom will extend to all the matters within its consideration.

The hon. Gentleman asked whether the report of the inquiry had to be provided by the end of the summer. It is appropriate to try to work towards that target because teachers themselves wish an early outcome to this protracted matter. He also asked why we have not backdated any outcome or any recommendations of the inquiry to the year 1985-86. Even at this date, 19 months into the dispute, the unions have yet to put in a pay claim for 1985-86. Therefore, it would be inappropriate to take action such as that which he suggested.

I hope, if the hon. Member catches your eye, Mr. Speaker, at the end of the time allowed for questions, that he will use the opportunity to give Opposition support to the call that I have made for the unions to cease industrial action forthwith.

Several Hon. Members *rose——*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I again draw the attention of the House to the point that we have an important Opposition debate ahead of us, but only half a day for it, and a large number of right hon. and hon. Members wish to take part. I shall allow questions on this statement to continue for 20 minutes.

Mr. Roy Jenkins (Glasgow, Hillhead): I welcome this statement. It will now clearly be right for the unions to take all action to bring the schools back to normal while the inquiry is going on, in so far as the position can be restored to normal after the damage that I fear has been done. The right hon. and learned Gentleman did not attempt to explain in his first answer why 19 months was allowed to go by. Without wishing to go into calendar competitiveness, my hon. Friend the Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye (Mr. Kennedy) and I put precisely those proposals for a wide-ranging inquiry to the right hon. and learned Gentleman's predecessor in October 1984. What is the reason for having allowed this delay and the damage to Scottish education over the past 19 months?

Mr. Rifkind: I welcome the right hon. Gentleman's welcome for the statement and in particular his support for my call that the unions should withdraw all industrial action and allow the schools to return to normality. As to the other matters, repeated attempts were made both by my right hon. Friend the previous Secretary of State and other interested parties to get the parties together to begin the negotiations. Unfortunately, right up to this day, the EIS has refused to become involved in negotiations. It is because the existing negotiating machinery has been seen to be ineffective in helping to resolve the dispute that it is necessary for Government to intervene to break the deadlock.

Sir Hector Monro (Dumfries): In view of the failure of the Scottish joint negotiating committee to find a solution to this problem I warmly welcome the investigation into pay and conditions of service and structure of teaching. I hope that the teachers will also accept this package. Will my right hon. and learned Friend make it a condition of acceptance of this package that the teachers stop any further disruption of education in Scotland?

Mr. Rifkind: An inquiry is to take place, and it is not subject to the approval of any particular quarter. However, I think that the public in Scotland will find it unthinkable that, while an inquiry is going on into pay and other matters involved, such as conditions of service, teachers will take strike action, boycott exams or carry out other acts of disruption against the youngsters in their care.

Mr. Norman Hogg (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth): Will the Secretary of State give assurances that any new machinery for determining the salaries and conditions of

service applied to teachers will fully recognise the teachers' organisations and will not remove or diminish the teachers' right to belong to a trade union?

Mr. Rifkind: The inquiry is free to make any recommendations that it wishes, and the Government will then have to consider the recommendations. The Government attach great importance to the rights of teachers to belong to trade unions, and I cannot conceive of any circumstances in which that right would be changed.

Mr. Alex Fletcher (Edinburgh, Central): I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend on the robust and realistic nature of the terms of reference for the inquiry. Will he ensure that parents are also robustly represented on the committee and that those teachers, unions that do not now cease industrial action are barred from the review?

Mr. Rifkind: The inquiry will be free to take evidence from such quarters as it thinks appropriate. I consider it desirable that the individuals serving on the inquiry will be appointed on the basis of their individual contributions and not necessarily in regard to any representative qualities that they might have. One will take into account the background and experience of the individuals concerned.

Mr. Willie W. Hamilton (Fife, Central): Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman understand that I very much welcome his statement and that I appeal to the teachers to end their industrial dispute, upon one condition? Their morale is at the lowest ebb that I can remember. Unless and until the Secretary of State says that he will treat the teachers' pay claim for 1985-86 as generously as the judges, admirals and the rest were treated, I fear that there will still be difficulties ahead for him. Does he understand that in the light of the terms of reference many people think that the timetable is very tight?

Mr. Rifkind: I welcome the hon. Gentleman's call to the teachers to cease their industrial disruption. As for his qualification, I have to emphasise to him that the Educational Institute of Scotland and the other unions have insisted all along that they have no desire to put in a claim because they wish there to be an inquiry that will look into these matters and make long-term recommendations. It is appropriate, therefore, that the inquiry should proceed on the basis that I have outlined.

Mrs. Anna McCurley (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): Will my right hon. and learned Friend accept my congratulations upon his excellent plan for an inquiry, which is worthy of Solomon? It should satisfy employers, parents and all teachers who wish the strike action to be ended and the profession to be held in the highest esteem and those who have the best interests of the pupils at heart. It is particularly encouraging to those areas that have been subjected to wholly unfair targeting. Those who reject this excellent inquiry will be judged accordingly.

Mr. Rifkind: I thank my hon. Friend for her kind words. All I would say is that Solomon is a slightly better comparison than I have been used to in recent weeks.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): Will the Secretary of State accept that, although we welcome the fact that he has decided to set up an independent review, we regret very deeply that it has taken him 18 months to do it? I notice that his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science is at his elbow, like the "hoodie craw"? Is it not an amazing coincidence that this offer is being made just two days after the English settlement? Why could not the Scottish Office have settled this at the beginning? A settlement could have been made then. I echo the points that have been made earlier in the light of what has been proposed. I hope that the teachers will call off their action and that the Government will honour the motivation behind it and ensure that they get a fair settlement this year and a properly supported outcome of this review at the end of the day.

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman's comments were typical of a Liberal intervention: qualifying every remark in order that it might not sound too significant to any section of the community. I believe that the Scottish public will welcome this committee as a necessary and essential way of ensuring that the interests of Scottish youngsters are well protected.

Mr. John Corrie (Cunninghame, North): Will my right hon. and learned Friend accept that I welcome his statement? Will he also accept that I agree with the hon. Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Ewing) that this is a very wide-ranging inquiry, which will affect the shape of education for a very long time to come? Therefore it should not be rushed. It should be got right. In the meantime, will my right hon. and learned Friend try to get the two parties together to provide some advance for the teachers, who really need it?

Mr. Rifkind: I thank my hon. Friend for his welcome. I have no desire to see a rushed inquiry. Naturally, we shall reflect and take into account the views of the members of the inquiry. We are all anxious to ensure a suitable outcome. However, we hope that the inquiry will also take into account the desire of both the education authorities and the unions that this dispute, which has already been very protracted, should not be extended too far as a result of the inquiry.

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West): Does the Secretary of State concede, in his wisdom, that this approach on his behalf would not have happened had the teachers not remained united in their view and if their unions had not remained fairly obdurate in pursuit of their claim? I wish to probe him a little upon the nature of the inquiry. If I heard him aright, the Secretary of State said that the inquiry would be fully independent and would be able to come forward with any recommendation. Will that include the possibility of an interim report on pay alone because of the need to allay fears and suspicions about the Secretary of State's restraint upon the terms of reference — which, as far as I can gather, are his terms of reference and not terms of reference agreed with the teacher unions? Can he assure me that if the body concerned wanted to come forward with an interim report on pay he would not place any impediments in its way? Moreover, is it the Secretary of State's intention to appoint as members of this inquiry any assessors from the Scottish Office?

Mr. Rifkind: I do not see any likelihood of assessors from the Scottish Office being appointed, although the Scottish Office will undoubtedly wish to give evidence to the inquiry. As for an interim report, along with all the education authorities the Government take the view that

[Mr. Rifkind]

the ultimate resolution of this dispute has to be in the form of a package covering conditions of service and contracts of employment as well as pay. Therefore, an interim report on pay would be as inappropriate as an interim report on conditions of service.

Mr. Douglas: But it is not independent.

Mr. Rifkind: It is indeed independent, because the members of the inquiry are being requested to make recommendations on all of these matters. Quite naturally, we expect them to make these recommendations at the same time.

Mr. Albert McQuarrie (Banff and Buchan): As one who has supported the teachers in their demand to be brought into line with the present salary structures of other professions, I welcome my right hon. and learned Friend's efforts to try to bring this very sad dispute to an end because of the effect that it has had on parents, teachers and pupils. When my right hon. and learned Friend forms this committee of investigation does he intend to look at the need to have representatives of the teaching profession on it to ensure that their point of view about the demands that they have already made can be fully aired?

Mr. Rifkind: The point of view of the teaching profession and the education authorities will be primarily made by the evidence that each of them submits to the inquiry. I said earlier that I expect the members of the inquiry to be appointed primarily in regard to the personal contribution that they can make to the work of the inquiry.

Mr. Michael J. Martin (Glasgow, Springburn): Is the Secretary of State aware that in at least one school in my constituency there was a long industrial dispute prior to the present industrial dispute? This means that the education of many children in my constituency, an area of high unemployment, will be damaged. What steps will the Secretary of State take to try to ensure that these children catch up with their education?

Mr. Rifkind: Obviously we are all very concerned that that should be brought about. No doubt the Strathclyde education authority will be the most appropriate body to take detailed action in regard to a particular school.

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): Although the Secretary of State's statement indicates a belated shift in the Government's attitude, will he admit that his claim that he is giving the teachers an independent hearing, for which they have been asking all along, is simply not true? His inquiry incorporates not just pay but conditions of service and contracts of employment. It is not exactly independent if at the outset it is placed in the finanial straitjacket of the Government's economic policy to cut public expenditure, particularly on education. Is the Secretary of State not aware of the obvious fact that the Government will get the education system for which they are prepared to pay? Will he come clean, therefore, and tell us whether at the very outset he is ruling out a restoration of the pay levels that were awarded by Houghton to the teachers over a decade ago?

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman is wrong in one respect and right in the other. He is wrong to suggest that the inquiry will be involved in some financial straitjacket. It will be asked to recommend what the pay of a teacher should be now, and in particular to take into account the various duties and responsibilities of teachers when coming to a view and making a recommendation on that matter. The hon. Gentleman is certainly right when he says that this inquiry goes significantly beyond the kind of inquiry that the unions have requested. It includes pay but it also deals with the other matters that the hon. Gentleman correctly mentioned. That is something that I believe a wide spectrum of opinion in Scotland has always maintained should be the case.

Mr. Michael Forsyth (Stirling): Does my right hon. and learned Friend recognise that parents are absolutely sick to death of this dispute and that his statement will be widely welcomed? I hope that it will be noted by parents throughout Scotland that the Opposition Front Bench spokesman, the hon. Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Ewing), is more concerned with dotting the i's and crossing the t's in the interests of the Educational Institute of Scotland than in welcoming this agreement and asking the EIS and the other unions to call off their action in the interests of pupils and parents.

Mr. Rifkind: I think that the House is still waiting with interest to know whether the Opposition will join my call and, indeed, the call of the Liberals and other parties, for the unions now to call off their industrial action.

Mr. Jim Craigen (Glasgow, Maryhill): Since the independent inquiry team will be operating within the straitjacket that has been designed by the Government, why has it taken 18 months for them to concede this inquiry? Will the Secretary of State give a guarantee today that he will honour the financial recommendations that the inquiry team makes, and that that will be reflected in the rate support grant to education authorities?

Mr. Rifkind: I repeat that the inquiry will be free to make any recommendations on conditions of service, contracts of employment and pay which it thinks appropriate. Not only we but the education authorities and the unions will wish to see the whole package of recommendations that it may make before coming to any conclusions as to what then should take place.

Mr. Gordon Wilson (Dundee, East), I welcome the initiative the Secretary of State has taken and hope that the Scottish teachers will give it serious consideration. I wish to suggest three things to the right hon. and learned Gentleman. First, in view of the fact that teachers have been without an increase in pay for a considerable time and have suffered a depreciation in their salary levels in relative terms, will he make a generous cash offer now because, considering the fact that this is not a pay review but one relating to pay and conditions, such an offer would be useful? Can he also give attention to the question of consultation on the appointment of the independent committee so that the teachers' representatives know that this is not to be just a collection of friends of the Scottish Office? Lastly, can the Secretary of State give a better reply than that which he gave to the hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) in relation to relativities and variations of pay levels? I think that such a statement, given the two inhibitions in his own statement, will go a long way to allay the fears and suspicions that many teachers could have that this is a con and not a serious offer.

Mr. Rifkind: There is no question of it being anything other than a serious contribution. If that were not so, I would be indicating constraints on the kind of recommendations that the inquiry will be free to make. I emphasise again that the inquiry will be free to make any recommendations — including recommendations on pay — which it believes to be appropriate. It will hear evidence from the various quarters and come to its own conclusions as to what it believes the pay and pay structures for Scottish teachers should be.

Mr. Barry Henderson (Fife, North-East): Has my right hon. and learned Friend noticed that the Opposition parties have begun to draw attention to the practical difficulties that arise from an independent review embracing both pay and conditions? Is it not the case that if the suggestion made by the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) last February had been adopted and the Scottish joint negotiating committee has commissioned an independent review, some of the problems would have been overcome? Will he now ensure that the inquiry will go forward as speedily as is practicable and that in the meantime there will be urgent negotiations to determine a pay settlement for the last two years?

Mr. Rifkind: With regard to 1985-86 I very much hope that the unions and local authorities will get together to agree a settlement. A settlement has already been obtained for England and Wales for that year. There is nothing to stop an agreement for Scotland being reached. The inquiry will, of course, make recommendations on future pay levels. It would not be appropriate for me to pre-empt the outcome of the inquiry in the way suggested to me by some hon. Gentlemen.

Mr. Hugh Brown (Glasgow, Provan): Many of us recognise that this is not the place to conduct negotiations but, since we will be meeting the EIS in Perth tomorrow, I for one should like to be able to urge the withdrawal of industrial action. As the Secretary of State says that there will be no pay claim accepted for 1985-86, is he ruling out the review body going back to 1985-86?

Mr. Rifkind: As to 1985-86, it is for the unions to make a claim to the employers and for the employers and unions to negotiate and reach a conclusion. It has already happened elsewhere in the United Kingdom, and ought now to happen for Scotland. I welcome the hon. Gentleman's desire to call upon the unions to withdraw their industrial action so that the inquiry can take evidence and make its recommendations in an atmosphere conducive to the best interests of Scottish education.

Mr. Michael Hirst (Strathkelvin and Bearsden): Can I assure my right hon. and learned Friend that his initiative will be widely welcomed, not least in Strathkelvin and Bearsden, which has had more than its fair share of disruptive action? Is he aware that parents, public and most reasonable teachers will be reassured that duties and responsibilities are to be examined since it cannot be right that a teacher on full pay can boycott examination procedures? Does he agree that, if the EIS does not call off its industrial action and disruption of Scottish education, it will have rightly earned the condemnation of the people of Scotland?

Mr. Rifkind: I agree with my hon. Friend. I think that the vast majority of Scottish teachers, who are moderate and reasonable people, will expect their union leadership to indicate that they should now return to normal working in the schools so that the inquiry can proceed in the proper atmosphere. I repeat, I still wait for Opposition Members to make a similar call.

Mr. Ron Brown (Edinburgh, Leith): Surely the "Governor-General" will accept that a public inquiry is simply a device to get the Government off the hook, bearing in mind that very shortly the Tory party will suffer another disaster in the regional elections. Surely the point is that, unless the teachers see the colour of the Government's money, they should continue with their industrial action because that is the only effective action they can take at the end of the day.

Mr. Rifkind: I think that the hon. Gentleman, by his latter comments, makes it quite clear that he is not the slightest bit interested in Scottish education and simply wishes to be a troublemaker.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): Will the Secretary of State accept the recommendations of the inquiry?

Mr. Rifkind: When the inquiry makes its recommendations, not only the Government but the unions and the education authorities will wish to consider the whole range of the recommendations, and naturally we shall wish to give them very great consideration. We are not setting up the inquiry purely as a cosmetic exercise. We will naturally wish, as will the unions and the education authorities, to give the closest scrutiny and considerable weight to the recommendations of such an inquiry.

Mr. David Marshall (Glasgow, Shettleston): Should the inquiry recommend a retrospective pay award, will the Secretary of State accept such a recommendation?

Mr. Rifkind: I have already indicated that we envisage that the recommendations of the inquiry should take effect from 1986-87 onwards. I think that it is appropriate to look at it on that basis, particularly as the unions themselves have not put in a claim and have indicated that they want an inquiry to look to the future and not simply to the past.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): Can the Secretary of State take note of the resolute support given to the teachers by the vast majority of parents throughout this long, miserable dispute? With that in mind, can he confirm that this is a genuinely independent review? If it is without any strings attached, all of us will join in calling for an end to the action.

Mr. Rifkind: Many parents have had sympathy with the teachers' claim for higher pay, but very few parents have had sympathy with the teachers' tactics of disrupting the education of their children. I am delighted to hear the hon. Gentleman's concluding remarks. I only wish that, on this occasion, he had been able to make them not from the Back Benches but from the Opposition Dispatch box.

Mr. Martin J. O'Neill (Clackmannan): Will the Minister accept that this conciliatory gesture will be welcomed by many people in Scotland? Since, from the teachers' point of view, the core of the dispute has been about pay, is he aware that if he were to indicate that meaningful negotiations could take place about the last year of pay it would be a useful start and would help the teachers in trying to reach a satisfactory end to their industrial action.

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman's own Labour-controlled education authority in Central region and, indeed, other Labour regions, have indicated that they believe that the resolution of the dispute must include a package covering matters other than pay. He ought to discuss these matters with his colleagues on the regional council.

Consolidated Fund Bill

Mr. Speaker: I have a short statement to make about arrangements for the debate on the motion for the Adjournment which will follow the passing of the Consolidated Fund Bill on Thursday 13 March.

Members should submit their subjects to my office not later than 9 am on Wednesday 12 March. A list showing the subjects and the times will be published later that day. Normally the time allotted will not exceed one and half hours, but I propose to exercise a discretion to allow one or two debates to continue for rather longer, up to a maximum of three hours.

Where identical or similar subjects have been entered by different Members whose names are drawn in the ballot, only the first name will be shown on the list. As some debates may not last the full time allotted to them, it is the responsibility of Members to keep in touch with developments if they are not to miss their turn.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &C.

Ordered,

That the draft Broadcasting (Local Sound Broadcast Programme Contractors' Additional Payments) Order 1986 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c. —*[Mr. Sainsbury.]*

Opposition Day

[9TH ALLOTTED DAY]

Plight of the Elderly

Mr. Speaker: As we have started rather late, I appeal for short speeches from the Front and Back Benches. I have selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

4.49 pm

Mr. Michael Meacher (Oldham, West): I beg to move,

That this House, bearing in mind the cruel hardship suffered by hundreds of thousands of elderly people in the harshest winter for 40 years resulting in a 10-fold increase in deaths from hypothermia, condemns the Government for its total failure to protect pensioners throughout the second coldest February on record: deplores the Government's inactivity in the face of the manifest breakdown of the exceptionally severe weather payments system; and calls upon the Government to ensure that the most vulnerable elderly and disabled people receive adequate income to keep warm and healthy during the remainder of this and subsequent winters.

It is often said that the measure of civilisation in a society lies in how it treats its elderly people, and that is a yardstick which the Tory Government, with their record, must rue. We have just been through a long period of intense and exceptional cold; indeed, the coldest February for 40 years and the second chilliest this century. *[Interruption.]* There are some very childish Members in the House. I thought that the hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) was a headmaster. I should have thought that he would have learnt to behave differently from schoolchildren.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North) *rose*——

Mr. Meacher: No, I shall not give way.

All over Britain easterly winds have kept temperatures far below freezing—down even to minus 15 deg, and to minus 20 deg in many places. Deaths from hypothermia have run into thousands. In last winter's cold snap, which was less cold than the past four weeks have been, there were 46,000 more deaths than in summer—an increase of 16,000 over the previous mild winter. Therefore, it would not be surprising if this winter there were about 60,000 cold-related deaths.

Even the Government's own figures—which grossly understate death due to the cold, because hypothermia-related deaths are classified separately as due to pneumonia, bronchitis or heart attack—tell the same story—that the death rate from hypothermia was 10 times higher last year than in 1978. They also show that in the first half of 1985 hypothermia killed 20 per cent.——

The Secretary of State for Social Services (Mr. Norman Fowler) *rose*——

Mr. Meacher: I shall give way in a moment.

The figures also show that in the first half of 1985 hypothermia killed 20 per cent. more pensioners than in the whole of 1984. It is all too likely that in the first two months of 1986 hypothermia killed more pensioners than in any comparable period this century. In fact, I have today received figures from the Office of Population Censuses

and Surveys which confirm those suspicions. They reveal that in the first three weeks of February 1986, 6,011 more people died than in the same period two years ago. They show clearly that the death toll from the severity of this winter has been over 2,000 a week greater than has happened previously, even in winter time. That is a clear measure of the Government's failure to protect pensioners from the ravages of this exceptional cold.

Mr. Fowler: If I heard what the hon. Gentleman said, he alleged that there had been a tenfold increase between 1978 and 1985 in deaths from hypothermia. That is completely without foundation. What is the basis upon which the hon. Gentleman makes that charge?

Mr. Meacher: I make that charge on the basis of the figures which have been widely provided, which show that in 1977-78 just over 40 persons died in those weeks. I agree that Government figures, including the Labour Government's figures, grossly understate the number of deaths from hypothermia, for the reasons that I have given. That is true under all Governments, and it is certainly true under this one, but, on the same statistical basis, 415 people died in the first half of 1985——

Mr. Fowler: I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman again, but it is important that the House understands this. The figures that the hon. Gentleman has quoted are on an entirely different statistical basis. In other words, he has compared the position before 1979, which was on one statistical basis, with the position after 1979, which was on another. That was made clear in the parliamentary reply that has been given. If the hon. Gentleman looks at that reply he will see that the worst year was 1979, and the winter months of that year. What the hon. Gentleman has just charged is completely untrue.

Mr. Meacher: What were the figures on the same basis for the period 1970 to 1978? What I am saying is that there has been a considerable increase, and this year the increase will be substantially greater than for any previous year. Does the Secretary of State deny that? Does he deny that in the past three weeks the number of deaths has been substantially higher than we have registered at probably any time since the war for a similar period?

Mr. Fowler: The hon. Gentleman is talking about additional deaths from hypothermia. We clearly have no accurate figures on that. What we have are figures which go back from 1985 to 1975, which make it clear that the worst period was the winter of 1979.

Mr. Meacher: I am sorry that the Secretary of State says that he does not have the figures. Perhaps his office has not given him the up-to-date figures. I have been given the figures for the number of deaths in the first three weeks of February 1986 compared with the number of deaths in the first three weeks of 1984, which was a "more normal winter".

There have been 6,000 more deaths than normal in the past three weeks. That suggests a mortality rate 2,000 every week higher than has previously been experienced in winter. While not all of those will be due to hypothermia, it would be reasonable to suppose that the great majority are deaths which have been precipitated by the extreme cold and the Government's failure to protect pensioners and others from that cold.

Mr. Fowler *rose*——

Mr. Meacher: No, I shall not give way.

Mr. Fowler *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. This is a short debate. The Secretary of State will be seeking to catch my eye shortly. Perhaps he can deal with these matters when he makes his own speech.

Mr. Meacher: In the face of this national disaster, the Government have been conspicuous by their inactivity. Responsibility for deciding whether exceptionally severe weather payments should be made was hived off to local Department of Health and Social Security officers, but no guidance has been given as to what constitutes severity in exceptionally severe weather.

Up to 10 days ago, during a period when any fool could have said that the weather was exceptionally severe, only a third of Britain's DHSS offices officially acknowledged the fact. That number suddenly rose to 80 per cent. only last week, and it is difficult to resist the conclusion that that had something to do with the Opposition's choice to make it into a central issue for this debate this week.

The Government have still refused to launch any national advertising, so the vast majority of eligible claimants are still unaware of their entitlements and the result has been pathetic. In Barry in south Wales, which I happened to visit last Friday, an area which had been designated on 7 February, only one claim had been processed in the course of the previous three weeks, paying out precisely 47p.

There has been a great deal of talk about exceptionally severe weather. I sometimes think that the real problem is an exceptionally severe Government. The human consequences of this are incalculable. Every day the media have carried stories of elderly people who have frozen to death in their own homes, such as Mrs. Edith Davis aged 83. Her Blackpool home was heated by only a two-bar fire. It was so cold when she was found that thermometers were useless to measure her temperature.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge) *rose*——

Mr. Meacher: No, I shall not give way. I want to make a bit more progress. I have been asked to make a short speech and I intend to do so. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will have an opportunity to take part in the debate.

The problem has arisen not just because of the extreme cold. Part of the reason is that by deliberate Government policy the price of fuel has been kept too high for the poor to afford. Gas and electricity prices, and water charges, have all risen too fast because the Government have used them as an easy way of raising extra income. Even if special benefit payments are made, they do not compensate. The end product is overcrowded hospitals and pennywise pensioners freezing in underheated homes. That is not muddling through; it is malign neglect.

A month ago seven American astronauts were lost in an accident and the whole world was distraught. Yet 700 British pensioners die of hypothermia and the Government, Pontius Pilate-like, wash their hands and walk away. There is something sickening about a society where jobs in the City are changing hands among 25-year-olds at fancy six-figure salaries while pensioners have to make a choice between warmth and food and are given only a 1 per cent. pension increase. There is something nauseating about a Chancellor planning £1·5 billion tax cuts in a fortnight's time while pensioners are fobbed off

[Mr. Meacher]

with an insulting 40p, which would not buy more than a couple of lumps of coal. It is shameful that in Britain, the country in western Europe most richly endowed with energy resources, more pensioners die of hypothermia than in any other Western country.

Mrs. Edwina Currie (Derbyshire, South) *rose*——

Mr. Meacher: There is more than a twinge of rank hypocrisy——

Mrs. Currie *rose*——

Hon. Members: Sit down.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has made it clear that he is not giving way.

Mr. Meacher: There is more than a twinge of rank hypocrisy about the Prime Minister claiming that the Government are spending £140 million on heating allowances——

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West) *rose*——

Mr. Meacher: —when the same Government have cut pensions by £5,500 million since 1979 by breaking the link with earnings in the uprating of pensions.

Mr. Nicholls *rose*——

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): The hon. Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) has three more jobs.

Mr. Meacher: If Labour's formula had been carried on by the Government, every single pensioner would now get £4 a week more in pension, and all married pensioners would get £6·50 per week more. It is irrefutable that if such pensions had been paid over the last two or three months thousands of pensioners who have died would be alive today.

Mr. Hind *rose*——

Mr. Meacher: No doubt the hon. Gentleman will be able to speak later, if he wishes.

We can, and will, go further. Our policy is to maintain the state earnings-related pension scheme and not to emasculate it, as the Government intend. Under a Labour Government, SERPS will within the next 13 years double the pension in real terms. Under Labour policy, pensioners will never again have to make a choice between warmth and food.

We recognise, however, that over the next decade periods of intense cold will continue to require significant extra aid for the most vulnerable. We view exceptionally severe weather payments as a vehicle which will probably never provide adequate aid to those in need at the time they need it. Last year's system depended on Meterological Office readings round the country by arbitrary associations. They have been declared illegal by social security tribunals. This year's system, after the change that the Government made, depends on arbitrary decisions by local officers, without national guidance about when, how, or at what level payment should be made. Far too few people in grave need have received help. The help has come too late and the amounts paid would be a farce, if the situation were not so tragic. Because the payments are limited to those on supplementary benfit, they rule out many other poor pensioners and widows.

The Government may make something of the fact that the weather is now less cold, but the bills have not yet come in. Even now not enough has been done to reassure pensioners who are afraid to turn on the heating because they may get into debt. It is a bad system that encourages people to get into debt. Pensioners who pay their bills do not get help. The present system creates particular hardship for those who have "pay as you go" slot meters, or who use coal or paraffin. They have to prove that the money would otherwise have been spent on, for example, food or clothing. It is diabolical that in order to get help pensioners are subjected to such a system.

For all those reasons, we reject the system as a cruel deceit for those who need urgent help in the bitter cold. Our policy has two aims. First, there is an urgent priority to organise a national programme for better home insulation. One indictment of current policy is that in Sweden and Canada, which suffer much colder winter weather, far fewer of the elderly population die of hypothermia. A campaign for home insulation makes sense on every count. It is a labour intensive operation, which would provide a big increase in jobs, at a time when building workers are suffering one of the highest rates of unemployment of any occupation. Home insulation would be energy saving. Once it was installed the consumer would pay less for heating. Above all, it would play a key role in reducing hypothermia.

Secondly, despite the much bigger pensions that we would pay, significantly increased help must be given to the most vulnerable in the cold winter months. If an extra £5 per week were paid automatically to all pensioners on supplementary benefit, it would cost £8·25 million a week. If we included also, as we believe we should, another 1 million pensioners and widows with resources slightly above the supplementary benefit qualification, but who are still in real need and who are unable to warm themselves adequately, that would cost another £5 million a week. If that aid were given every week from mid-December to the beginning of March, it would cost about £130 million. The investment of that sum each winter is the least that those who have worked for the country in peacetime and who, when the call came, fought for the country in wartime, have a right to expect from a civilised society. That is our pledge.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Will my hon. Friend comment on the news that was reported in *The Guardian* earlier this week, that Liberal and Conservative councillors in the London borough of Hammersmith and Fulham had decided to sell an old people's home, known as Stewart's Lodge, together with the pensioners within that home, to a private company? They have been stopped from doing that only by the positive action of Mr. Derek Prentice, the leader of the Labour group on that council, who has saved those people from the clutches of private enterprise.

Mr. Meacher: I saw that report in *The Guardian* yesterday. That proposal to sell off not only the home but the 29 people in it as a single job lot was typical of the privatisation initiatives taken by the Government. I also noticed that the proposal was voted for by Tory and Liberal councillors.

Mr. Nicholls *rose*——

Mr. Meacher: In a debate on the plight of the elderly that shows the attitude of the Government, who regard old people and their welfare simply as a means of increasing profit.

Mr. Nicholls *rose*——

Mr. Meacher: I hope that those who will uniquely have an opportunity in the coming weeks to vote on the matter will take account of that.

We have given our pledge. Never again must this country endure a winter when the poor and the elderly freeze to death for want of help with heating bills. That is our objective. We will not only will the end; we will also will the means.

5.9 pm

The Secretary of State for Social Services (Mr. Norman Fowler): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof,

"recognises the difficulties faced by elderly people during periods of severe weather; commends the Government's record of paying higher retirement pensions to more pensioners than ever before, of increasing the supplementary benefit scale rates, of providing for the first time automatic heating additions of £2·20 per week for all supplementary pensioner households over 65 years of age, and of introducing a higher rate of £5·45 per week for such pensioners over 85 years of age; notes with approval that payments under the exceptionally severe weather scheme are now available throughout mainland Britain; and observes that the present relative stability in fuel prices demonstrates the value of firm control over inflation and is in stark contrast to the increase of 170 per cent. in electricity prices over the period of the Labour Government between 1974 and 1979."

I agree with the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) that this is a profoundly important subject and that policy must match its importance. I entirely reject, however, the type of speech that he made, which, even on his record, is one of the worst that he has ever made. I also entirely reject the charges that he levelled at the Government. The Government are now directing record resources to heating additions. In real terms we are directing £140 million more than the Labour Government. The facts make it crystal clear that the Government have given more help through heating additions, that we have given it more effectively and that we have directed it in such a way as to ensure that it goes to the people who need it most.

As we saw again today, nothing has been more disgraceful than the way in which the human problems of the elderly have been exploited by the Opposition during the past few weeks. No charge has been too extravagant. No care has been taken about the fears that have been aroused or about the information that has been employed. We had a profound example of that today. I should like to give two examples of what I mean.

On Tuesday, the Leader of the Opposition asked my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister:

"Why . . . has our death rate during the winter been three times that of the United States of America and four times that of Sweden?"—[*Official Report*, 4 March 1986; Vol. 93, c. 149.]

We have checked on that statement, and for what period the latest international figures are available. The latest evidence that we have was given in the November issue of *Health Trends*. It did indeed show that the increase in the death rate in winter in the United Kingdom—not of course the death rate itself—was higher than in the United States or Sweden, but the period taken for the international comparison was the three-year period 1976 to 1979, and for the crucial winter months of those years the Opposition were in power. It seems to me to be an exercise in cynical trivialisation to suggest that the problem of winter deaths is somehow the responsibility of this Government and that the problem has not arisen before.

The second example comes from the speech by the hon. Member for Oldham, West and from the motion, which condemns the Government on the basis of suffering during the winter

"resulting in a 10-fold increase in deaths from hypothermia"

There is absolutely no evidence of a tenfold increase. The only basis on which that statement could have been made is a total misreading of figures which compare 1975 with 1985, but those figures were on an entirely different statistical basis.

What is worse is that any comparison of the past 10 years—1975 to 1985—shows that it was during the winter of 1979 when most deaths in England and Wales with mention of hypothermia occurred. In the first three months of 1979, there were 585 deaths with mention of hypothermia in England and Wales. That is more than in any year in the period 1975 to 1985, and in those winter months of 1979 the Labour party was in power.

My fundamental objection to the Opposition's case is that they are devaluing the argument and have no concept of what the real debate is about. It is not just about spending money, and it is not just about hypothermia, serious and tragic though that is. The issues go far wider and are infinitely more difficult and complex than the hon. Gentleman has even hinted at.

It has been a long established trend in Britain that, when the weather is exceptionally cold, there have been increases in the number of deaths from or associated with hypothermia; but there is also the wider problem of the substantial increase in the number of deaths from all causes which are associated with the winter—strokes, coronary heart disease and chest infection.

As it happens, matters have improved. The excess mortality associated with winter has diminished. I take the example of men. In the period 1959 to 1963, the average excess was 27 per cent. In the 1970s, the average excess was 16 per cent., and in the period 1982 to 1984, the average excess was 13 per cent. There has been an improvement, although I am the first to say that we cannot be satisfied until the figures have been brought down even further.

The evidence is that—as the 1976 to 1979 figures show—circumstances in Britain are worse than in some other countries which have severer climates, and the reasons for that are anything but clear. There appears to be no substantial difference between people living in institutions, such as old people's homes, and those living at home. Central heating does not seem to be the crucial factor. No correlation has been found between the percentage of households with central heating in nine different regions of England and the seasonal variation in mortality. Nor is the problem concerned solely with the elderly; it applies to virtually all age groups.

This is self-evidently a serious and complex issue. It is not remotely an issue just of social security. A whole range of other issues are involved, not least the attitudes which society takes towards the problems of elderly people and how it reacts and responds to cold weather.

I also accept that proper social security provision is fundamentally important in enabling elderly people to cope with severe weather. This is where I return to the remarks of the hon. Member for Oldham, West. If the

[Mr. Norman Fowler]

debate on social security is to be informed and responsible, it is also important that the true background is well understood.

There are three points on social security that I want to emphasise. The first concerns pensions. In November, pensions went up by £4 a week for a married couple and £2·50 for a single person. That was an increase of 7 per cent. when inflation was 5·5 per cent. In the interim July uprating, the retired couple's pension will rise to £61·95 a week. That compares with £31·20 per week in November 1978. In the autumn, the Government will announce a further increase, to be paid from April 1987. In other words, there will be three upratings in 16 months. That means that this Government have more than honoured their pledge to maintain the value of pensions by protecting them against inflation.

In fact, at November 1985 prices, the pension was worth £3 a week more in real terms than it was in November 1978. During the same period, the number of pensioners has risen from 8·5 million to 9·5 million. That means that we are paying higher pensions and paying them to more pensioners than ever before. Spending on retirement pensions has thus risen from £7·5 billion in 1978-79 to £16·5 billion in 1985-86—a rise of £2·5 billion in real terms.

Mr. Donald Stewart (Western Isles): In spite of those figures, does the right hon. Gentleman not think it odd that our pensions are below average wages, unlike pensions in Scandinavian countries and among our European partners? Our pensioners have a far smaller cut of national wages.

Mr. Fowler: I understand the point made by the right hon. Gentleman. However, I would say that, despite what has been a difficult economic period throughout western Europe, we have not only increased the real value of pensions but paid those pensions to about 1 million more pensioners than previously. We have also done one more vital thing for pensioners in this country. It is not enough simply to say that we shall increase pensions. Inflation must also be kept under control if the security of pensioners is to be fully assured. That was the crucial failure of the previous Labour Government. During the five years of the Labour Government, inflation rose by 112 per cent. Not only were savings destroyed, but the value of any increase in pensions was eaten away at an alarming rate month by month. Therefore, the control of inflation is crucial, and that is one of the Government's most important achievements for pensioners and all those on fixed incomes.

Secondly, I want to deal with the position of pensioners requiring supplementary benefit. The most important additional help that goes to pensioners on the lowest incomes is the regular guaranteed income that is provided week by week. The supplementary benefit scale rates are aimed at meeting normal living expenses, including heating. The higher, long-term rate of support goes automatically to pensioners in recognition of their extra needs. The real value of the scale rates has risen by 6 per cent. between 1978 and 1985.

Thirdly, in addition to the regular help that is provided through supplementary pensions, there are specific further heating additions. As the House will know, they are received by those who need extra warmth because of age, ill health or disability or whose homes are exceptionally difficult to heat.

The Government have made heating additions automatically payable to supplementary pensioners who are householders and aged 65 or more. The result is that over 90 per cent. of all supplementary pensioners now get a heating addition, compared with only about 70 per cent. in 1978. Between 1978 and 1985 the basic rate of heating addition has gone up by about 20 per cent. in real terms.

The higher rate of heating addition of £5·45 a week goes to the very old—those over 85, who are increasing in numbers—as well as to the severely disabled. That is worth over £230 a year extra to someone on the long-term rate. Taken together with the help in the weekly benefit rate itself, it means about £600 a year to help with heating costs.

The position is that 2·5 million people in this country are now receiving extra help with heating, and predominantly that help is going to the elderly. In terms of the amount of money spent, the Government are devoting £400 million a year to heating additions—an increase in real terms of £140 million since 1978.

The right way to help with heating costs is through a regular weekly income which is related to needs. That is how help has been given by successive Governments. In addition, limited help has been given by successive Governments. In addition, limited help has been available with extra expenditure in times of severe weather. This help, which goes back to the days of the National Assistance Board, has always represented a very small part of help with heating costs. The fact is that arrangements of this sort cannot by their nature be an adequate substitute for a regular weekly income on which people are able to plan ahead.

I should make it clear to the hon. Member for Oldham, West that the Government have already taken steps to ensure that those who need help through the exceptionally severe weather payments system receive it. In an advertising campaign, which begins tomorrow and will go on over the weekend, we shall again seek to ensure that people know how to claim the money. That is exactly what the hon. Member for Oldham, West was asking for.

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead) *rose*——

Mr. Fowler: I shall not give way again.

We have made it clear that we are reviewing this scheme for next winter. We are also examining future policy overall. In the reform of social security in the Social Security Bill, which is at present in Committee, we have made it clear that overall at least the same level of resources will be devoted to helping with heating costs. We shall also be considering whether, within the new structure, there are more effective ways of deploying those resources.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North) *rose*——

Mr. Fowler: I think that the hon. Gentleman may find this attractive.

I have it in mind that in the income support scheme there may be a case for winter premiums which would recognise in a more straightforward way the extra winter needs of certain vulnerable groups. I am certainly prepared to examine the case for that.

I shall also be considering the role of the social fund. Even those who are not supporters of the social fund—

[Interruption.] The hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) will be able to address the House later if she catches the eye of the Chair. I think that we must recognise that the existing regulatory framework has not served us well on the severe weather payments system. If one wants to relate extra help sensitively and flexibly to individual personal needs, the best basis for achieving that aim is not to try to define that help in every detail in advance in regulations. The general approach of the social fund is a much better starting point.

Mr. Frank Field *rose——*

Mr. Fowler: This debate goes beyond social security. For example, the Health Service is crucial for elderly people. Over the past six and a half years the actual amount of patient care provided—both in hospital and in the community—has increased. Those advances have been recorded in areas of particular importance to old people. Between 1978 and 1984 in England the number of geriatric in-patient cases increased by 47 per cent., the number of geriatric out-patient cases increased by 35 per cent., the number of regular geriatric day patient attendances rose by almost 20 per cent., and the number of elderly people treated by district nurses rose by about 26 per cent.

At the same time, there has been a steady increase in the numbers of key staff providing geriatric services. Between 1978 and 1984 the number of consultants increased by almost 30 per cent., while the number of other hospital medical staff increased by 22 per cent. The trend is also clear in personal social services. Spending has risen from £1,062 million in 1978-79 to £2,417 million in 1985-86. That is a real increase of over 20 per cent. That expenditure is shown by increased services on the ground. The number of places in day centres is up by over 20 per cent., the number of home helps is up by 14 per cent. and the total number of meals on wheels provided has risen by over 1 million on levels achieved by 1979.

What matters is the message behind the figures. More old people are getting more services under this Government than they got in the period 1974 to 1979. That is a clear message, which reflects credit and achievement on all concerned in the National Health Service, local authorities and personal social services. The number of very elderly people in our population is rising and there will be major challenges in the years ahead.

The central point that I want to make is that the House should address the problems on the basis of the facts, not on the basis of the totally bogus catalogue of charges made by the hon. Member for Oldham, West. The Government stand on the basis of the facts. We are committed to the welfare of elderly people. We have proved that commitment by our record so far, and we will maintain that commitment to the growing numbers of elderly people in this country in the years ahead.

Several Hon. Members *rose——*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the House of Mr. Speaker's appeal for short speeches.

5.30 pm

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): I would like to make a short contribution to the debate. In all these debates about the plight of the elderly we are inclined to become wrapped up solely in the problems that confront the elderly and our perception of the elderly is that they are a problem. That is a wrong-headed approach to the issues and difficulties that face us. The elderly members of our community should be considered as a positive resource. They have experience and they have a real contribution to make.

Ms. Harriet Harman (Peckham) *rose——*

Mr. Kirkwood: No, I shall not give way. I do not have time to do so.

Of course, the elderly need basic essentials, and they need additional resources. In some specific instances and areas they need more help and assistance generally. As the Secretary of State said, that straddles issues like money —which is of prime importance but not the only factor — health care, housing, transport, social support and energy needs.

Ms. Harman *rose——*

Mr. Kirkwood: I am sorry but I do not have time to give way to the hon. Lady.

It would be wrong to consider the problems that confront the elderly outwith the broad context that I have set out. I agree with the Secretary of State about that.

In this debate we are seeking to react to a real need and an emergency that has resulted from the exceptionally severe weather we have experienced. It is right and proper that the debate is taking place, but there is a more important need, which is to engage in long-term planning. There must be a good deal more long-term planning so that we are not merely reacting to emergencies.

Mr. Frank Field *rose——*

Mr. Kirkwood: As I have said to the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman), I do not have time to give way to interventions.

I listened carefully to the Secretary of State. He contended that the statistics that he provided—I have no way of refuting them — suggest that health and community care services are actually improving and are not merely under control. That is not the evidence that comes to me through my eyes and ears. More important, that is not the evidence that is related to me by my colleagues and by those who actually work in health and community care services. Such people are not especially politically motivated and they report to me that there has been a tremendous increase in demands upon them because of an increase in the number of people that they serve and the new and improved quality and standard of service that they are expected to provide. The statistics that the Secretary of State provides are not what really matter. He must measure up to the increasing demands that are being made on our services. If he hides behind statistics all the time, he will never get round to measuring up to that demand. I hope that he will consider that carefully.

Ms. Harman *rose——*

Mr. Kirkwood: What is the extent of the Secretary of State's co-operation with other Ministers and their co-operation with him, and what consultations take place on issues such as fuel conservation? The Right to Fuel campaign recently drew attention to the immense difficulties that are experienced in the conjunction of the Departments of Health and Social Security, Energy and the Environment, all of which are directly involved when it comes to trying to initiate sensible schemes. Some pilot projects have been extremely successful and could be built

[Mr. Kirkwood]

upon, but there have been immense bureaucratic difficulties in trying to co-ordinate that activity. I hope that the Secretary of State will consider that carefully.

Basic resources and basic pension rights are related factors and I understand that we are talking about potentially massive sums. However, I ask the Secretary of State to bear in mind that the Social Security Advisory Committee has observed that if he does nothing more than peg benefits and pensions to prices, it is inevitable that the gap between benefits and pensions and earnings will widen as earnings leap ahead year after year. That prospect is not acceptable to us and it would not be acceptable to those outside the House. If the gap is allowed to widen too far it will lead to the disintegration of the fabric of society. That will be inevitable if it is allowed to continue over a long period.

The Government give me the impression that they are complacent.

Mr. Norman Fowler *indicated dissent*

Mr. Kirkwood: The Secretary of State shakes his head. I listened to the right hon. Gentleman's statistics with interest but I did not receive the feeling from him that he is pulling out all the stops to deal with the short-term and long-term difficulties. He should give the House a commitment that he will set up an interdepartmental working party to consider some of the problems. He should enter into urgent discussions about the short-term problems with his colleagues outside and within the Department.

The severe weather single payment regulations are subject to three tests. The first test involves the period of severe weather and that is where the real difficulty arises. There is no definition of "period" and there is no definition of "severe". the Secretary of State could abandon the first condition and rely on the remaining two. They provide that fuel costs have to be shown to be greater than the savings that are available to meet the costs and that the amount of additional consumption has been greater year on year. I accept that the scheme has to have some qualifying features but I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman could abandon the first test. He could go even further than that next year. It is clear that we shall have to face these problems next year and the right hon. Gentleman could declare the whole period from December to March as a period of severe weather qualifying for benefit. He could put the onus on the Department to show that there has not been severe weather. If these changes were made, we might produce a system that could be seen to be capable of delivering sensible amounts of resources in a way that would meet needs.

The Government have shown complacency recently by withdrawing heating allowance moneys from the elderly poor by changing the supplementary benefit available scale margins and by reducing central heating allowances. These acts have compounded the problem.

Increases in fuel costs in relation to increases in the retail price index have been disproportionately high. The figures that appear in the United Kingdom *Energy Digest* —they are the most recent that I can find—show that the RPI increased by 67 per cent. from 1979 to 1984 while coal and coke prices increased by 100 per cent., gas charges by 121 per cent. and electricity charges by 79 per cent. Heating oil, including paraffin, feature in the list. The majority of my constituents who have difficulty in meeting fuel bills use this source of heating, which causes condensation problems and leads to housing and environmental difficulties. The figures suggest that the RPI is not a sensible measure for pensioners who face large increases in fuel prices. That is something else that the right hon. Gentleman should consider carefully.

My view is reinforced by the family expenditure survey of 1984, which showed that the average family in 1984 was spending 11 per cent. more of its total budget on fuel than in 1979 and 9 per cent. less on food. These statistics are frightening, and it should be recognised that they refer only to absolute costs. The most recent figures that I can find that relate to the proportions of the budgets of the retired single pensioner and retired couple that are spent on heating appear in the family expenditure survey of 1982. That survey showed that the single pensioner spent 15 per cent. of his total budget on fuel each week. That is a considerable proportion. If the Secretary of State or any of us had to spend 15 per cent. of our income each week on fuel, something would be done quickly to alleviate the burden.

I do not underestimate the difficulties that face the Secretary of State, but he must sort something out for next year. The exceptionally severe weather payments scheme is causing great heartache and distress and I look to the right hon. Gentleman to put matters right before we are hit by the next winter.

5.39 pm

Mr. Richard Ottaway (Nottingham, North): I will comply, Mr. Deputy Speaker, with your request to be brief.

Everybody grows old—that is a fact of life. There are three groups of elderly people. The first group of people are those who are able to look after themselves, who have made provision and have an occupational pension to supplement their state pension. The second group are those who have nothing but the state pension but are able to look after themselves. They take precautions and read the leaflets such as those published by the Health Education Council and Age Concern. The Age Concern leaflet entitled "Warmth in Winter" contains a number of useful tips and I recommend it to all hon. Members. It discusses money and how to obtain extra supplementary benefit. It discusses home insulation grants. Last year, the city of Nottingham's Labour-controlled council did not take up the full allowance on home insulation grants. The document gives tips on how to save fuel, the right clothes to wear for warmth and tips on safety. It gives sensible, practical advice which the elderly can take on board and states where such advice can be obtained.

The third group of people—with whom the debate is concerned—are those who cannot look after themselves. It is a matter of personal distress that, last week, someone died of hypothermia in Nottingham and that others are suffering and are in hospital. It is reported that two patients went into hospital with their temperatures as low as 26 deg. C—the definition of hypothermia is 35 deg. C. I am pleased to report that both patients survived.

The Opposition blame the Government as though this were a phenomenon which has arisen only since 1979. However, the social services correspondent of *The Times* said in an article on extra payments:

"It is an issue with which no Government in the 40 years of the welfare state has come to terms".

I care about the elderly and we all must work hard for them but one must not turn the issue into a political football. One cannot play politics with the elderly.

Mrs. Margaret Beckett (Derby, South) *rose*——

Mr. Ottaway: Recently the Government's statisticians said that for every 1 deg drop in average temperature, winter deaths rose by 8,000. It therefore comes as no surprise when the Opposition spokesman says that the number of deaths will rise when the temperature drops.

The figures which are published are different from the number of deaths. Why is this? It boils down to two reasons. First, families do not report deaths from hypothermia because of the shame it will bring to the family. Secondly, it is reported that almost all the hypothermia cases in Nottingham are related to another illness, which lowers the resistance to cold but which has nothing to do with hypothermia.

What can we do to help people who are in distress? The services in Nottingham are excellent and I am pleased to pay tribute to the local services and the Government services. I know of no case in Nottingham of someone being let down by these services. I was told by a local reporter that, last Friday, when the reporter told the social services department that an old person was suffering, within one hour food and bags of coal were given to that person.

Old people's perception of cold tends to diminish as they grow older and they do not realise the danger that they are in. The problem that faces us is finding those people who are suffering and who need our assistance, especially those aged 80 and over. We need reports on such people. Relatives should phone the services when an old person needs help. The charities must be encouraged to carry on with their work. Recently, I went to a presentation by Help the Aged for the introduction of their emergency bleeper Lifeline. If an old person falls over, the bleeper is triggered and the emergency services will check on that old person. They will get the old person into hospital if necessary. I pay tribute to the work of Age Concern in Nottingham, which gives help to people in distress at all hours of the day. Nottingham's *Evening Post* runs a column "old and cold". It raises money from the public which it can dish out to those who need a little extra. The role of neighbours is important—we need a nosey neighbour scheme rather than a neighbourhood watch scheme. Such a scheme could look after old people.

It is easy to blame the Government. Anyone can say that we should spend more. The pensioners who came along today to put their case, and who did so eloquently, said the same. However, I believe the Government's record stands up to scrutiny. I believe that by keeping inflation at such low figures the Government are doing more to help the elderly than any other campaign. I have no hesitation in supporting the Government's amendment.

5.45 pm

Mr. Reg Freeson (Brent, East): At the beginning of the Minister's speech he said that "policy must match the importance of the subject." Nobody would disagree with that. On the contrary, we, and I trust Conservative Members, would advocate that and seek to practise it. However, if we seek to put those words into practice rather than treat them as rehetoric, we must match the objective with the resources. That is where the Government are falling down.

It is acceptable for any Government to take any period in the past 40 years and say that according to the latest available figures more was being done in the various services and areas which the Minister quoted than had been done five years earlier, 10 years earlier or indeed 20 years earlier. All Ministers of successive Governments do the same thing. That is not the test. The test is whether more should and could be done, but is not done. That is the test, and that is where the Government are failing.

I intend to concentrate my remarks on an aspect which was briefly touched on by the Secretary of State and then virtually set aside. He vaguely mentioned the failure to correlate deaths from hypothermia with the levels and extent of central heating systems in Britain, region by region. It was not an effective response to the call by my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) for more effective insulation in British homes, especially the homes of the elderly.

I shall pursue the Minister's point about housing. If it is the case that policy should match the importance of the subject and resources need to be applied for that purpose, the Government have continuously failed on housing. They have failed to provide decent homes for the elderly. From figures that I have obtained from the Library it appears that in 1980 about 40,000 additional dwellings were provided for elderly people in the form of sheltered accommodation or single bedroom flats of an appropriate nature. In 1985 that figure dropped to 15,000. These figures are for the public sector, local authorities and housing associations. The figure of 40,000 in 1980 was reduced to 15,000 in 1985 and there is the prospect of a further reduction in 1986. In percentage terms that represents a 60 per cent. drop in the provision of housing for the elderly by housing associations and local authorities.

How, then, can it be said that policy and practice are matching the importance of the subject? I am not interested in arguing whether fewer elderly people live in decent accommodation in 1985 than was the case in 1979 or 1969. Clearly that is the case because housing conditions steadily improve. The test is that of need, and I shall quote some more figures which I hope the House will not find boring, because they represent people in need.

At the same time as that decrease, about 300,000 elderly people are on waiting lists to move. They are prevented from moving into suitable accommodation which would be well heated and insulated during the winter months. The figure of those waiting to move is increasing, while the level of construction and provision of dwellings is decreasing. Moreover, thousands of public sector dwellings are being sold. Fewer public sector dwellings are available today than were available five years ago, not by a few hundreds or thousands, but by hundreds of thousands.

Older people are much more likely to occupy old local authority and private accommodation and less likely to be able to carry out repairs. These public sector properties, which the elderly occupy in disproportionate numbers, need about £19 billion expenditure on repairs and modernisation. How much have the Government provided? I am sorry that the appropriate Minister from the Department of the Environment is not present to listen to the debate. The Government have provided less than £200 million.

[Mr. Reg Freeson]

According to the Government's condition of property survey, 480,000 dwellings classed as unfit are occupied largely by elderly people. The more unfit they are, the more likely it is that elderly people will live in them. Under this Government, public sector housing starts, whether in new build or buying and modernising old properties, have fallen sharply year after year. That is the reality, not the rhetoric or statement of intent, and something needs to be done about it.

Something must be done to increase the resources available for public sector housing, no matter which party is in government. I do not say that as a party-knocking exercise. Whereas a few years ago local authorities were providing each year 150,000 to 200,000 dwellings by new build or by buying and modernising old properties, today, because of Government restrictions, they are providing about 30,000 dwellings. Who are affected? Large numbers of elderly people, among others, are affected.

In the late 1970s the housing associations were providing 40,000 dwellings a year, the vast bulk of which consisted increasingly of rehabilitated properties. Today the figure is below 20,000 a year, and is likely to fall even further. All the information is available on the record. Again, a disproportionate number of elderly people live in those properties.

The provision of housing is urgent, and it is not merely a matter of making fine speeches. It is not merely a question of the number of dwellings, whatever that number may be, but of their standard. The standard is decreasing, and the first item to be hit is heating and insulation. I challenge any hon. Member to visit the few purchase, conversion and modernisation schemes that are being undertaken by housing associations and local authorities today to see the standards to which they are being compelled to fall. A few years ago, property was being well insulated and central heating systems were being installed, which is important for elderly people and others, no matter what the Secretary of State says. Now, such properties depend for heating on plug-in electric fires because the Department of the Environment prevents authorities from spending money to maintain decent standards. That pushes up costs, reduces heating and insulation standards, and increases the rate of ill health, hypothermia and the expenditure of far too restricted pensions.

The Government have it in their power, as from this afternoon, to do something about two further matters. Besides increasing resources to housing associations, increasing local authority provision for elderly and other people, and improving the standard of provision to ensure decent heating and insulation, the Government should bear in mind the Homes Insulation Act 1978, which enables them to introduce further schemes of insulation grant, well beyond the loft insulation scheme, which was first introduced and is now petering out. The Departments of Health and Social Security, of Energy and of the Environment should get together to improve standards and ensure that resources are available. We are talking not about chucking money away but about investment in decent buildings and homes to help thousands of needy elderly people.

In addition, the Government should enable housing associations to do what the Treasury is stopping them from doing, which is to match public money with private money, which they could borrow from building societies and banks to enlarge their housing programmes. Because of Government instructions, housing associations are not permitted to introduce private capital to match public capital to increase the rate of construction, purchase and modernisation of houses. Unless such action is taken, this year, next year and for years to come, no matter how many people may benefit from improved conditions, many thousands will not.

In Brent, 20,000 dwellings need modernisation or replacement—that is between 20 and 25 per cent. of the total housing stock—and a disproportionate number of them are occupied by elderly people, who are suffering from draughts, bad heating, bad insulation and bad conditions. If the Government would will the necessary resources, instead of indulging in rhetoric, they could improve the conditions of my constituents and thousands of elderly people suffering from the cold in winters such as this. The Government must take action, not merely quote past statistics. Future needs require to be met, and they are not at present being met.

5.58 pm

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): I speak as the proud and active president of Age Concern in my constituency. All our members have a proud and brave story to tell of their lives, as do pensioners who are not members. Each must be, and is, valued for himself or herself.

The first point that I should like to make is one on which I have campaigned for a considerable time. It continues to concern me very much, and I hope that it causes concern to all hon. Members. I refer to the resources available for pensioners. I accept the point made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services, that pensions are now 6 or 7 per cent. better than they were when the Government came to office. That is a matter for congratulation, not for chiacking.

We must remember that a month's pension is taken up by standing charges. If I could improve one area for pensioners, I would remove standing charges. I hope that all hon. Members would support me in that. We must press British Gas, the electricity boards and all others concerned to remove standing charges. That would make an immediate and important impact on pensioners and their standards of living.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Greenway: No, I will not give way, but I will be brief.

We must examine the need for more resources for pensioners. The terms of the motion and the speech by the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) remind me of the demands that are made on the resources of pensioners in my constituency in London and beyond. Happily, with the abolition of the GLC, rates are being reduced by the Conservative-controlled borough of Ealing and by other Conservative-controlled boroughs across London. That will substantially help pensioners. Pensioners were badly hit when the Labour-controlled GLC doubled their rates and fares in 1981. Pensioners are not helped by the GLC in its current legal battle, wanting to spend £96 million of ratepayers' money. Why could that money not be given to pensioners, if the GLC professes

to support Londoners? Labour members of the GLC, Labour Members of this House, and Liberal Members for all I know, will go across to the great fireworks parties that the Labour-controlled GLC is setting up to commemorate abolition. That will cost hundreds, thousands, millions of pounds of ratepayers' money. That money will come, in part, from the very elderly who are struggling to pay their rates and heating costs.

Mr. Corbyn *rose*——

Mr. Greenway: Labour Members should remember that waste of money when they shed crocodile tears about pensioners. They should tell their colleagues across the river to divert that money into pensioners' pockets. They would then be doing something right for pensioners. Opposition Members should boycott those parties; they are a disgraceful insult to pensioners. All pensioners will suffer and have to pay more rates than they need because of the money that the GLC will waste to mark abolition. Pensioners have already suffered as a result of the huge, expensive campaign that the GLC has run to save itself. That campaign included expenditure of between £10 million and £25 million on the promotion of pensioners' travel passes. Those passes were never in doubt. That campaign was conducted long after the passes had been guaranteed in law.

Mr. Corbyn: They knew what was happening.

Mr. Greenway: Opposition Members do not like to hear this, but they will have to listen to it. Pensioners were mendaciously told by the Labour leader of the GLC that they were going to lose their passes. More resources for pensioners would be available if wasteful campaigns were stopped. If Opposition Members had any sincerity, they would back me on that point.

What would it be like if we had another Labour Government? The Labour Opposition have already stated that their projected programme, if they are elected to office, would cost £24 billion. That would immediately raise VAT to 41 per cent. and so affect pensioners. Pensioners' families would not be able to help them, as the wage earners would be paying 20 per cent. more on the standard rate of tax. Pensioners would have a terrible time if a Labour Government were ever elected. The Labour party's crocodile tears had better return to where they came from. Labour Members need to be more honest and sincere about pensioners.

Last Saturday, in my constituency, I had the pleasure of attending a conference for carers of the elderly and carers of others. I congratulate the Government on the tremendous progress that they have made in creating schemes for carers to relieve those people who have a 24-hour-a-day responsibility looking after the elderly. The carers scheme has grown enormously in the past five years at considerable Government expense. It has not been mentioned today. I must say that that scheme is helping to keep elderly people in reasonable dignity and allowing their carers to have a break. That scheme helps enormously as it oftens allows the carers to go to work and earn a little money to help the very elderly for whom they are caring.

I should like to make a regional and somewhat partisan point. We have heard much from Scottish Labour Members about the need for extra heating allowances for pensioners and others in Scotland. A steady study of weather charts over the past few weeks will show them, as it has shown me, that the worst of the cold has been in London and the south-east. I hope that there will not be a big diversion of resources to Scotland. If there is, hon. Members with London constituencies will fight against it.

Pensioners always want and need higher pensions. My grandmother lived to be a very old lady and died in her late nineties. She rightly said that no one ever has enough money, no matter whether one is poor or rich. If hon. Members reflect on that they will see the truth in it. My grandmother meant that everyone can conceive of a need. I hope on that basis that the Government will maintain their excellent record of improving pensions in real terms. I hope that the Government will never, as the Labour Government did in 1975 and 1976, take away the pensioners' Christmas bonus. That was a mean thing to do. Only the Labour party would do that and then have representatives stand at the Dispatch Box and shout their mouths off as if they were the pensioners' friends.

The motion refers to this winter as being the worst for 40 years. In 1947 Mr. Emmanuel Shinwell was Minister of Fuel and Power. I remember then, as a small boy, what a terrible time the pensioners had under the Labour Government. They could not buy coal, the lights were off and there was no heating. Why is tonight's motion so arrogant? The Labour party has no record of which to be proud and much of which to be ashamed. That record goes back to 1947 and beyond.

Labour Members should remember what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said about 1979. Old people then, like everybody else, could not bury their dead. Conditions were arctic, and they could get no help for love nor money. Those were the conditions that existed when the Labour party was in government and the country will never forget it.

6.8 pm

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): If pensioners, as a group, are worse off than other sections of the community, Scottish pensioners are even worse off than those in England and Wales because climatic conditions are such that 20 to 30 per cent. more fuel is needed to heat a home in Scotland than is needed in southern England. Hypothermia and cold-related illnesses are common in areas with severe climatic conditions. Deaths from hypothermia in Scotland represent 25 per cent. of the United Kingdom total. Whether the hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) likes it or not, Scottish hon. Members will still bring these points to the House and remind him of them.

The difference in climate in Scotland, which the Government have recognised, bears out the demands that Scotland's pensioners had been making unsuccessfully until last week. The pensioners believe that, as they live in an agreed cold climate, that does not mean that they have become acclimatised to the cold. In practical terms, the problem is that Scottish pensioners are facing more severe effects from underheating their homes, given the colder climate, than their counterparts who live in southern England.

Our old people experience many problems with respect to their heating costs. There is concern about those at risk from hypothermia and other illnesses because of excessive economising on fuel. There is concern about those who live in cold conditions but, fortunately, do not die. There is concern about the hardship sufferred by those paying

[Mr. Ernie Ross]

their bills, but with great difficulty. There is concern about those who fail to claim the benefits to which they are entitled. About 150,000 Scottish pensioners claim supplementary benefit, but 75,000 Scottish pensioners entitled to receive supplementary benefit fail to claim it. These are the elderly among us who are losing out, not only on supplementary benefit but on the extra help available for heating.

We all know pensioners who will not claim supplementary benefit because of the stigma attached to means-tested benefits. They have been brought up during the years of the parish, the free books and the free school meals and in their retirement are not prepared to go with the begging bowl asking for more. Throughout their lives, those elderly people have contributed to our wealth as a nation only to witness its sale by the Government for a short-term, highly dubious financial gain from which they will not benefit. That is a massive sale of assets which should have been retained to provide the national income that would have protected our pensioners, giving them the peace of mind to enjoy a retirement not only of dignity but, just as important, of reasonable comfort.

Many pensioners deny themselves the means-tested help available because of their pride. Many others are unable to obtain help through the supplementary benefit system because their modest occupational pension takes them above the needs level set by the Government. As a group, pensioners have a lower than average income. The Government's duty should be to ensure that pensioners are made aware of their entitlements and that the highest priority within the social security system is given to ensuring that those entitlements are taken up.

It is not just whether they can heat and feed themselves that now concerns our elderly in Scotland. Pensioners in Scotland are equally concerned and puzzled about the Government's rate reform intentions set out in the recently announced Green Paper "Paying for Local Government". They are puzzled about where the Government imagine the sudden affluence will come to meet this new demand. The purse is already empty. How many single pensioners are living in the four-bedroomed house in Scotland which is the much-quoted example to show who will benefit from the change in the method of gathering rates?

The reality is much more stark and frightening. For every pensioner in receipt of housing benefit, 400,000 in Scotland will be worse off because they will have to pay 20 per cent. of their rates. Just what do the Government think pensioners should now give up to meet this extra financial burden? Perhaps our pensioners will shortly be reminded that they have a Christmas bonus which could be used. Perhaps they will be told that soap coupons could be saved and exchanged or that the stamps from Brooke Bond tea packets could be collected in a book to pay for the new rate demands. This is a mean-minded decision by a penny-pinching Government who show their disregard for those members of our society who have contributed to its wealth and health and ask only that that contribution should be recognised by allowing them to be equal members of our society now that they have retired.

It is not just a matter of whether pensioners can heat their homes. Some of our pensioners are living in underheated houses because they have money in the bank to bury them when they are dead. On 5 February 1982, I introduced a private Member's Bill to increase the death grant from £30 to £190 in January 1983 and to require the Secretary of State to review the death grant on 1 January in each subsequent year so that it would retain its value in relation to the general level of prices. The Bill aimed to abolish discrimination based on age.

Conservative Members talked the Bill out. They would not wish to be reminded now of the part they played in sabotaging that modest attempt to give security and peace of mind to our pensioners. The hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Sir H. Rossi), who, unfortunately, is not with us, spoke from the Front Bench on behalf of the Government. He said:

"I might have preferred to debate the issues before us after the Government had completed the review of death grant arrangements which has been in train since 1980. Unfortunately, that was not possible. Once the review is completed, I or my right hon. Friend will make a statement on the outcome, which I am sure will give us a full opportunity for constructive debate."

He concluded:

"We are more than conscious of the cases that are brought to our attention where hardship is experienced, because of the ever-widening gap between the level of death grant and the basic cost of a funeral. I assure the House that we shall come forward with our proposals as soon as possible." — [*Official Report*, 5 February 1982; Vol. 17, c. 692-8.]

Now we know—the Government's proposals, after four years' deliberations, are straight out of the monetarists' top drawer: "It is so meaningless. We cannot cut it any more, so we will just abolish it." There speaks the caring, sharing Tory Government.

The picture of an elderly person sleeping on a sofa piled high with blankets in the only room with a heater is not an unusual or extreme one. The reality of life in Scotland for pensioners on low incomes is that their activities are severely curtailed. Winter days may be shorter for all of us but, for many of our elderly people, these days are shortened out of necessity. They stay in bed until midday and go back to bed after teatime. They deserve much more from life than enforced periods of bedtime.

I hope that many of our pensioners are around on that real day of accounting when the Government go to the country. They will not forget the way in which the Government have treated them in the past six years. They will repay the Government through the ballot box.

6.16 pm

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): The last few weeks of intense cold have been a nightmare for those on the lowest incomes. The poorer pensioners have to endure much suffering because of their inability to keep their homes anywhere near adequately heated. Gas and electricity prices have increased substantially over the years, at well above the rate of inflation.

When listening to the complacent speech of the Secretary of State, it was difficult to understand why there was so much anxiety in the House and outside. At least the Opposition have tried to explain the justified concern about what has been happening. Since the Conservative party has been in office, the retail prices index has increased by just under 76 per cent. However, in the same period, gas prices have increased by 131·6 per cent. and electricity prices by more than 101 per cent.

I am strongly opposed to large increases in fuel prices. As we know, that is a way for Government to raise revenue through indirect taxation. The burden falls most heavily on those with the smallest incomes. That policy is wrong. If fuel is so expensive, where is the sense and justice in the fact that all people pay the same, regardless of income?

If it is right to give help with rent and rates, why not introduce a fuel rebate scheme during the winter months for those on the smallest incomes and limit the amount that is rebated in price?

It is wrong that many of our constituents—the poorer pensioners and those on the smallest incomes earning perhaps £50 or £60 a week—should pay precisely the same for gas and electricity as Cabinet Ministers and those who earn more than those Ministers. That is why there has been so much hardship and suffering during the past month. People on small incomes have not been able to keep themselves properly warm.

Pensioners on supplementary benefit face much uncertainty. They must obviously wonder whether the exceptionally severe weather payment will be made in their area when a really cold spell starts. In many parts of Britain that payment has been authorised two or more weeks after the very cold weather spell started. I understand that in most cases the payment will be backdated to 6 February. Until the announcement was made, the elderly on the smallest incomes did not know whether they could use more fuel, because they did not know whether any extra assistance would be given. What is more, until the bill arrives they are not in a position to apply for the extra assistance. They do not know how this year's bill will compare with last year's. Altogether, there is a great deal of uncertainty, which has led to much suffering.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross) said, retired people are frightened to keep the heat on anywhere near to the level that it should be. They fear not disconnection but receiving a fuel bill which they simply will not be able to afford. Thousands of retired people living on the smallest incomes leave their homes cold, and heat only one room. They go to bed early, and when they are up they often wrap themselves in blankets, simply because of their justified fear about the fuel bill.

We must not forget the many retired people whose incomes are just above supplementary benefit levels. In some cases it is only a few pence above; in others a few pounds. They receive housing benefit because of their inadequate income. It is important to bear in mind—I hope that the Secretary of State does so—that these pensioners do not receive any assistance with their heating bills. What are they supposed to do? Ministers who have been interviewed on radio and television have not been able to give an adequate reply to that question. The plight of about 2 million pensioners receiving housing benefit but not in receipt of supplementary benefit is acute.

As we know, all heating additions as such are to be abolished, and although the Government argue that at the end of the day people are not likely to be worse off, some will be. The Government have admitted that some will be losers and some will be gainers. I fear that some of the people about whom we are particularly concerned will also lose as a result of the Social Security Bill. We make strong criticisms of the mechanics of the exceptionally severe weather payments, but the Government intend to abolish it.

I listened carefully to what the Secretary of State said, but the Social Security Bill now in Committee will mean that somebody in a winter such as this will have to apply to the DHSS local office. Any assistance will come out of discretionary cash or limited social funds. It is likely that any assistance given will be by way of a loan. What good will that be to people who are counting every penny of their small income? I cannot see these pensioners being keen to obtain a loan, and certainly not one that is likely to be paid off out of their weekly benefit. However bad the situation is now, it will be even worse as a result of the changes that the Government have introduced.

Furthermore, by undermining and eroding SERPS the Government are ensuring that future generations of pensioners will be faced with similar problems facing those of today. If SERPS had been allowed to continue, there would have been a reasonable chance that a large number of people now in employment would, once they retired, have an adequate income. However, because the Government are undermining and eroding the scheme, more generations of poverty-stricken pensioners will have to endure the hardship and suffering that so many have endured during January and February this year.

The Government have shown little or no concern for the acute problem of many people on the smallest incomes, particularly pensioners, in the harsh winter months. They have quoted figures, but the Tory Front Bench, and the Tory Back Benches too, have shown little understanding of what is needed. It is a disgrace that people in our society should have to experience such conditions, especially as many of them served in the last war, as my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) said. Is this their due — that they should have to endure such suffering? What sort of society are we when we cannot organise such matters properly, and when we allow so many people to live out their lives in such misery, when extra help should be given when needed? The Government should be condemned, and I hope that all my hon. Friends will support the motion.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I understand that the first Front Bench speech will begin at a quarter to 7. Five hon. Members still wish to take part in the debate, and if they all speak briefly I hope to be able to call them all.

6.26 pm

Mr. Lewis Stevens (Nuneaton): We have heard from the Opposition Benches the inevitable cry that nothing is being done and the Government are uninterested. However, that is belied by all the facts about what the Government have done in managing to keep control of inflation, which is so vital, and in recognising their commitments to increase pensions and to provide heating additions. The Opposition still claim that the Government have done nothing.

The hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) spoke about fuel prices, but he should recall that it was distortion of fuel prices to the domestic consumer that caused the readjustment of prices, to bring about equality, and forced up the prices. That subsidy was indiscriminate and went across the board. Even the benefits that it produced were not going to the most deserving people.

I congratulate the right hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Freeson) because he spoke about the important topic of the insulation of houses. This Government, not the Labour Government, put great emphasis on increasing the take-up of improvement grants on houses. When some improvement grants were increased to 90 per cent., the take-up also increased.

I am glad that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said that advertising of the heating allowances for

[Mr. Lewis Stevens]

special conditions would be introduced, and that the Government will look into economic support and the social fund to see how we can tackle these problems. That is important in this complex problem. It is not automatic that the people who suffer in the severe weather are those on housing benefit, or in the worst housing conditions. The upturn in the number of deaths in bad weather applies almost irrespective of whether the victims come from inner cities or deprived areas or better accommodation in other parts of the country.

We have to ask ourselves exactly what the problem is and how we can best alleviate it. Sadly, money is a problem but, as my hon,. Friend the Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Ottaway) said, it is also important to identify those who are in genuine need and do not have the heat, warmth comfort and other facilities that they need. Although the social service and other departments have expanded, and the voluntary services also do a great deal in that identification process, much still needs to be done to make the best use of the existing facilities. Anything that can be done to improve the publicity about benefits generally should be seriously considered.

The hon. Member for Walsall, North referred to those with incomes slightly above the qualifying figure for housing benefit. These people are not used to turning to the Department of Health and Social Security for social security. They will be wary about using their limited incomes to heat their homes. My experience is that many people could obtain rate rebates or housing benefit but that they do not apply. The help that is already available to them is not being fully taken up. Advertising would play a major part in persuading them to take up the help that is already there.

The Opposition scare people by saying that the state earnings-related pension is to be abolished. The Government have given a guarantee that those who retire during this century will not be affected by the changes to the state earnings-related pension scheme. The Opposition, however, say that the SERPS reduction is imminent and that it will create immediate difficulties. The Government have not let down the pensioners.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services will look at all possible ways, through the social services and the voluntary organisations, of making known the help that is already available to those who may need it.

6.31 pm

Mr. Willie W. Hamilton (Fife, Central): It is generally accepted that the poorest sections of the community include the elderly. Precisely because they are poor they are much more vulnerable to the effects of winter weather than are other people. Most hon. Members have visited African villages and other undeveloped countries where one finds that the dignity of old people is much more prevalent and obvious than it is in this country. The community collectively regards the poor as its responsibility and looks after them as a family.

Party political points have been scored in this debate. I have no objection to that. I make such points, and I shall probably make one or two before I sit down. However, it is important to remember that the difference between basic pension and average earnings is far greater now than it was a few years ago and that it is getting worse. That is why the Labour Government introduced the state earnings-related pension scheme. The drop from average earnings to basic pension was so great that it meant almost immediate poverty. SERPS was designed specifically to reduce that drop, if not to eliminate it.

The great tragedy is that this Government quickly got their eye upon SERPS. They thought that it would prove too costly. Therefore they sought to abolish it, but public opinion was almost unanimous in attacking the Government's proposals, so they watered them down. Nevertheless, the Social Security Bill exercise is designed drastically to cut public expenditure upon social services.

The Secretary of State for Social Services said that the total provision for social security had been increased from £7·5 billion in 1979 to £16·5 billion in 1985. That is true. However, the implication was that that provision must be cut. I take the opposite view. If the will is there the means are there, whatever Government are in power. They can do exactly what they like with the cash. They can spend it upon defence, agriculture, education, roads or housing.

I come back to the proposition that I have always put forward whenever the House has debated matters such as this: that if the will is there and adequate, basic pension can be provided. That proposition is fundamental to this debate. If there were an adequate, basic pension we should not be talking about heating allowances or subsidies of one kind or another. The basic pension would then be at least double what it is now. Public opinion polls have proved that if people were asked to pay increased national insurance contributions, or more income tax, or a combination of both, to achieve that end they would be prepared to do so.

I hope that the Government will take on board the fact that it is no good fiddling around with heating allowances, giving one kind of dribble and drabble here, there and everywhere, by which I mean the voluntary bodies and the local authorities. Give them a basic pension that is adequate for their needs and all these problems will be solved.

6.35 pm

Mr. Roy Galley (Halifax): How easy it is to come to this House time after time and cry for more. It would be understandable if the Opposition cried for more only for the pensioners, the disabled and one or two specific categories, but they come to this House and cry for more for every conceivable subject under the sun.

It is clear from the speeches of some Opposition Members that they recognise that there has been some improvement in the position of pensioners. The right hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Freeson) said that that is not relevant to this debate. I suggest to him that it is relevant and that the position is improving. But that does not mean that there are grounds for complacency and that we should not seek greater improvements. Pensions are higher now than they have ever been before and their purchasing power is higher than it has ever been before. Nevertheless, we should seek to increase them. However, Opposition speeches would lead one to believe that there has not been a considerable improvement during the last few years in pensions or in health services.

If one is not responsible for setting the priorities it is easy to cry for more for everything. This Government have given the highest priority to health and pensions. When the Labour Government gave in to the clamour for more from every single group in the community the result was

bankruptcy and massive inflation. The Opposition have to ask themselves how that helped pensioners. Many pensioners have small savings, upon which they place great store. They want to have a few hundred pounds with which to deal with emergencies and to cope with their funeral arrangements. Because the last Labour Government gave in to the demands for more for everything, their savings were eroded by half.

There has also been much weeping about energy costs. However, during the period of the Labour Government the price of electricity rose by over 170 per cent. That is not caring for the elderly. Caring for the elderly means keeping inflation under control and creating a real improvement in their standard of living. That is what this Government have done.

The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) referred to the social services. In my part of the country those services are absolutely superb. That does not mean that they cannot be improved. There are groups in our society, for example the physically disabled, in particular the young physically disabled, for whom we ought to do more. We ought to look at what can be provided for them. The number of home helps has been increased. Furthermore, the number of day care places has risen and the amount of sheltered accommodation has been increased. The number of main meals that are served has risen, as has the number of luncheon clubs. The voluntary effort that enables a more flexible response to be made to the changing circumstances of the elderly has also improved.

Do Opposition Members put into practice what they preach when the money is available? The answer is no. At present the West Yorkshire metropolitan county council has £15 million in the kitty, money that could go back to the ratepayers or to the district councils to assist in the provision of better social services. Is it going to do that? Not a bit of it. It is going to fritter away that money on all sorts of ludicrous schemes, such as building a theatre for £1 million in Huddersfield. When it comes to the crunch, what we get from the Opposition are words, not deeds. The fact is that the pensioners' position when the Labour party was in power was much worse.

I must make one important point to my right hon. Friend which picks up a comment made by the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire. When we abolish the heating addition and institute a pensioner premium, there will be a psychological and perception problem. It is important for my right hon. Friend to look at the possibility of tailoring that pensioner premium more closely to the costs and overall needs of the elderly and tying it, not necessarily to the RPI, but to a more specific index.

The hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) said that in the present weather crisis the Government had shown little concern. That is a travesty of what has happened. There was a ready response in that practically the whole country is now covered by severe weather payments, which will be backdated.

The situation for pensioners has improved, it is improving, and it must improve more. We must continue to give a high priority to pensioners, but one cannot do everything overnight. If we try to do everything overnight, we shall end up with very large cuts in health services and draconian measures in social services such as were taken by the Labour Government in 1977.

6.41 pm

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): In answer to what has been said by the hon. Member for Halifax (Mr. Colley), if society cannot afford to pay its pensioners, who can it afford to pay, and what are we not paying them?

Pensioners in this country receive almost the lowest pension paid in any country in Europe. They live in the coldest homes with the highest rate of death through hypothermia, and have the worst possible conditions of all pensioners. Is that because the country is so poor that it cannot afford the pension, as Conservative Members seem to be saying, or is it because the Government prefer to spend money on other things, such as Trident submarines and the nuclear missile programme? It is question of choice. If we wish to end the monstrous death rate of pensioners every winter, something else has to go. I suggest that it is the arms programme, and I suggest the nuclear arms programme at that.

There are at present 9 million pensioners in the country, and the number is increasing. Roughly half those pensioners are below the official poverty level which is 140 per cent. above supplementary benefit level. Half are pensioners living in a state of penury and half in a state of extreme fear. We should stop looking upon pensioners as a problem in society, and we should start looking at them as people who have made an enormous contribution throughout their working lives and still have a contribution to make; they do not wish to be patronised, but they do wish to be able to live in some decency.

In areas such as the one I represent, a whole plethora of cuts in various aspects of Government spending is hitting the pensioners' living standard. There is a lack of a decent basic pension. That is the first requirement. Secondly, there are cuts in the health services, which fall disproportionately on pensioners. If Conservative Members think there have been no cuts in the Health Service, they should come to my constituency and see the closed and boarded-up hospitals. The same thing is happening in every other inner urban area.

There is also the loss of the Greater London council and the metropolitan counties and of the assistance that they have given to pensioners' organisations. They have managed to bring in subsidised or free travel for the elderly which is not available in many Conservative and Liberal-controlled county authorities.

The immediate issue to which the motion addresses itself is hypothermia and the cost of fuel for pensioners. A great deal can be done. The Government choose to use the fuel pricing mechanisms of gas and electricity as a form of taxation on the population of the country. Because of the way that system operates, the smallest consumers pay the most. Because of the system of standing charges pensioners are penalised for being old and for wanting warm homes. Because they cannot afford to pay the bills they do not heat their homes properly, and many of them die each winter. I find it nauseating, to put it mildly, that Conservative Members should be concerned about hypothermia yet do nothing about fuel prices, and that they have not supported the measures to abolish standing charges for the elderly or done anything to alleviate the plight of pensioners.

Unless something is done very quickly, the wringing of hands that has happened in the last hour and a half will happen again next spring and the spring after that when we see again the monstrous death rate for pensioners. We

[Mr. Jeremy Corbyn]

must stop patronising pensioners. We must start by working with those splendid pensioners' action groups and others that are politically organising and seeking decent pensions and living standards for themselves. They are the people whom I believe will decide the outcome of the next election. I very much hope that they will have the opportunity to do so.

6.45 pm

Mrs. Margaret Beckett (Derby, South): This has been the coldest winter for 40 years. It is therefore as stupid as it is irrelevant for the Secretary of State and many of his hon. Friends to come here and bleat on about what previous Labour Governments have done in other years. We are talking about this year, which is the coldest for 40 years and in which the Government's own medical statistician has said that 200 pensioners are dying every day.

The hon. Member for Halifax (Mr. Galley) said that the Government had made a ready response to the problem. It is a year since we last had these debates, a year since the Minister of State said that the system of paying exceptionally severe weather allowances was "a shambles". What did the Government do about it? Damn all, quite frankly, is what the Government did about it.

It was December 1985 before new guidance was issued, the guidance that is now in place. All that the Government can say about it is that heating costs are met and that they have been doing a good job because they have put up the regular sums that people get through heating additions. But those are payments for normal heating for normal needs, and are not intended to cope with conditions of extreme cold. I understand that the Department used to recommend 21 deg C as a suitable temperature for the elderly and had to abandon it because it found that over 90 per cent. of pensioners could not afford to heat their homes to that temperature. Even on the basis of normal need we know that there is a problem, never mind on the basis of exceptional need. The Secretary of State said that special help cannot be a substitute for the payments. Nobody is asking for this as a substitute; we are demanding the payment in addition to the sums normally paid because people need heating in additional ways over and above what is normal.

The implication of the Government's attitude is that the system is now working all right with the new guidance. Can they really believe that? I spoke to a pensioner from Kent last week who told me that he rang his area office when the temperature was minus 22 deg F, and the office said that it was not making exceptional severe weather payments. He rang the office the week after when the temperature was minus 12 deg F. By then the office had worked out the system, and was prepared to make such payments. Even the Government's own local offices do not understand the system as the Government well know.

The Government commissioned some research fairly recently to evaluate these schemes. It showed that 90 per cent. of the pensioners who should be entitled to the allowance do not receive it because they do not know about the allowance, because they cannot find out or because they are turned down. The research showed that this is because of the complexity of the system.

I have a copy of the questionnaire which is sent to anybody who applies for the allowance. It has 20 separate questions. It includes, for example, a request to forward the bills for the same period for the last two years, how much savings people normally hold, what they would normally expect to pay for their fuel, whether they have had any recent period of illness and, if so, for how long, whether they have had to use more fuel and how they have managed to buy the extra fuel they have needed. There are 20 such questions which have to be answered satisfactorily when people make the claim. The complexity of the system saves the Government about £25 million a year in supplementary benefit.

The Government say that it is up to the chief adjudication officer to suggest to local offices what action to take. But it was crystal clear that local offices had been waiting for a lead. The day that the chief adjudication officer put out his guidance, Ministers were delighted to tell us that local offices were falling over themselves to declare that theirs was an area in which payment could be made. I think that it was the Under-Secretary who said, "As I speak, fresh news is coming in of more tens of offices which are making this payment."

Does the Secretary of State imagine that the chief adjudication officer was not paying attention to what was going on in the House when, day after day, Labour Members, and occasionally Conservative Members, raised the problems of their constituents and the only answer that they received was that heating allowances had been increased and that the Government thought they were doing a good job? Where were the moving pleas from the Government Front Bench, the expressions of concern and the hope that the chief adjudication officer would be listening to what was said and might take some action? Not a word. Then the Minister says that it was up to the adjudication officer and there was no need for Government action.

We called on the Government to publicise the allowances. Only a week ago they resisted that idea and said that they were sure that the scheme would be all over the papers and that everyone would know. We welcome the Secretary of State's belated decision to go for some Government advertising.

Let me draw the Government's attention to the research that they commissioned, which points out that it is completely unnecessary to go through the farrago of making people fill out a questionnaire with 20 different questions and apply to the local office. The report says:

"The department knows exactly who needs help and there is no need for this bureaucratic system at all."

The Government have been advised that about 3·5 million pensioners could get that help simply by the Government looking through their own records.

Several hon. Members have suggested that we cannot find the money for everything and they talked about throwing money around, and so on. Let me draw to the attention of the hon. Member for Halifax the fact that in 1984-85 the gas levy—the special payment demanded by the Government from the gas industry—was £500 million. The electricity levy was £406 million. That is an example of money being thrown around. It is an example of money put on fuel prices by the Government.

At least the Secretary of State acknowledged that there is a serious problem in this area. Nevertheless, the Government have cut funds for the home insulation scheme, which seems a rather strange way of recognising the problem. He suggested that in future it would be better because people may be able to make claims from the social

fund. He did not remind the House that they will be able to apply for loans from the social fund only if they are already drawing income support. He did not point out that if they have as much as £500 saved for their funeral, they will not be able to claim a penny. Nor did he remind the House that, under the Social Security Bill, which establishes a social fund, the Government are cutting people's pension entitlement by half, bringing it down to less than the basic pension will purchase today. Through that proposal and others in the Bill millions of pensioners will be losers in the short and long term.

As the motion says, the plight of pensioners is great, but unless and until we remove the Government they will find no remedy.

6.52 pm

The Minister for Social Security (Mr. Tony Newton): The Opposition have done a genuine service by bringing the subject to the House for debate and enabling at least some more serious contributions to be made to what is undoubtedly a serious and difficult issue. I pay tribute in that respect to the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) and to a number of my hon. Friends who have spoken.

But from the Opposition Front Bench we have not only not had a serious contribution to the debate of a serious subject, but we have had the most disgracefully misleading use of statistics that I have heard in the House for some considerable time. I shall give my figures. They are exactly the same as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's figures which are good enough to bear repeating. Indeed, they are important enough to bear repeating.

Let me remind the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) what the Leader of the Opposition asked my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister at Question Time earlier this week. That too is worth repeating. Any team that has the Leader of the Opposition on its side needs a jolly good goalkeeper. He asked the Prime Minister:

"Why . . . has our death rate during the winter been three times that of the United States of America and four times that of Sweden?"—[*Official Report*, 4 March 1986; Vol. 93, c. 149.]

That is a very good question, but as soon as we looked into the data on which it must have been based we found that it could only have been based on those for the three years between 1976 and 1979 when the right hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends were in office.

Then we had the misuse of statistics about hypothermia deaths this winter by the hon. Member for Oldham, West. He referred to a tenfold increase in deaths from hypothermia. Let me repeat what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said:

"There is absolutely no evidence of a ten-fold increase. The only basis on which that statement could have been made is a total misreading of figures which compare 1975 with 1985."

When one looks at the figures properly it is clear that it was the winter of 1979 when most deaths with mention of hypothermia took place during the first three months of the year. I hope that in due course the hon. Gentleman will apologise for the way in which he sought to mislead the House and the country tonight.

Let me move on quickly because I want to be nice to the hon. Gentleman as far as I can. I want to congratulate him—I would be grateful if I could have his attention for a moment.

Mrs. Beckett: The hon. Gentleman did not listen to him.

Mr. Newton: I listened with great care to the hon. Member for Oldham, West, which is why I have been refuting some of the points that he made. However, I want to congratulate the hon. Gentleman because it is nearly an auspicious anniversary in his life. In March 1976 a report in *The Times* said:

"Old age pensioners shouted down Mr. Meacher, Under-Secretary of State at the Department of Health and Social Services, yesterday as he tried to explain the Government's record on pensioners."

That was 10 years ago.

Something else happened roughly 10 years ago and I was put in mind of it by the strictures of the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) on the complexity of the exceptionally severe weather payment regulations and the problems associated with it. I am certainly not going to defend those regulations as a miracle of simplicity, but I have here a booklet published by the Department of Energy in December 1978 on the electricity discount scheme 1979. That was the Labour Government's answer to not dissimilar problems at that time. It is 17 pages long. It contains some 60 questions and I can convey something of its flavour by quoting one or two. One question reads:

"I am in dispute with my electricity board about my bill. If this is not settled before the scheme ends how can I make sure I claim my discount?"

The answer was:

"Write immediately to the electricity division, the Department of Energy."

Question:

"I applied for a Rate/Rent Rebate/Rent allowance but did not hear from my local authority until after 30th June. What should I do?"

Answer:

"Write to the Department of Energy Electricity Division".

What a farce that was.

It is a pity that we cannot use visual aids in the House. I have here the visual description of the electricity discount scheme sent to the post offices to try to tell them how to operate it. It was a nightmare of complexity which nobody understood, which was ineffective, and which the incoming Conservative Government got rid of in favour of a policy of systematically and substantially increasing the regular weekly payments of heating addition to greatly increased numbers of people.

That is the point that the hon. Members for Oldham, West and for Derby, South have persistently refused to focus on in this argument. Wherever one looks, there has been a substantial increase since 1979 in the regular extra weekly help given to virtually every pensioner in receipt of supplementary benefit—far more than those helped by Labour Members—to the severely sick and disabled and families with young children, to the point at which, on any reasonable reading of the combination of what is in the basic supplementary benefit rate and the heating additions, any supplementary pensioner householder over 85 receives about £600 a year—£150 a quarter—to help with paying the heating bills.

That is the right way to be giving such help. That is the record on which we stand and on which we shall seek to build. We have no need at all to apologise to Her Majesty's Opposition in the light of their miserable record in the self-same subject.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:

The House divided: Ayes 187, Noes 283.

Division No. 94] **[7 pm**

AYES

Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Bagier, Gordon A. T.
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnett, Guy
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Anthony
Boothroyd, Miss Betty
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Brown, R. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne N)*
Brown, Ron *(E'burgh, Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim *(Heyw'd & M)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Carter-Jones, Lewis
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Thomas
Clay, Robert
Clelland, David Gordon
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Conlan, Bernard
Cook, Frank *(Stockton North)*
Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cox, Thomas *(Tooting)*
Craigen, J. M.
Crowther, Stan
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(L'lli)*
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dixon, Donald
Dobson, Frank
Dormand, Jack
Douglas, Dick
Dubs, Alfred
Duffy, A. E. P.
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Edwards, Bob *(W'h'mpt'n SE)*
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forrester, John
Foster, Derek
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
Freud, Clement
Garrett, W. E.
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Golding, John
Gould, Bryan
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hamilton, W. W. *(Fife Central)*
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Hart, Rt Hon Dame Judith
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Heffer, Eric S.
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Janner, Hon Greville
John, Brynmor
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kilroy-Silk, Robert
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ronald
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McCartney, Hugh
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McGuire, Michael
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
MacKenzie, Rt Hon Gregor
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Meacher, Michael
Meadowcroft, Michael
Michie, William
Mikardo, Ian
Miller, Dr M. S. *(E Kilbride)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Nellist, David
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Park, George
Patchett, Terry
Pavitt, Laurie
Pendry, Tom
Penhaligon, David
Pike, Peter
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Robertson, George
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, J. W.
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*
Ross, Stephen *(Isle of Wight)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ryman, John
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Short, Mrs R. *(W'hampt'n NE)*
Silkin, Rt Hon J.
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(M'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Stewart, Rt Hon D. *(W Isles)*
Stott, Roger
Straw, Jack
Thomas, Dafydd *(Merioneth)*
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Tinn, James
Torney, Tom
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert
Weetch, Ken
Welsh, Michael
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Wilson, Gordon
Winnick, David
Woodall, Alec
Wrigglesworth, Ian
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John McWilliam and
Mr. Frank Haynes.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arnold, Tom
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Rt Hon Sir H.
Atkinson, David *(B'm'th E)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Vall'y)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Rt Hon Sir Frederic
Benyon, William
Best, Keith
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Blackburn, John
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'to'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Boyson, Dr Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brinton, Tim
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Hon Peter
Bruinvels, Peter
Bryan, Sir Paul
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nick
Butcher, John
Butler, Rt Hon Sir Adam
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, W. S.
Clark, Hon A. *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Cockeram, Eric
Colvin, Michael
Cope, John
Cormack, Patrick
Corrie, John
Critchley, Julian
Crouch, David
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
du Cann, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Dunn, Robert
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Eyre, Sir Reginald
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Anthony
Fletcher, Alexander
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Freeman, Roger
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Gardiner, George *(Reigate)*
Gardner, Sir Edward *(Fylde)*
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Grant, Sir Anthony
Greenway, Harry
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John S
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Harvey, Robert
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Sir Paul *(N'folk SW)*
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, J.
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Henderson, Barry

Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hickmet, Richard
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hirst, Michael
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Stratf'd-on-A)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(G'ldford)*
Howell, Ralph *(Norfolk, N)*
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Jackson, Robert
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Joseph, Rt Hon Sir Keith
Kershaw, Sir Anthony
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knox, David
Lamont, Norman
Latham, Michael
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lyell, Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
McCurley, Mrs Anna
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
McNair-Wilson, M. *(N'bury)*
McQuarrie, Albert
Major, John
Malins, Humfrey
Malone, Gerald
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mates, Michael
Mather, Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, David *(Hants NW)*
Monro, Sir Hector
Morrison, Hon C. *(Devizes)*
Morrison, Hon P. *(Chester)*
Moynihan, Hon C.
Murphy, Christopher
Neale, Gerrard
Newton, Tony
Norris, Steven
Onslow, Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Sir John *(Harrow W)*
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Parris, Matthew
Patten, Christopher *(Bath)*
Patten, J. *(Oxf W & Abgdn)*
Portillo, Michael
Price, Sir David
Proctor, K. Harvey
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Rees, Rt Hon Peter *(Dover)*
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rippon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
St. John-Stevas, Rt Hon N.
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Silvester, Fred
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stokes, John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Terlezki, Stefan
Thatcher, Rt Hon Mrs M.
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waddington, David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Wall, Sir Patrick
Waller, Gary
Walters, Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watson, John
Watts, John
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Wheeler, John
Whitfield, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wiggin, Jerry
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Michael
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Michael Neubert and
Mr. Mr. Tony Durant.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 33 (Questions on amendments) and agreed to.*

Mr. SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House recognises the difficulties faced by elderly people during periods of severe weather; commends the Government's record of paying higher retirement pensions to more pensioners than ever before, of increasing the supplementary benefit scale rates, of providing for the first time automatic heating additions of £2·20 per week for all supplementary pensioner households over 65 years of age, and of introducing a higher rate of £5·45 per week for such pensioners over 85 years of age; notes with approval that payments under the exceptionally severe weather scheme are now available throughout mainland Britain; and observes that the present relative stability in fuel prices demonstrates the value of firm control over inflation and is in stark contrast to the increase of 170 per cent. in electricity prices over the period of the Labour Government between 1974 and 1979.

London Docklands Railway (City Extension) Bill *(By Order)*

Order for Second Reading read.

7.13 pm

Mr. Neil Thorne (Ilford, South): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Mr. Speaker: I should announce that I have not selected any of the Instructions.

Mr. Thorne: London's docklands have been in decline for many years. An early proposal to help with the regeneration of the area by extending the London Underground through the docklands to Thamesmead had to be abandoned because of the high cost—more than £400 million at today's prices.

A start has been made to revitalise the docklands. By 1985 more than £1 billion had been invested. More than 200 companies have set up businesses, 4,700 new jobs have been created and 1,300 jobs have been preserved. Moreover, 2,000 private homes have been built, of which 42 per cent. have been bought by residents of dockland boroughs.

There has also been a considerable improvement in the road structure. Most important of all, London Regional Transport is constructing a new light railway through the area. Canary wharf is a site of some 71 acres in the Isle of Dogs, two miles to the east of the City. A £1·5 billion development of 10 million sq ft of offices and supporting accommodation is planned by an American consortium. The need for an extension of the City is well known and arises principally from the limited amount of space left to expand it as a financial centre. The consortium has insisted that the development will not go ahead without a rail link from Canary wharf to the Bank, as the existing terminus at Tower Gateway will not tie in with the development physically. Nor will it tie in with the City in the minds of those who would wish to set up business or work at Canary wharf. Hence the promotion of this private Bill.

The Bill is promoted by London Regional Transport. Its powers and responsibilities are set out in the London Regional Transport Act 1984, section 2 of which provides that it shall be the general duty of London Regional Transport, in accordance with principles from time to time approved by the Secretary of State, and in conjunction with the British Railways Board, to provide or secure the provision of public passenger transport services for Greater London. The Act also confers a power to promote Bills. A private Bill has been promoted by LRT and its predecessors in almost every Session since 1963, when the London Transport Board was set up. The present Bill has been modelled on the earlier Acts of LRT's predecessors.

Powers to build the initial railway from Tower Gateway to Island Gardens and from Stratford to Poplar were acquired by the then London Transport Executive through the normal parliamentary procedure for railway construction—the London Docklands Railway Act 1984 and London Docklands Railway Act 1985. Responsibility for funding the railway, cash limited by the Government at £77 million outturn, was through the London Docklands Development Corporation and the Greater London council. The GLC role has subsequently been assumed by London Regional Transport. A small project team, locally based in Poplar, and reporting to a joint LRT-LDDC board, is supervising the design-and-construct contract which was let on a fixed price basis to the General Electric Company/Mowlem railway group. The contract is in the form of a single package covering design and construction and nearly all of the equipment. There are severe penalties should the railway not be ready for opening in mid-1987.

The initial railway links the Isle of Dogs with the important regional centre of Stratford to the north and the eastern side of the City. Much of the route makes use of disused railway line and is re-using existing materials where possible. In the Isle of Dogs, much of the railway is on new viaduct, including new bridges across the West India docks. Progress has been rapid—75 per cent. of the contract work has already been completed and the project is both on time and to budget. Much of the civil engineering work is already complete, even on the northern leg to Stratford, which received parliamentary approval less than one year ago. Track laying is now progressing.

The City terminus, Tower Gateway, in Minories, is adjacent to the British Rail line to Fenchurch street station. It was not possible to link with the Underground at Tower Hill without the expense of tunnelling, and this could not be afforded within the £77 million project cost. A terminus within Fenchurch street station was not possible because the capacity was needed by British Rail and an alternative, a tunnel to Aldgate East, was prohibitively expensive. Proposals have been put forward to improve Tower Hill Underground station to handle the interchange traffic but London Regional Transport recognises the inadequacy of the interchange.

The trains are much faster than buses, they are smaller and faster than conventional rail vehicles and generally serve closely spaced stations. They are automatically driven but each will have a member of staff on board who will check tickets, assist passengers and be able to deal with emergencies. Although the stations are unstaffed they will have closed circuit television surveillance and facilities for passengers to contact and talk directly with the control centre. All stations will be fully accessible to disabled passengers with lifts for wheelchair access.

In the late summer of last year London Regional Transport was approached by the American consortium which is proposing a multi-million pound property development on Canary wharf in the Isle of Dogs. The consortium sees transport as a fundamental requirement for the success of the development and approached LRT with proposals for a westward extension of the docklands light railway to Bank. The view of LRT was that the City extension would be a major advantage to London's public transport infrastructure and would resolve the problem that had been highlighted by the late Martin Stevens of the far from ideal City terminus at Tower Gateway.

The Bank extension proposed by the Canary wharf development consortium leaves the initial railway just east of Tower Gateway and goes into tunnel before reaching the precincts of the Tower. The lines continue in deep level twin tunnels beneath Tower Hill, Byward street, Great Tower street, Eastcheap and King William street. Those tunnels would have a side walkway for emergency evacuation, maintaining the docklands light railway facility of full access for the disabled. Traffic on the extension is estimated at 9,500 passengers in the busiest hour when the development is complete.

A link with the City and the major development at Canary wharf would increase traffic from 6 million to 44

million journeys a year. Inevitably some aspects of the initial railway would need to be changed. Trains and platforms for example would be longer and some of the structures would need to be strengthened to accommodate the longer trains. There would be more trains and more frequent services. Other technical changes would be necessary to the track layout at Crossharbour and near Stratford, to accommodate the stepped-up services. A larger station at Canary wharf is also envisaged. The extension would substantially increase jobs on the light railway from about 100 to 200.

LRT sees the scheme as an opportunity to overcome the weakness of the initial docklands light railway City terminus, and to provide an excellent new addition to London's public transport infrastructure in partnership with the private sector.

The principal function of this Bill is to authorise the carrying out of railway works. The authority of Parliament provides protection for the builders of the railway against actions for nuisance. Since statutory authority is required for work, it is also convenient to obtain from Parliament any compulsory purchase powers required. This follows the usual practice.

I do not intend to describe the contents of the Bill clause by clause. However, there are certain features that the House may wish to be aware of. I also wish to mention some significant changes suggested by the promoters which they hope will meet many of the criticisms levelled against the Bill as originally drafted.

In part II details of the works are shown on the plans and sections, which were deposited with Parliament at the time of the deposit of the Bill.

The scheme in the Bill comprises a twin track railway branching off the railway authorised by the London Docklands Railway Acts 1984 and 1985. The extension leaves the initial railway immediately to the west of the bridge over Leman street descending deeply into cut and cover under Mansell street and then into bored tunnels in front of the Tower to pick up an alignment beneath the District line to the west of Tower Hill station. The line then continues westward on a downward gradient following the District line tunnels beneath Great Tower street and Eastcheap to King William street. The tunnels would have walkways which could be used to evacuate trains in the event of emergencies and the platforms are to be long enough ultimately to accommodate trains of three articulated units.

The line of the railway has been planned so that the tunnels are, for the most part, constructed at a depth below the streets so as to avoid any problem of interference with the existing building foundations and inhibition of future building developments.

The arrangements originally set out in the Bill for the terminus at Bank and for an interchange at Tower Hill have provoked a good deal of concern. In particular the City corporation has petitioned against the Bill on the grounds that the Bank station and associated proposals are unsatisfactory and unsuitable.

London Regional Transport acknowledges that the least satisfactory feature of the scheme currently before Parliament is the passenger movement within the station at Bank, which already handles 26 million passengers a year. The light railway extension would increase total traffic at Bank by a third. LRT and London Underground Ltd. were concerned about this and although the original scheme would have worked, LRT decided to re-examine the options available, with the help of consulting engineers, Mott Hay and Anderson, which has considerable experience of tunnelling in this part of central London. It assisted in the Northern Line construction in the 1920s and work on the Waterloo and City line in the 1950s. As a result, a revised arrangement has been proposed for Bank station with the docklands light railway platforms in a different location.

The scheme envisaged in the Bill has docklands light railway platforms below the Mansion House, with the main entry and exit route to a new ticket hall near the top of the Waterloo and City line travolator, below Queen Victoria street. A deep level subway connection is provided to the Central and Northern lines, but passengers to and from the Circle and District lines would need to walk the full length of the Northern Line platform, which is a key concern, and along the existing escalator and subway link to Monument station. The Bill allows for a station at Tower Hill which would meet the needs of passengers interchanging with the District and Circle lines, but there would still be considerable movement along the Bank Northern line platforms. The proposed station at Tower Hill has itself attracted petitions against the Bill.

In the revised proposals the platforms are below the Northern line platforms under King William street. The overrun tunnel would be transferred from Cheapside to Princes street. There would be a new escalator exit to an extended Northern line ticket hall, a facility which would also be available to Northern line passengers. A separate escalator route at the southern end of the station would take interchange passengers to Monument avoiding the Northern line platforms and the present escalator link and would obviate the need for a station at Tower Hill.

The new scheme also has a new deep level subway from the docklands railway and the Northern line through to the Waterloo and City line, with a branch to the Central line. This new route would bypass the existing congested routes via the ticket halls, which are used by 30,000 passengers a day. As with the original scheme, there is provision for lift access to the surface for people with disabilities. The revised proposals would meet the requirements of a number of petitioners against the Bill in its present form.

Despite those major advantages, the revised scheme would cost no more than the earlier proposal. It is against that background that LRT will be asking Parliament for permission to amend the Bill by an additional provision to acquire the land needed. At the same time it will be possible to delete certain powers from the Bill, including the need for any access under the Mansion House. Discussions are taking place with the City corporation which has been supplied with drawings of the revised scheme.

Part III deals with lands powers. This empowers LRT to acquire land or take temporary possession of it. The Bill does not contain provision for compensation for land authorised to be acquired, as the Land Compensation Acts 1961 and 1973 apply automatically once Parliament authorises the compulsory acquisiton.

I should point out that clause 17 provides for LRT to take temporary possession of land in Trinity square, but this provision would not be necessary if the revised scheme is adopted.

I hope that it is clear from what I have said that the Bill would provide a means for London Regional Transport to carry out a valuable development of the public transport network of London. As promoters, London Regional

[Mr. Thorne]

Transport has shown a willingness to amend the scheme when that was shown to be sensible and I am sure that it will do all that it can to ameliorate any remaining fears or problems facing the petitioners.

Much has been made in the press and elsewhere of the connection between the Bill and the Canary wharf development. However, we should not lose sight of the more general benefits of the extension. The improved connections that it would provide would greatly improve ease of access to and from a large part of docklands for the benefit of industrial and commercial regeneration throughout the area. I am sure that hon. Members whose constituencies are served by the railway are well aware of the potential benefits to their constituents in terms of quicker and more convenient travel. I believe that it is in everyone's interests for the Bill to be given a Second Reading so that the opportunity to secure these benefits is not jeopardised.

7.30 pm

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): I should make it clear at the start that I do not intend to vote against the Bill. I shall not do so for the good and simple reason that was touched upon in the last few words of the hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Thorne). The extension of the London docklands light railway from Tower Hill on the edge of my constituency to the new terminal at Bank would greatly improve travel facilities for many of my constituents, especially those in the whole docklands area south of Commercial road, who have long suffered from inadequate public transport.

However, in the interests of my constituency, and having regard to my wider duties as a Member, I feel bound to protest at the astonishingly scanty and contradictory information that we have been given about the proposed railway extension. The hon. Member for Ilford, South need not reproach himself when I say that he has not begun to answer most of the questions that are in the minds of my hon. Friends and myself. I think that the answers to our questions inevitably must be found in what Ministers have to say, and the confusion arises from a great deal of what they have already said.

On the face of it, the Bill is about extending the London docklands railway for a relatively short but important distance from Tower Hill to the Bank Underground station. That extension raises important questions of finance and engineering, the positioning of the Bank terminal to avoid congestion and rail management and control.

However, the Bill is about much more than that. It is about another and related proposal. It is about the massive development, as a major offshoot of the City of London, of Canary wharf on the Isle of Dogs. It is also about major changes in the capacity and design of the London docklands railway. I refer to the stretch between Tower Hill and the Isle of Dogs, which is now being built and is due to be completed next year. So close is the relationship between the proposed development of the offshoot of the City at Canary wharf and the Bill that it is true to say that for the Government and the financial interests that are backing them the two projects are mutually dependent. If there is no Canary wharf development, there will be no City extension of the docklands light railway. Equally, if there is no City extension, there will be no Canary wharf development.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) had that put on the record clearly when he questioned the Secretary of State for Transport on 13 January. He asked:

"Will the Secretary of State confirm that the westward extension will go ahead only if the Canary wharf project goes ahead first?"

The Secretary of State replied:

"Yes, sir."—[*Official Report*, 13 January 1986; Vol 89, c. 757.]

We are concerned with two problems. First, there is the railway extension, which is the immediate subject of the Bill. Secondly, there is the Canary wharf development, about which we have virtually no information other than that which has been provided by the public relations advisers on behalf of the financial sponsors of those projects. It is strange, indeed ludicrous, that the relevant information should be kept from the House and our constituents, but for that we must blame the Secretary of State for the Environment, to whom I wrote some months ago as soon as I heard of the Canary wharf development, for his refusal to hold a public inquiry.

The scale and importance of the development at Canary wharf is not in doubt. The proposal is to build up to 10 million sq ft of purpose-built office accommodation to house the latest information technology and to serve a massive banking and financial service complex at Canary wharf. According to the promoters, this will have an estimated work force of 49,000 in executive, clerical and associated jobs, and at least another 8,000 workers to provide off-site support services.

The promoters' claim has been backed by the preliminary findings of the independent Henley Centre, which claims that about 21,000 of the 57,000 jobs would go to local residents in the docklands boroughs. I believe that it is the largest office development ever proposed in the United Kingdom. But, incredibly, simply because Canary wharf lies within the Isle of Dogs enterprise zone, where industrial and commercial development is exempted from the national regime of town and country planning, the Secretary of State for the Environment feels able to refuse to hold a public inquiry.

What the impact will be of this vast additional work force, if the estimates turn out to be true, on the Isle of Dogs and on the borough of Tower Hamlets, what effects there will be on land use and land prices throughout the area, what additions of rail and road transport will be required to service this vastly increased working population, and what the environmental effects of making this massive additional transport provision will be on the residential community, we simply do not know.

I have urged the Secretary of State to call in the development, to appoint an inspector and to hold a public inquiry. In spite of his previous refusals, I repeat that call tonight. There is no reason why, with an energetic Secretary of State and a well-chosen inspector, such an inquiry should take more than six months to hold. If the Secretary of State had accepted my plea last October, the inquiry would by now be more than half way over and be concluded by the early summer—well ahead, I suspect, of the conclusion of the legislative processes affecting the Bill.

Mr. Ian Mikardo (Bow and Poplar): Or of their getting the money.

Mr. Shore: Indeed, that may be true, as my hon. Friend says. Without such an inquiry and the information that it would provide, we cannot make any real sense of the Bill. If the Secretary of State continues to refuse an inquiry, the instruction that I have tabled today, which calls upon

"the committee to consider the economic social and environmental effects of the provisions of the Bill on persons living and/or working in the area served by the dockland light railway"

will be a poor but next best thing, together, of course, with the committee proceedings on the Bill.

I shall turn direct to the proposed City extension. Can the Minister confirm that since the Bill was published a major change — of course he can confirm this — has already taken place? The hon. Member for Ilford, South has told us that London Regional Transport has agreed a new layout of the Bank terminus. The intention now is to bring it out at King William street, with direct connections with the Northern line, as opposed to what seemed to be the Waterloo and City line connection and a ticket hall below Queen Victoria street. This is a substantial change in a matter of four months, and I would like to know whether it has been fully researched, and whether it has met the objections laid by the City of London corporation. In any event, as the hon. Member for Ilford, South fairly reminded us, it will require what is called an additional provision to the Bill.

Can the Minister tell us about the control and financing of the proposed City extension line? We have had a series of statements, mainly in written answers to questions, from both the Secretary of State and the Under-Secretary of State. On 11 November 1985 the Under-Secretary said:

"I understand that London Regional Transport is currently examining proposals for a privately financed extension of the Dockland light railway westwards to Bank." — [*Official Report*, 11 November 1985; Vol. 86, c. *78*.]

A fortnight or so later, on 27 November, the Secretary of State for Transport said:

"An understanding has now been reached with it"—

the Canary wharf consortium—

"that it will contribute £30 million towards the construction of the extension and, unless others can come forward, secure underwriting of an agreed privatisation scheme. My right hon. Friend"—

I assume that he is referring to the Secretary of State for the Environment—

"and I have endorsed this understanding."

He added:

"There will be opportunity for other people who are interested in owning and operating the extended railway to put forward alternatives to the consortium's proposal."—[*Official Report*, 27 November; Vol. 87, c. *565*.]

The following day, 28 November, the Under-Secretary spelt out the Government's approach when he said:

"The Government believe that any further investment in the docklands light railway should be privately funded, and that the railway should be owned and operated in the private sector." —[*Official Report*, 28 November 1986; Vol. 87, c. *674*.]

As recently as 13 January the Secretary of State, replying to an oral question, said:

"it is a very important breakthrough that the provision of public transport can now be contemplated in the private sector."— [*Official Report*, 13 January 1986; Vol. 89, c. *757*.]

The intention is clear. Such an extension should be privately financed, privately run and privately managed.

The idea of spatchcocking a privately owned railway into a publicly owned and run London Regional Transport rail system is bizarre. It raises incredibly complex questions of integration with the surrounding public transport system, not to mention the major problems involved in financing its operating costs. Is this still the Government's intention? Is it the intention of the Canary wharf consortium? According to my information, the consortium neither wishes nor intends to turn itself into a railway operating company.

I am informed that the consortium has discussed making a financial contribution with the Secretary of State. That is why the Secretary of State referred to the contribution of £30 million in the statement of 27 November. Are we correct in believing that that contribution has been increased, by negotiation, to about £45 million? If that is so, what form will it take? What form will any other financial contribution take? Will it be a grant, a fixed interest loan, a share in the equity, or what?

What is the Secretary of State's current forecast for the total cost of the City extension? Is it still the estimated £70 million, the figure quoted last November when the Bill was first published? These are important questions. Unless the financial arrangements are satisfactorily concluded, and unless it is clearly understood that this extension line will be a publicly financed operation, there will be no certainty that, when the Bill is passed, the work will be successfully concluded or that the line can be kept solvent in the years ahead.

We are entitled to ask about the implications of the City extension line for the rest of the docklands light railway, the stretch that will run from Tower Hill to the island garden on the Isle of Dogs. The implications are both financial and physical.

With regard to finance, is it still the Government's intention — I quote once again from the Secretary of State for Transport's statement on 27 November 1985—

"to offer . . . to any appropriate person who is prepared to construct the City extension"

the management, ownership and control of the rest of the London docklands railway? We are entitled to a reply to that question. We need to know because, if I have understood correctly the Secretary of State's statement, the go-ahead for the City extension line is

"subject to final agreement between LRT and the consortium on the detailed design and costs of the City extension, and on the particulars of the privatisation scheme, and to the completion of a master building agreement between the consortium and the LDDC on the Canary wharf development, as well as to the consent of Parliament to the Bill" — [*Official Report*, 27 November 1985; Vol. 87, c. 565.]

We have no information on the physical implications of the City extension for the London docklands railway, a large section of which is now under construction, except an explanatory note issued in February by London Regional Transport. I think that the hon. Member for Ilford, South drew on this document in his speech. The explanatory note states that the City extension link and the major development at Canary wharf will increase traffic from 6 million to 44 million journeys a year, with an hourly peak of about 9,500 passengers along the proposed City extension line. That is a massive, sevenfold increase in the carrying capacity required of the London docklands railway now under construction.

London Regional Transport's brief modestly states:

"inevitably some aspects of the initial railway would need to be changed. Trains and platforms for example will be longer and some of the structures would need to be strengthened to accommodate the longer trains. There would be more trains and

[Mr. Shore]

more frequent services. Other technical changes would be necessary to the track layout at Crossharbour and North Stratford to accommodate the step up service. A larger station at Canary Wharf is envisaged."

According to my rough calculations, instead of two-coach trains, at least three coaches would be required and the frequency would increase by seven to roughly one train every one and a half minutes during the day.

The initial railway, now under construction, has been designed for far lower capacity and frequency. What are the expected costs of this vastly increased train service? What figure can the Secretary of State put upon it? What will these major modifications of platforms and rolling stock do to the estimated date when the new service will come into operation? Large stretches of the new service will run through residential areas in my constituency. What estimates have been made about the likely environmental effects? Most important, what is the likely increase in noise disturbance?

What are the implications of the proposed new developments for road traffic in the area? If Canary wharf generates about 57,000 new jobs on the Isle of Dogs, what proportion of the employees working there can be expected to come by car, as opposed to rail? I have seen estimates of the use of the rail link as high as 35 to 40 per cent., and as low as 20 to 25 per cent. On the first assumption, about 30,000 people will travel to Canary wharf by car, and on the second assumption it will not be far short of 40,000 people. This takes no account of the delivery vehicles and messenger services that would also be involved.

Has any estimate been made of the capacity of the road system between the City and the Isle of Dogs to cater for this vast increase in road traffic? Is the highway wide enough? What are the implications for the use of the so-called docklands northern relief road and for Cable street, which lies between? What are the likely environmental and noise effects of such a massive increase in road traffic? How will a horrendous bottleneck be avoided on the Isle of Dogs, and what parking facilities have been planned for this great mass of commuter cars?

I do not know the answers to those questions, nor, I suspect, does the Secretary of State. Sensible planning is not an optional extra, a luxury, a bureaucratic exercise. It is an essential requirement for making sure that we can avoid a monumental snarl-up of traffic, with attendant great and unnecessary disturbances to residential communities that lie on the route of the proposed road and rail routes.

I had hoped to be able to move the motion that I tabled:

"That it be an Instruction to the Committee on the Bill to consider the economic, social and environmental effects of the provisions of the Bill on persons living and or working in the area served by the Docklands Light Railway."

That is not to be, as the Instruction has not been called. However, I hope that these matters will be considered as the Bill proceeds.

7.48 pm

Mr. Michael Heseltine (Henley): I listened with great interest to the speech of the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore). He asked a bewildering range of questions about the impact of the extension of the railway or the proposal to build offices in the east end of London.

I should have thought that the right hon. Gentleman would have been able to contribute to this debate like no other man because he was Secretary of State for the Environment for many years and has represented an east end constituency for many years in this House. If it had been possible to make these great calculations and to work them out with the precision that his questions implied, if there is a sort of planning environment and if there are answers, why did he never find them? What did the right hon. Gentleman do with that opportunity? There was no shortage of consultation, investigation or analysis. The whole environment of the east end of London was about inquiry, discussion, forecast and planning, but it was not about anything that mattered. Nothing happened. The right hon. Gentleman, who presided over the whole fortunes of the area and one of the most exciting reclamation schemes in the world, left a desert for this Government. That was the legacy that the Government inherited.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Heseltine: I shall not give way at this stage. Indeed, the hon. Gentleman was equally guilty.

When the Government at last began to grapple with the problem of bringing hope and life to the east end of London, two people were conspicuous in seeking to frustrate the Government's endeavours. The Government decided that the time for dialogue, consultation and planning was over and that it was time for results, and the first step that we had to take to get results was to wrest the decision-making capability from the hands of the right hon. Gentleman and the Labour party.

Mr. Spearing: I remind the right hon. Gentleman of the day when he and the present Secretary of State for Northern Ireland visited my constituency and the whole of the Beckton area. The London Docklands Joint Committee, which was established by the right hon. and learned Member for Hexham (Mr. Rippon) under the previous Conservative Government, had a Beckton district plan, under which the Thames water authority installed more than £20 million-worth of drainage works, and land reserved for public housing has now largely been taken over by private developers. When the right hon. Gentleman visited the area, were not those works in full swing?

Mr. Heseltine: I have no doubt that there were infrastructure works such as the hon. Gentleman described, but I remember the open spaces and the unforgivable dereliction which characterised the east end of London for most of the post-war period.

Mr. Shore: The right hon. Gentleman's account is a travesty of what happened. He knows perfectly well that the docklands area was allowed to rot. Under the right hon. and learned Member for Hexham (Mr. Rippon), nothing happened. It was not until I came to the Department of the Environment and made the docklands area one of the six partnership areas, including Liverpool, that inner-city policy was given a whole new impetus and things got moving. The right hon. Gentleman merely took the credit for the foundations that we had built, and imposed on the area an alien and unwanted London Docklands Development Corporation.

Mr. Heseltine: I do not dispute the right hon. Gentleman's claim that it was a partnership area. It was a partnership of the various Labour-controlled east-end London boroughs, which suffocated the area and denied access to the private sector for more than a decade. The Government brought about a partnership—not a wholly private sector-inspired operation—between the east-end boroughs and the private sector. The consequences of that can be seen today from one end of the east end of London to the other, not just within the urban development corporation area, but in the peripheral areas that surround it. It is alive with building activity.

We started with homes. At that time Opposition Members said that people in the east end could not afford and did not want homes in that area. They were content to see those people go to the new towns in order to buy their homes, leaving behind increasingly under-provided areas of housing and inadequate public-sector housing. Today, in the east end of London, the private sector is leading the most exciting new home explosion in any inner city.

Mr. Mikardo: Homes that cost all of £250,000.

Mr. Heseltine: If I remember correctly, when I went to Beckton to open some of the first houses, they were priced at less than £30,000, and they were sold principally to the council tenants whom we were told did not want to buy them. Therefore, the Government alone unleashed the aspirations of the east enders which had been denied them during the post-war period. The credit for that goes to the Government, and to no one else.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Heseltine: I shall not give way. I do not wish to take up the time of the House for more than a few minutes.

The issue if simple. Having now begun this exciting reclamation in partnership with the public and private sectors, do we intend to back the commitment that we unleashed upon it, or to return to dialogue, consultation, planning, further figures and more investigations, which we had to get rid of when we took over the reponsibility? My view is 100 per cent. clear: we must make and fulfil every commitment we know how to that exciting regeneration of the east end.

If I were to make only one potentially adverse criticism of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, it would be that I do not believe that there should be any long doctrinal discussions about whether the link must be financed by the public or private sector. It is unrealistic to think that railway connections must be financed privately, and there is hardly any precedent for it. The infrastructure for regenerating inner-city areas or opening up regional areas is usually provided in the public sector. If my right hon. Friend can do a good planning deal with those who wish to develop Canary wharf, I should be the first to praise him for it. To risk losing the development would be wholly unacceptable. There is a horse trade to be done, and I have complete faith in my right hon. Friend's ability to do just that. We must not allow the deal to be prejudiced.

I support the view, which is more closely related to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment than to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, that the Canary wharf project should not be called in. One of the purposes of establishing enterprise zones was to give certainty and clarity to people who wanted to develop so that they would develop quickly within the environment of the urban development corporation, and jobs would come on stream quickly. Once again, the Labour party is returning to its original position of frustrating the dynamism that the enterprise zone has unleashed.

Mr. Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): My right hon. Friend, as a former Secretary of State for the Environment, was the begetter of the special development order implementation. Will he confirm that the Secretary of State would have to be satisfied that all the real issues to which the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) referred, were solved before he issued the special development order, and that in any case the special development order would come before the House? Essentially, the only difference between that route and a public inquiry is that a public inquiry would take not six months but years, as the record and experience of major public inquiries show.

Mr. Heseltine: As my hon. Friend kindly reminds me, I have experience of the special development order. It can be a relatively speedy and thorough process, opening up wide discussion of the plans under consideration. It can be processed quickly through Parliament, if Parliament is prepared to allow that to happen. On one occasion I used that technique, and it led to a successful conclusion of the planning process, although, sadly, the building was never built. That is one of the ill fortunes of life.

What is on offer in the east end of London today may be the most exciting urban reclamation anywhere in the western world. It exists because the Government have created a partnership between the public and private sectors and funded the public sector, where necessary, and because the private sector has responded on a scale beyond the wildest dreams of those of us who believed in the project only a few years ago.

I hope that the Government will give all the support necessary to my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Thorne) and that the Bill will get a Second Reading. Any difficulties that need to be ironed out can be dealt with expeditiously in Committee, and this additional resource can be put behind the dramatic success already under way in the east end.

7.58 pm

Mr. Ian Mikardo (Bow and Poplar): I shall not waste time or abuse the patience of the House by commenting on the distorted rewriting of history to which we have just listened, and which is highly characteristic of the one who did the rewriting.

The achievements of the London Docklands Development Corporation have been funded with money taken from local authorities. I do not know what the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) calls a partnership when, from 110 acres of housing land in Tower Hamlets, 102 acres were given to the docklands corporation, leaving the borough council with only eight acres. That is a bit of a one-sided partnership, is it not? If that money had been made available to the London Docklands Joint Committee, I am sure that all that has been done would have been done and would have been done in the greater interests of the area.

[Mr. Ian Mikardo]

One thing, however, would have been different. Any action would have been carried out in the knowledge that there are tens of thousands of people living in the area. The great trouble with the docklands corporation and the proposed Canary wharf project is that the people in charge believe that they are building on a green field site. They ignore the fact that there are 15,000 people on the Isle of Dogs. When road transport is considered, those in charge of the two bodies I have just referred to simply try to find ways of coping with the 50,000 people who come on to the island every day. They think that they can solve that problem with the Canary wharf scheme.

Nobody seems to have noticed that half the working people go off the island to work. They must use the same narrow, winding and inadequate roads. There are also many secondary schoolchildren who leave the island to attend school. There is a good secondary school on the island, but some children leave the island to attend denominational schools. Those children must use the same narrow, winding, and, in one case, highly dangerous roads. Housewives also leave the island to shop. They go to Chrisp street market, Roman road market and Stratford market. They must use the bus facilities, which will be swamped by the people using the Canary wharf.

None of those considerations has been taken into account. The right hon. Member for Henley dismisses talking to people as contemptible consultation. He considers it to be dreadful, abject and most reprehensible to take the interests of people into account. That would be a reprehensible tendency of a Labour Government to consider people's welfare. The right hon. Gentleman would obviously believe that that could not be sufficiently condemned. All that the hon. Gentleman is concerned about is property and money.

Having passed over the right hon. Member for Henley, I should like to thank the hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Thorne) for the careful and patient way in which he expounded the contents of the Bill. I have great sympathy for the hon. Gentleman. The poor chap has been pitchforked into the job of moving the Second Reading of a Bill which is concerned with a part of London with which he has no constituency connection and which therefore he does not know very well. There is no earthly reason why he should know it well. He has also been pitchforked into moving the Second Reading of a Bill which he, unlike some of us with constituency interests, comes to at very short notice.

Some of us have been involved in great detail in this Canary wharf lark for many months. I think that the hon. Member for Ilford, South performed well to enter this new world which he knows nothing about, making it sound as if he was on relatively safe ground.

As the hon. Member for Ilford, South and my right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) said, the Bill is not simply concerned with the railway; it is also concerned with Canary wharf. They are, as my right hon. Friend quoted the Secretary of State for Transport as saying, "inseparably linked." I repeat what my right hon. Friend said: if there was no Canary wharf, there would be no City extension and we would not be having this debate about the Bill.

The House has a responsibility in this debate to consider the wider effects of the Bill and to take them into account. The House must consider the effects that the Bill will have on the lives of the people who live on the Isle of Dogs —if the right hon. Member for Henley will forgive me for that impertinence—and of the people who do not live there. Many people already come from other parts of London to work on the Isle of Dogs.

The House must also consider the effects that the Bill will have on the operation of the rest of the light railway. My right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney made that point. The affected parts of the light railway will be the section running from the eastward end of the City extension through the borough of Tower Hamlets and the northern part of the borough of Newham through to Stratford East station.

Like my right hon. Friend, I must make it clear that I am not, in principle, opposed to the railway, to the City extension or to the Canary wharf project. The railway and the City extension, as my right hon. Friend said, will provide a valuable transport facility. Of course, anything, absolutely anything within reason, that will create employment is warmly welcomed. The Opposition do not oppose these matters in principle.

Why, then, did we table a blocking motion to the Bill? My right hon. and hon. Friends and I did so for several reasons. The first was to precipitate the debate and to get, as my right hon. Friend has said, more information from the Government and the sponsors about what is to happen. We have not been given much information so far. The explanatory statement from the sponsors, part of which the hon. Member for Ilford, South read out this evening, is rather arid, thin, contentless and colourless. Our first object in precipitating the debate therefore, was, to learn more.

Our second purpose was to create time to consider all of the effects and implications of the project. A lot of thinking remains to be done. Many of the problems that arise from these developments have not yet been thought through.

Another purpose was to enable us to use the time made available to enable our constituents whose lives will be changed by the projects to have a say about the proposals and how they want to see the projects develop. I am sure that the right hon. Member for Henley will dismiss that with contempt, as he does not care about people.

It is important that we should provide time to allow the people whose daily lives will be changed to have a say. None of our lives will be affected, but some tens of thousands of people will be affected and it is important and an essential part of our democracy that they should have an opportunity to express their views.

The Bill, even in its narrowest interpretation, has aroused opposition from many people and organisations who believe that their interests may be prejudiced by it. That is why no fewer than 20 petitions against the legislation have been presented. They are a pretty formidable and rather interesting lot. They include Barclays bank, the Midland bank, the National Westminster bank and the Bankers Clearing House Ltd. In addition, there are 10 other companies, mostly either finance companies or property companies.

There are also some rather different petitioners, such as the corporation of the City of London, the Wardens and Commonality of the Mistery of Fishmongers of the City of London, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, the trustees of the London Parochial Charities for the City Parochial Foundation, the right rev. and right hon. the Lord Bishop of London, the London Diocesan Fund, the

Rev. Prebendary Dr. Hugh Fearn, the Rev. E. Chad Varah, the Rev. Peter A. Delaney and, last but by no means least, the Master, Wardens and Assistants of the Guild, Fraternity or Brotherhood of the Most Glorious and Undivided Trinity. If I had that lot up against me, I would give in gracefully for fear of what might happen to me in the afterlife! The House will readily see from that list that the Bill's sponsors have brilliantly succeeded in doing what few people can do—uniting in opposition to them both God and Mammon.

One petitioner in particular, MEPC plc, a property company, is curious and intriguing. Its vice-chairman and managing director is Mr. Christopher Benson, who is also the chairman of the London Docklands Development Corporation. His position with MEPC plc is one of his 18 company directorships, which, I suppose, might be why we do not see so much of him these days around the docklands.

It is curious that the LDDC is one of the three progenitors of the Bill, yet its chairman is petitioning against the Bill. I understand that that anomaly may soon be resolved. Mr. Benson may not be in charge of MEPC plc for much longer because, according to a report in one of the Sunday newspapers, the company will be taken over by Trafalgar House. Trafalgar House is run by Sir Nigel Broackes, who preceded Mr. Benson as chairman of the LDDC. Truly, the world of the big property tycoons is very small. The appointment of two chairmen of the corporation from that small world is one reason why, in all its operations, the corporation cares a great deal about property and money and does not care very much about people.

As the hon. Member for Ilford, South pointed out, in addition to that formidable list of petitioners, there may be some more objectors. As the hon. Gentleman explained, an amendment to the Bill is proposed. This has been made necessary by the revised plans for the Bank station. The Bill's sponsors need the consent of the House for an additional provision. To allow for the further objections to that additional provision, the sponsors will have to allow for more time. This will provide some breathing space to enable some sort of inquiry to be conducted. I do not necessarily think that it should be a statutory planning inquiry. I agree with the right hon. Member for Henley that that would take so long that it would be inappropriate.

I should like to give the House and, at the same time, the Bill's sponsors, the LDDC and the Canary wharf consortium a list of the matters which they will have to consider in detail before the Bill can complete its passage through the House and the other place. Those matters fall into two groups. The first concerns the light railway and the other concerns the Canary wharf scheme which the railway and the City extension are built to serve.

The first group presents some difficulties, for the reason that my right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney expounded with such exhaustive clarity. The problem is that we do not know for sure who will operate the railway. As I understood it, the Secretary of State intended first — my right hon. Friend quoted the references — to privatise the railway. He proposed to give away, for nothing, a railway worth £77 million of public money. That would have been a greater rip-off of the nation than selling British Telecom for half its true value.

The Secretary of State discovered, to his horror, that he could not privatise the railway because no one was willing to take it off his hands within the straitjacket of the rigid limits he had imposed on its capital expenditure. He therefore passed it back to London Regional Transport, where, as I understand it, it is for the moment and where some people — including, I was glad to hear, the right hon. Member for Henley — want it left. There are persistent rumours and reports that the Secretary of State intends some sort of privatisation, if he can manage it, and that he is even prepared to put in a lot more taxpayers' money to enable him to give away this public asset.

That leaves us not knowing where we are. The sponsors of the Canary wharf project — the consortium and the LDDC — also do not know where they are. They are very unhappy about this indecisive waffling by the Secretary of State from one policy to another. I have a copy of a report presented by the chief executive of the LDDC to the meeting of his board on 21 February. I obtained it through a leak—it is not just the Ministry of Defence and the Department of Trade and Industry that have become leaking vessels. The chief executive told the board that the indecisiveness of the Department of Transport about the ownership and, consequently, the financing of the railway, including the City extension—that waffle by the Secretary of State—had been "exasperating for the Consortium and indeed for us"—for the LDDC.

I look forward to the Minister's reply. Perhaps he will throw some light into this murkiness. If he can, all concerned — not only I but the docklands consortium, the London Docklands Development Corporation and all those who live in the area—will be grateful to him. He should do his best to put at rest all the doubts and worries that have been created by the Secretary of State.

As I said, the problems fall into two groups, of which the first group concerns the railway, and there are five difficulties concerning that aspect. One is the cost of the first stage railway—or, as the sponsors call it, the first and second stages; there were two Bills, Nos. 1 and 2. As we have heard, the cost of that has been limited—come what may, said the Secretary of State—to £77 million and not a penny more.

That sum was originally for one two-coach train running every seven and half minutes. Under this measure, with a City extension, we shall have a much higher frequency — one every one and a half minutes or thereabouts—and the trains will be 50 per cent. longer. That will mean more rolling stock, but it must all come out of the £77 million. That additional rolling stock will mean a larger maintenance organisation, necessitating more maintenance equipment, and that will cost money. We shall also need bigger stations, and that will mean some of the existing stations being structurally altered.

Although I am not an expert, I understand that the main change as a result of the greatly increased frequency will be in the signalling and control system. The trains will be automatic; a member of staff will be on board, but they will not be driven by a driver. They will be controlled from a central point. That is why the signalling system is the key to the whole business.

A signalling system that will do for one train every seven and a half minutes—because, in layman's terms, it has a time gap in which to unwind and reclock on—will not do for a frequency six or more times greater. All that will involve a lot of money, and nobody has said where it will come from. Theoretically, it must still all come out of the £77 million.

[Mr. Ian Mikardo]

I suspect that the Canary wharf consortium turned its nose up at the idea of taking it over, because it was being asked to buy a pig in a poke. The consortium knew all about the piglet, but it was suddenly told that it was no longer a piglet but a whacking great pig, and nobody would say how big it was. The poke was not to be any bigger, anyway, so that the consortium did not know whether it could get the pig into the poke. I suspect that that is why it gave the thumbs down to the Secretary of State when he tried to offload the railway on to it.

I come to the noise factor. It is true, as others have said, that the noise of automatic light railways — in some respects they are not much more than tramways — is much less than the noise of conventional trains. But three coaches going by every minute and a half, in many cases at the level of bedroom windows, is still a noise nuisance. There is a great difference in the noise level between a three-coach train every one and a half minutes and a two-coach train every seven and a half minutes.

I regret to say that people who have been dealing with the noise problem of the eastern part of the docklands light railway do not have much confidence in the willingness of the DLR to meet their valid objections about noise.

In the northern area, at the point where the railway, having gone northwards from the Isle of Dogs, turns east towards Stratford, there is a change of level and the railway moves up what is called the Bow incline. At that point there is a row of nice houses belonging to the Victoria Park housing association. The plans cut a little off the gardens of some of the houses there and place the railway virtually along the back walls of all of them.

I tried to help the people living in those houses, and the Victoria Park housing association, by convening meetings at the time of the No. 2 Bill, and we thought all was well. When the new Bill was presented I received a letter from the director of that association. In it he recalled how we met in July 1984 — when the No. 2 Bill was in Committee—and went on:

"I have been pressing DLR for further information about the likely noise levels and for improvements in noise reductions, so far without any success whatever. In particular, I have been asking for the following:

(1) Assurances that the noise specification will be achieved and enforced;

(2) Revised noise prediction calculations now that the details of the design have been finalised. It would be reassuring to know if the predictions were better than those presented at the hearing. Equally, if the predictions are worse, we are entitled to know;

(3) Assurances that maintenance standards will be adequate."

One would have thought that they would not be difficult assurances to give.

"(4) The noise barrier to be raised, preferably to two metres. It is quite clear that this would have significant benefits, but no reason has been given for not including it;

(5) A copy of the simulation tape that has been prepared; and

(6) Details of the noise reduction measures included in the final design."

He cannot get that information. It does not augur well judging how tender the light railway authorities will be with the huge volume that will be involved.

Some of the requests made by the Victoria Park housing association and the owners of the houses have the full support of the surveying team of the London borough of Tower Hamlets. That does not make a ha'penn'orth of difference. The docklands railway board, if it does not want to tell, does not. It is not right that residents should not be able to get the information. Even worse, it means that there will be a great deal of scepticism about how far the railway will have managed to cope sensibly with the increased noise problems arising from longer trains and higher frequency.

My third point of concern is whether there will be, between the light railway, the rest of LRT and the London area of British Rail, harmonisation of the ticketing system, fares, travel cards and concessionary fares. If the railway is to remain with LRT, that will be relatively easy, although we would still want an assurance that it will be done. If it is to be privatised, then, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney pointed out, the harmonisation will be difficult.

Mr. Stephen Ross (Isle of Wight): This is an important point on which I back the hon. Member to the hilt. He must, make sure that this is written into the contract. Such a provision was not written into the contract when Sealink was privatised and now there is considerable trouble with concessionary fares, through booking and the rest.

Mr. Mikardo: I am grateful to the hon. Member for his support. It is a pretty obvious point. There is nothing very clever or difficult about it and it should be attended to.

The fourth of my five points is that the people of the area should be provided with a proper system to handle passenger complaints. LRT has its arrangements, so if the railway stays with that body, there will be no difficulty, but if it is privatised, the people of the area will have no recourse, except through the expensive mechanism of the courts, against being badly treated, low safety standards or a failure to honour any undertakings. I should like to hear from the Minister about that as well.

The fifth and last point is about the extension of the railway into the southern part of Newham. If, as I hope, my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) catches your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am sure he will have a great deal to tell us about that. I apologise for having gone on for so long, but 20,000 of my constituents are affected by this proposal. I have been living with it since the beginning of last year, and I have been trying to learn something about it.

The second group of matters that concern my constituents derive from the Canary wharf scheme, where the rail extension is to be built. Everybody in the area —I not the least—warmly welcomes any possibility of creating jobs in an area of low employment. There have been a number of wide-ranging estimates on how many jobs will be created. I strongly suspect that all of them are exaggerated. The highest estimate is shown by the report produced and widely advertised, including in *The House Magazine*, by a consultancy firm called Henley. I do not know who is responsible for commissioning the report. The company kindly sent me a copy, but I received it only yesterday evening, perhaps because it did not want me to have the time to read it too carefully. Now that I have read it, I am discovering that the methodology behind its conclusions on job creation is not merely flawed and naive, but laughable.

If any of us were setting out to estimate the number of jobs that would be created in Canary wharf, we would do it by first discovering what firms were to be located there, secondly, what they would be doing there, thirdly the work load that would be generated when firms are there, and

fourthly, how many workers would be required to carry that work load. There is nothing clever about that—it is the way to go about estimating how many jobs are required.

However, this was not what Messrs. Henley did. Almost incredibly, in its lovely glossy booklet—I bet the cover is worth more than the content—the firm said that there will be so many million square feet of office space, and that each worker requires so many feet of working space. The company then divided the one into the other and, hey presto, calculated the number of workers who will be given jobs. QED. Can anyone conceive of anything more rubbishy than that as a methodology for a serious piece of economic analysis? Whoever paid for that report should be trying to get his money back, because he has been conned.

If anybody should think that all that I have said is just my personal view, I point out that the LDDC attaches no more credence to the report and its estimate than I do, because it has just commissioned another report from a major firm of accountants, on exactly the same terms of reference, so obviously it does not believe a word of what the Henley report says. It is a fairy tale, and it would be wrong to make any plans based on that so-called analysis.

None the less, however unsoundly based the estimates of new jobs are, however exaggerated they may be, if we can get only a quarter as many of the jobs that it suggests will be created, and if only a quarter of that quarter will be jobs for local people, that will be a godsend in an area in which unemployment is double the national avearage.

However, there still remain four causes for concern about the effects of those developments on the quality of life of the people who live on the island,. The first is the environmental blight of those three phallic symbols stuck up in the middle of the island, which will be pretty ugly. They will destroy the best view in London—the view across the river to those lovely buildings at Greenwich. I am not speaking of my say-so when I say this. It is noteworthy that the Royal Fine Art Commission, which gave a modified welcome to the Canary wharf design, is rapidly retreating from its position and beginning to question the design.

Secondly, there is the road congestion to which my right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney referred. As hon. Members will know, the Isle of Dogs is shaped from north to south like a pear, with the stem at the top end and the bulbous bit at the bottom. A single road goes round the outside like a great "u". It is wider at the bottom than it is at the two prongs at the top. The western side enters from the roundabout in West India Dock road. The eastern side enters from Preston's road. The whole of the road is narrow. The western entrance to the island is narrow and winding and there is a swing bridge. It will be great, will it not, if the swing bridge is opened when 30,000 people are coming on to the island. There are already tailbacks from there to the mainland. There are considerable tailbacks at both entrances. One may imagine what it will be like with all this lot coming through.

The western side is even worse. The road is narrow, winding and dangerous, and it curves. There is a very high wall along one side of the road, which creates blind bends. They are terribly dangerous. Huge numbers of people—30,000 a day—will be coming to the island on that road, in addition to the people who already come to the island. Some of them already have to wait quite a long time on public transport before they can get there. With a contraflow of islanders going off to the mainland to work, housewives going off to the mainland to shop and children going off to the mainland to school, there will be absolute chaos.

Improvements can be made, but what is the time scale? No borough programme has been approved for road improvements. No projects have been approved which could be implemented in the near future. There is much talk of a new link with the island from the east of the A13. However, there will be great problems to overcome. It will not be possible to get away from a planning inquiry there because it is not in the enterprise zone—or a large part of it is not in the enterprise zone. That is years and years away.

The third of the four matters that cause concern is the displacement of existing business. I shall trouble the House with one more letter from a constituent. I should not do so if it were not germane to the matter under discussion. It is the most pungently practical letter that I have received from a constituent in all my years as a Member of Parliament. It comes from the managing director of a small company that is located in the London docklands development zone on the Isle of Dogs. I ask the House to listen to what this chap says. He writes:

"A little over five years ago we moved into a primitive disused PLA warehouse, part of what had been grandly re-christened 'Quayside Industrial Estate'. The dilapidated state of the area was reflected in the low rents but we were promised future landscaping, car parks and all amenities. Regardless of subsequent increases in rent and rates, none of these things materialised."

This is the great London Docklands Development Corporation that the right hon. Member for Henley was lauding to the skies.

My constituent went on to say:

"none of these things materialised and the environment has continued to decline rapidly. However, in spite of all the difficulties we have prospered and now give work to some 24 full and part time employees. On Wednesday 20 November 1985, the right hon. Nigel Lawson MP presented us with an award 'for contribution to the regeneration of Docklands.' Only a few days earlier we had received notice to quit from the London Dockland Development Corporation who wished to re-develop our site. They say they are prepared to compensate us to some degree for loss or expenditure incurred in the enforced move, but they are not prepared in any way to assist in our relocation. Unfortunately, now that the developers can see rich pickings on the horizon the prices and rents being asked for the new units are completely beyond the likes of our modest enterprise and we are effectively being booted out of the very area that we helped to resuscitate. We feel"—

this is a real cri de coeur—

"that we were pioneers, we belong here and have every right to remain part of Docklands future. The 20 or so people we employ are the real east enders, not middle class software analysts and finance brokers moving 'out east' from Weybridge and Gerrards Cross. We are in the last throes of our battle to remain in Docklands. Unless we find some help within the next few weeks, the LDDC will have won and the people of the Isle of Dogs will have sadly lost another 2,000 jobs."

That is the great London Docklands Development Corporation which the right hon. Member for Henley lauds.

Mr. Spearing: Will my hon. Friend note that the great LDDC has put compulsory purchase orders, in very similar circumstances, on a dozen or more units in my constituency, including land owned by the London borough of Newham? It is not just happening in Tower Hamlets and on the Isle of Dogs.

Mr. Mikardo: That is absolutely right. I should not be surprised if it were happening on the south side of the river as well. We shall possibly hear about that if the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) speaks this evening. Certainly it is happening all over this area. But what worries me is that what has happened up to now is only a tiny fraction of the amount of disclocation and removal of existing businesses that will take place as a result of the Canary wharf scheme. It will be 10, 20 or 30 times as great as it is now.

The strangest part of the story that I have just read out from this letter is that some time ago the London Docklands Development Corporation gave an undertaking that all businesses being thrown out of their premises would be not only compensated but resited. That undertaking was given to this chap who wrote to me and to everybody else, including the companies that have just been mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South.

A local newspaper reported an undertaking that had been given by a spokesman for the corporation. According to the newspaper report, he said:

"The businesses have our assurance that they will not be financially disadvantaged. They will receive full disturbance compensation."

He added:

"All tenants are to be offered alternative accommodation in the docklands area and possibly within the Enterprise Zone."

That clear and unequivocal undertaking has been flagrantly and, I am sorry to say, characteristically dishonoured by the corporation.

Mr. Simon Hughes: The problem is even worse for those of us who are in those parts of the docklands area that are not in an enterprise zone. We suffer not only from the relocation, for which we are also seeking undertakings if we are to support other schemes, but from the natural sucking of jobs into areas which are included in an enterprise zone. That is a double pressure which militates against those of us who represent constituencies to the south of the river. They have identical problems, identical high levels of unemployment and identical employment needs. We are willing to get on with dealing with those problems if we are given the chance and also the guarantees that I hope that the Minister can start to give us tonight.

Mr. Mikardo: I am absolutely sure that the hon. Gentleman is completely correct. The enterprise zone creates problems at its edges and by the drawing of its boundaries. The only people who are benefiting from the enterprise zone are the landlords, not the entrepreneurs. The concessions that are given to those who rent industrial premises on land within the enterprise zone make the land more valuable. There are large capital profits being made not by manufacturing companies, but only by property companies.

Finally I turn to the question of an inquiry. As I have said, one could understand genuine resistance to a formal planning inquiry. If my right hon. Friend is right in saying that it could be done in six months, we could do it even starting now because it will be all of six months before all the petitioners are dealt with, it will be all of six months before all the questions are answered and it will be all of six months before Credit Suisse First Boston will be able to raise the huge amount of money which is involved. As I understand it, that money is not turning up as quickly and as easily as it had expected. I think that there would be time even for a statutory inquiry if we could be sure that it would take six months. I am bound to say, although I differ from him on other matters, that I think that the right hon. Member for Henley was right in casting doubt on whether a statutory inquiry could be that quick.

I cannot for the life of me see why the consortium, in co-operation with the development corporation, should not hire a hall on the Isle of Dogs for a week and appoint one person of a type who would carry public recognition—an authoritative person, a person who would be recognised as being impartial and fair—or perhaps a bench of three. They could sit there for a week and all those who have anything to say about how their lives will be affected or how their businesses will be affected or what their worries are about the Canary wharf scheme could come along and say it. Then, when those on the bench had listened for a week, they would write a report, and they could do it in two or three weeks, I am sure, and publish their findings—not statutory, not binding on anyone, not involving the Secretary of State, but it would be a big step forward. I think that it would do a great deal to get over some of the difficulties and frictions which exist and which I fear will intensify in the next few months.

The right hon. Gentleman said that the whole purpose of an enterprise zone was to avoid the delay of inquiries. One understands that. However, the Canary wharf scheme is quite different from anything that was envisaged as escaping public inquiry. This is sui generis: it is a one-off; there has never been anything like it. It will have effects on a large community. It will have effects not merely in the borough, but all the way from the City to the constituency of the hon. Member for Ilford, South and equally on the south side of the river. Many people are potentially disadvantaged.

Consultation by the development corporation up to now has been a sham. It consists of its making up its mind what it is going to do and sometimes telling people what it has made up its mind to do. That is not consultation. There was set up—I was very pleased about it, I wanted it, and I was delighted when it happened—a joint Canary wharf working party between the development corporation and the docklands forum, which is the umbrella organisation of all the community groups in the area, and what happened? The critical meeting of that joint working party had to be cancelled because the corporation did not produce the documents which it had firmly promised for that meeting as a basis for discussion at the meeting. It just treats everybody with absolute contempt in that way.

I end as I began, by thanking the hon. Member for Ilford, South for his introduction to the debate, but I must tell him and the sponsors of the Bill that between now and Report we shall monitor carefully how far the sponsors have gone towards meeting our constituents' reasonable requests before we decide what should be our final attitude to the further progress of the Bill.

8.55 pm

Mr. Charles Morrison (Devizes): As there are still several hon. Members who wish to speak in the debate, I should start by assuring them that it is not my intention to speak for quite as long as the hon. Member for Bow and Poplar (Mr. Mikardo) spoke.

I should like to declare an interest as warden of the Ancient Mistery of Fishmongers, but neither that petitioner nor any of the other petitioners, so far as I know,

is petitioning against the Canary wharf development. All they are doing is petitioning against some aspect or consequence of the London Docklands Railway City extension.

The hon. Member for Bow and Poplar spoke with his usual charm and humour. Justifiably, he has expressed concern, explicitly and implicitly, about the welfare of people, but surely people will be best served by the new jobs, the new opportunities and the new facilities which will come with such an exciting development as Canary wharf. Even if the Henley Centre is a little wrong, I suspect that the benefit that the development will produce in jobs will be considerable. I have no doubt that many hon. Members would be thrilled to bits if they had this kind of development in their constituencies. I can tell the House that my hon. Friend the Member for Calder Valley (Mr. Thompson) has been getting steadily greener in the course of the debate, as it has become clearer how many jobs are going to result from the development.

Hon. Members may with some justification wonder why the Member for Devizes is speaking in the debate. In truth, I am speaking in place of my Friend the Member for the City of London and Westminster (Mr. Brooke). I should emphasise that I am not delegated by him to say anything that I shall say but, as his representative in the sense that at weekends he is my constituent and as therefore I am the person to exercise judgment as to what is in his best interests, and since, as a Minister, he is debarred from taking part in the debate, my objective to try to speak to some of the interests of many of those people and institutions which he represents. My hon. Friend attended the beginning of the debate, but he had to depart, to his regret and chagrin, on ministerial business.

In particular, I speak for the corporation of the City of London and some others of those who have petitioned against the Bill. That stated, I want at the outset to emphasise again, and to make it abundantly clear, that I am strongly in favour of the Canary wharf development. I am fully aware that in order to achieve the success that that development deserves, it is essential that it should have good connecting transport and railway connections. However, those railway connections cannot be constructed without full account being taken of the interests of others. Thus, it is not my intention—far from it—to oppose the Bill in principle.

Furthermore, I am fully aware that negotiations between the sponsors of the Bill and those concerned about certain aspects of it are continuing. Indeed, I had hoped that the negotiations would have been brought to a successful conclusion before the Bill came before the House. If that had happened, I would have withdrawn my name from the motion in the names of the hon. Member for Bow and Poplar and others. But the Bill has come forward rather more quickly than I expected and the negotiations are not concluded.

My aim tonight is to ensure that doubts which have been expressed to me by the City corporation and others are given consideration. The revised terminus scheme at the Bank, first canvassed by London Regional Transport on 20 February, leaves unanswered a fundamental, if implicit, objection voiced in the City's petition against the original scheme that a Bank terminus approach of any kind would not serve the long-term interests of those using the City as their place of employment or those envisaged to be using the railway from the docklands area.

The City corporation's preference for a Cannon street/Monument new station is directed to ensuring that those whose destinations lie west beyond the City do not further exacerbate the critical congestion above and below ground in the Bank area. Even though I am not a regular visitor to the City, I am well aware of that congestion.

If a future Blackfriars extension were allowed for, some of the through passenger traffic would not interchange in the City at all. Moreover, the unrealised part of the east-west vision of the 1970s Jubilee line would be preserved for the benefit of Londoners generally. Particularly preserved would be the future extension from Blackfriars to Charing Cross to meet the existing terminus of the Charing Cross/Stanmore/Jubilee line, being the section already constructed. However good the interchange arrangements claimed for the revised Bank terminus proposal, it is at an unacceptable penalty to those working in the City and to the proper east-west strategy of London Regional Transport for the future.

The danger is that the promoters are so absorbed — perhaps understandably — in achieving a business and commercial link between the Bank and the new financial centre at Canary wharf that they totally ignore the wider community interests of those who will live and work in docklands in travelling any further westwards than the City.

In addition to that major strategic criticism, I want to bring to the attention of the House the City's concern about the following main detailed considerations. There is a severe reservation about the closeness of the new tunnels at one metre underneath the existing Northern line tunnels and stations. The proposed pedestrian link from the Waterloo and City line to the Central line is too close to the foundations of the Mansion House. I am sure that the Canary wharf developers would be horrified if anything ever happened to the Mansion House. The new option at King William street proposes the complete stopping up of Lombard street and Bucklersbury, and that, not surprisingly, is completely unacceptable. That option would lead to increased congestion at Monument and along the south side of Cannon street. It does not tackle the problem of passenger flows from Cannon street to the Bank.

The corporation of the City of London's preferred option remains the one identified by its engineers at Cannon street. That would allow the traveller on the Docklands Light Railway to continue westward to interchange with the District and Circle lines and to join the southern region of British Rail at Cannon street or to take a travolator link to Bank station. It should be emphasised that from Cannon street to Bank would take no more than five minutes by travolator.

Comparing the latest London Regional Transport scheme with the City's option, the last report of the corporation engineers says:

"Firstly, although both schemes are quite complex in engineering terms, there are far greater risks associated with the construction of the LRT scheme. The proximity of the proposed DLR step plate junction and the new southern escalator tunnels to the existing Northern Line running tunnelsa gives rise to serious concern about the continuous operation of services along the Northern Line during the construction of the DLR.

Secondly, the LRT scheme pre-empts any possibility of a further westward extension, whereas the Cannon Street Option is capable of extension. It is based on the design for a Jubilee Line station at Cannon street, and so the DLR could be extended along the route of the Jubilee Line if it has been preserved. This is of particular importance at a time when extensions to London's

[Mr. Charles Morrison]

overcrowded underground system are being sought. Following the introduction of travel cards and the simplified fare structure, there has been a considerable increase in public transport demand. Furthermore, should predictions for rapid increases in the City's employment transpire . . . a system that is capable of extension would be of great merit."

Mr. Mikardo: I am most grateful, as I am sure the whole House is, to the hon. Gentleman for giving us the up-to-date view of the City Corporation, which is a very important element. May I suggest that the Cannon street solution has one additional advantage, in that a roofed-over Cannon street would make an ideal site for a heliport?

Mr. Morrison: That is a very interesting suggestion, which will no doubt be taken into account by the corporation and by the promoters of the Bill.

Although the City corporation is pleased to note the willingness of London Regional Transport to consider alternatives to the original proposals, it is not happy about the latest London Regional Transport scheme. That is why it is continuing to petition against the Bill.

I turn to the concern of those petitioners who wish to obtain a more satisfactory basis for compensation. Some of those petitioners would be partly, or perhaps wholly, relieved of that concern if the City corporation's preferred scheme was adopted. Be that as it may, I should like to remind the House that the normal basis for compensation payable by an acquiring authority — for example, in cases such as the construction of an underground railway by London Regional Transport—is the same as for other compulsory purchasers of land or interests in land.

First, there is compensation for the land actually taken. In this case the land that would be taken is merely subsoil at a depth of about 100 ft. The value of that is almost nominal; it might be a few pounds per metre run of tunnel. In addition, however, where an owner retains land contiguous to the land taken, he is entitled to claim compensation for injurious affection if the land retained is reduced in value due to the acquisition and the works.

To establish a claim for injurious affection, one has to demonstrate that the market value of the land retained is reduced. That is difficult enough when there is clearly immediate damage and it is merely a matter of deciding how much the potential sale price is reduced. It becomes much more difficult when damage may or may not be felt at some indefinite date many years hence. For example, when a perfectly sound building is leased and produces a good income for a term expiring in perhaps 25 years' time, at that date it may or may not be found expedient to arrange for a redevelopment, the cost of which may or may not be increased due to possible complications arising as a result of the presence of a tunnel a long way below the surface of the land.

By the time that one has taken into account doubts about the amount, if any, of the extra costs of development and whether the development will take place and one has deferred the estimated extra cost for 25 years, the answer is that compensation for injurious affection will be very low. Furthermore, it is extremely difficult to demonstrate by market evidence that a purchaser of the property today would pay any less for the building because of that possible future problem.

My basic point is that a developer should not be permitted to enhance his scheme by damaging other people's property without paying to the full for that damage. The fair solution might be to require the developer to provide for compensation to be paid in future when the damage occurs and can be assessed properly. I have no doubt that this matter can be thrashed out in Committee, but it is of great importance to several petitioners. I cannot believe that it is beyond the wit of the promoters to meet most of the arguments being put forward by the petitioners. I certainly hope so, as I believe that the Canary wharf development is of tremendous importance and holds out great hope for the future.

9.11 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Transport (Mr. David Mitchell): It might be helpful if I give the Government's view of the Bill.

When the Bill was deposited in November, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made a statement explaining the Government's views on matters as we then saw them. We had reached an understanding with the Canary wharf consortium that it would contribute £30 million to the construction of the extension and secure underwriting of an agreed privatisation scheme. The understanding was subject to final agreement between London Regional Transport and the consortium on the detailed design and costs of the City extension, and on particulars of the privatisation scheme. It was also contingent on the completion of a master building agreement on the Canary wharf development between the consortium and the London Docklands Development Corporation. The whole understanding was, of course, subject to parliamentary approval of the Bill.

In making our statement, we expected the design and costing exercises to be completed before tonight's debate. I am pleased to be able to tell the House that since then good progress has been made in refining the design, specification and estimated cost of the extension of the docklands light railway to the City. In the light of this work, as my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Thorne) has explained, amendments are to be sought to the Bill to improve the interchange arrangements with the existing Underground network. I am sure that this will be widely welcomed, and I hope that the amendments will be accepted. More generally, the Government are satisfied with the progress which has been made by LRT in developing a workable and soundly based design for the new extension.

In parallel with the work on the design of the railway, LRT and the Government have been discussing with the Canary wharf consortium detailed proposals for the privatisation of the whole railway, as envisaged in the November agreement. The consortium has recently told us that it no longer feels able to secure the underwriting of a privatisation of the railway. Instead, it has suggested going forward on the basis that the railway will be built and subsequently operated within the public sector, but with finance being provided by the consortium for its construction.

My right hon. Friend has told the consortium that, subject to acceptable terms being agreed, he is prepared to see the extension built and operated in the public sector. We have not ruled out the prospects of privatisation for all time, but the thorough consideration that this has been given in our detailed discussions with the consortium suggests that it is not a practical option at the present time.

Negotiations are in hand with the consortium to explore the mechanisms for financing the construction of the

railway extension, taking into account projections of profit and loss on the combined railway. The LDDC is also engaged in negotiations with the consortium on the wider aspects of the Canary wharf proposals. The Government will wish to take an overall view of progress on all fronts before agreements are finalised by LRT and the LDDC. Needless to say, the project will not go ahead unless the Government are wholly satisfied with the deal.

The proposed City extension to the docklands light railway would provide an additional impetus to development, not only at Canary wharf, but elsewhere in the docklands. It should also benefit local people by giving them improved connections to the Underground network.

Mr. Spearing: The Minister has just said that the Government will not go ahead until there is a successful conclusion to the deal. Therefore, will he confirm that further discussions need to take place between himself, the promoters and the Canary wharf consortium, and also, possibly, in respect of the master building agreement? Is the hon. Gentleman saying that the principle of going back to the public sector has been agreed, but the financial details have yet to be agreed?

Mr. Mitchell: Broadly speaking, what the hon. Gentleman has said is correct. I shall spell it out a little more in a moment.

The Government have considered the content of the Bill and have no objection, in principle, to the powers sought by LRT. A number of matters have been raised in correspondence with the promoters by the Department, and I would expect these to be cleared up satisfactorily. In particular, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment is somewhat concerned about the impact of the proposed redevelopment of Tower Hill station and the effect of tunnelling and other works on the historically and archaeologically important areas immediately surrounding the Tower of London. Also, for a temporary period during construction, the movement and management of the many tourists in the area will be seriously disrupted. Therefore, although my right hon. Friend is not against the scheme in principle, he wishes to reserve his position on that aspect for the time being.

During our earlier discussions, the hon. Member for Bow and Poplar (Mr. Mikardo) sought clarification of the current state of play and was worried about what he called "indecisiveness". That matter was also raised by the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore). He drew attention to parliamentary questions which were answered last November and contrasted them with the current position. The fact is that, as negotiations proceed, the situation is one of constant change. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has been very forthcoming. Perhaps in retrospect, if he had waited he might not have been faced with this particular charge today.

I am sure that no hon. Member would expect me or any other Minister to conduct any part of these negotiations on the Floor of the House. I can say that there has been no indecision. We are still in the process of negotiating the best deal for the Government and the public. That does not mean giving the consortium just what it wants. I have explained that the consortium felt unable to underwrite the privatisation of the whole railway. It is the consortium which has changed its mind. We have responded positively to the new situation.

The hon. Member for Bow and Poplar also mentioned noise. That is a matter for LRT, and no doubt it will explain it to the Committee. The hon. Gentleman also mentioned the harmonisation of the light railway's and LRT's concessionary fares and pensioners' passes. I can give him the assurance that he sought. It will be fully covered by LRT.

The hon. Gentleman asked also about a public complaints system. I can confirm that the LRPC will apply, as to other parts of the public network. I believe that Dr. Eric Midwinter and his colleagues on the LRPC will be happy with that.

Mr. Mikardo: I am grateful to the Minister for the precise answers that he has given to some of my questions. However, I am a little worried about the parts that he has not answered. I hope that I am not attaching undue significance to the omissions. I asked about fares and fare structures being harmonised with LRT.

Mr. Mitchell: Those are matters for LRT. I hope that I shall be able to conclude by leaving sufficient time for my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South to respond to issues which have been raised concerning LRT.

The hon. Member for Bow and Poplar asked about safety standards, which is really a matter for LRT. However, I can tell him that rail safety legislation will apply. He asked a number of questions about jobs, but this issue is somewhat outside the scope of the Bill.

Both the hon. Gentleman and the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney addressed themselves to traffic and environmental effects on the road system. The LDDC undertakes transport planning in its area in conjunction with the Department of Transport and the boroughs, and it is currently examining the highways implications of the Canary wharf proposals. This work will reveal whether it will be necessary to extend and rephase existing plans for road connections to Canary wharf, and whether substantial on-site parking provision, as planned by the developer, will be sufficient.

The hon. Member for Bow and Poplar warmly welcomed the prospects of job creation, but drew attention to many petitions, including a number from City institutions, both spiritual and temporal, and expressed anxiety about the effect on his own life in the hereafter. I am sure we all hope that he will remain here long enough to see many jobs created as a result of the initiatives that flow from the introduction of the enterprise zone by this Government.

The hon. Gentleman drew attention to the interlinking between the Canary wharf development and the western extension. As he rightly said: no development, no DLR extension. It is only the request from the consortium for the rail link that has caused the expenditure to arise in the first place. The hon. Gentleman complained that there was no planning inquiry. I cannot speak for Mr. Travelstead, but I feel that if there were not an enterprise zone and the projects had to pass through the normal planning consent arrangements, it is highly likely that Mr. Travelstead and any other substantial developers would run to the other side of the world before even considering undertaking the development.

The hon. Gentleman will know that the consortium has made a series of presentations of the scheme to the docklands boroughs, local Members and community and environmental groups. In response to the views expressed at these meetings it has modified the scheme to move one of the towers further east to take it out of the line of Wren's Greenwich axis.

[Mr. Mitchell]

The right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney talked about the cost of modifications to the existing DLR arrangement. It will be between £7 million and £10 million. The right hon. Gentleman asked who would pay. The answer is that that issue is part of the negotiations with the consortium. It is included in the estimated cost of £92 million. The right hon. Gentleman talked about the effect on the environment. That is a matter for LRT. He asked whether modifications could be carried out to the existing railway without delay to its opening, and I assure him that they could be. We still expect the opening to take place in July 1987.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) demonstrated the arid failure of the old methods of planning blueprints, Socialism and bureaucracy to create the jobs and the rebirths that are so necessary. In contrast to that is the bustling activity that has been brought about by the lifting of planning and other restraints in the enterprise zone. I am sorry that Opposition Members have learnt nothing and still hanker for the old methods which failed so miserably in the past. My right hon. Friend the Member for Henley was right—the enterprise zone and the LDDC have unlocked the opportunity which Mr. Travelstead and his colleagues are now seizing. I am glad my right hon. Friend supports this significant United States investment in the docklands area.

My hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Morrison) recognised the difficulties of my hon. Friend the Member for City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke), who, as a Minister, is unable to participate in this debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Devizes raised a series of questions on behalf of the City, including the linkage into the LRT and BR network, structural matters between the docklands light railway and some of the existing tubes, the closeness to Mansion House foundations, the effect on Bucklersbury, and compensation matters. These are matters for consideration not by me but by LRT and the promoters of the Bill, but I have no doubt that they will be dealt with when the Bill proceeds, as I hope it will, to Committee.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South demonstrated, in his introduction to the Bill, the benefits to the dockland areas and the preparedness of himself and his fellow promoters of the Bill, so far as practicable, to meet legitimate points made by petitioners.

There are 20 petitions against the Bill and they relate to property interests along the proposed route of the railway. The petitioners will have an opportunity to present their objections to the Select Committee. The Committee will be in a better position than we are tonight to examine the issues involved in detail. It will have the added advantage of hearing expert evidence. I therefore recommend to the House that the Bill be given a Second Reading and allowed to proceed in the usual way to Committee for its detailed consideration.

9.26 pm

Mr. Peter Snape (West Bromwich, East): The Bill before us deserves our wholehearted support. I have been guilty of repeatedly boring hon. Members over the years by my support for the railway industry and railway schemes, especially new ones.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Thorne) on the detailed manner in which he introduced the Bill. However, although his speech was detailed and outlined many of the Bill's provisions, we are bereft of some vital information. I attach no blame to him because vital financial information is lacking. To use the words of the Minister, "negotiations are still taking place" at the Department of Transport.

The problem with the Bill is not that negotiations are not being conducted "on the Floor of the House" to use the words of the Minister—none of us would expect that—but that negotiations appear to have been conducted in the habitual manner of this Secretary of State. That is by nod, wink and leaks from Marsham street. The odd off-the-record remark and semi off-the-record briefings to various journalists and others are regarded as a suitable way of charting the advance, or otherwise, of this project over the past few months.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) rightly described the Bill as scanty and contradictory. That point was emphasised by my hon. Friend the Member for Bow and Poplar (Mr. Mikardo) in his drawn-out, but nevertheless extremely informative, contribution. My hon. Friend mentioned that the original estimate, approximately £77 million, was for a railway consisting of two-coach trains running every seven minutes. The more detailed project which is before the House tonight envisages a train every one and a half minutes. That, as my hon. Friend correctly pointed out, involves more rolling stock and a fairly complicated signalling and control system which would allow the trains to run automatically.

It is some years since I had anything to do with signalling control systems on British Rail mainline, but even more years have passed since the Secretary of State played trains on the nursery floor, which is presumably how he qualified for his present post. I hope that the Minister will agree that new signalling schemes are fairly expensive, and that if all the costs are to be contained within the original estimate of £77 million——

Mr. David Mitchell: No.

Mr. Snape: Perhaps the Minister will tell the House what the costs are likely to be.

Mr. Mitchell: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman was, not only in deep conversation when my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Thorne) introduced the Bill but was not listening when I replied to that precise point. I gave a figure of between £7 million and £10 million, and said that it was covered by the existing negotiations and would be in addition to the £77 million.

Mr. Snape: I apologise if I missed that part of the hon. Gentleman's speech. However, he has still not answered the central question, which is where the money is coming from and how the scheme is to be financed.

A mixture of leak and innuendo has surrounded the scheme. First newspapers reported that rich Americans were descending on our shores, anxious to caste as much largesse as possible into docklands, to build and operate a railway system. I hope that I am not sceptical by nature, but I find the scenario envisaged by some of our more sensational newspapers rather surprising. I noticed at the time that the Secretary of State looked rather pleased with himself, so I thought that he may have got it wrong again but that, on the other hand, he may have got it right, and that that would happen. Then we heard that only £30

million of private capital would go towards the overall cost of the project. Again, the Marsham street rumour machine went into action, and we heard that the Secretary of State had threatened to cancel the whole project because not a penny of public money was to be used on it. He is not overfond of railways at the best of times, and new ones in docklands are guaranteed not to appeal to him.

Then, in a Cabinet Committee—those things that do not meet because we never hear about them — the number of jobs involved was pointed out to the Secretary of State, and the ante was upped to £45 million for additional costs. I hope that I did not miss this part of the Minister's speech, but we still do not know who will own the railway, if it is ever built. There are some gaping holes in the project, as we see from the Bill. Will it be the Department of Transport, the London Docklands Development Corporation or London Regional Transport? We are entitled to know.

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Nicholas Ridley): My hon. Friend the Minister made that clear.

Mr. Snape: In that case, the Secretary of State can stand up and tell us. After all, this is his pet project, and none of us knows who will eventually own the project, including hon. Members with a direct constituency interest and involvement. If the information is available, we should like it now.

Mr. Mitchell: If the hon. Gentleman had listened to what I said earlier, he would have discovered that LRT would own and register the project. I made that clear in my speech, and I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman was not with us.

Mr. Snape: That was not how I interpreted the Minister's remark. I heard that part of his speech, and he made it clear that LRT was responsible for operating the system, but only because our rich Americans, unlike some of the Conservative party's less enlightened Back Benchers, know full well that dollars, pounds and profits are not normally to be made from running a railway system. The benefits of running the docklands railway are not immediately quantifiable. They are similar to those with which we justify the nation's road building programme—that is, that time is saved, life is saved because of the lack of accidents, and better communications are achieved, giving a boost to the economy. One cannot stuff such profits in one's pocket and walk away with them.

As I have said, no one particularly wants to operate the railway as a private enterprise operation. That is why the Secretary of State and his hon. Friend the Minister of State must still satisfy us as to where the cash is coming from and in whom the ownership will eventually be invested if the project goes ahead. I am only sorry that the hon. Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor) was not in his place tonight, as he might have learned a salutary lesson that privatised railways do not appear in the whole of capitalist United States of America. Even there, they believe that the running and operation of the railway system is best left to professional railwaymen.

Mr. Shore: My hon. Friend has brought from the Minister of State an astonishing set of facts. In his statement the Minister of State confirmed that the City extension and the dockland railway is to be run by London Regional Transport. The Minister of State said that it will be a publicly owned and publicly financed part of the railway system. Throughout the whole of November 1985 and January of this year the Minister of State and the Secretary of State told the House and the people that they insisted upon a privatised railway scheme. We now want and are entitled to know whether the building of the City extension is dependent upon the consortium making a particular contribution to the total cost otherwise we are discussing a measure which may never see the light of day.

Mr. Snape: I think that my right hon. Friend has encapsulated the whole dilemma facing the Department of Transport. If the project goes ahead, a considerable amount of public money will be involved.

We all know that the Secretary of State is reluctant to use public money in such areas and the changes that we have seen over the past half an hour, since the Minister of State rose to speak, included an admission which was consistently denied throughout the later months of last year and has only just been revealed.

There is one other matter that I wish to raise.

Mr. David Mitchell: Did the hon. Gentleman also miss the point in my speech when I referred to the fact that it was the consortium that had changed its mind on how to proceed in the matter?

Mr. Snape: I am well aware that there have been some changes of mind in various areas in connection with this scheme. I will swap one change of mind by the Secretary of State for one change of mind by the consortium. We will be no more enlightened about the likelihood of the scheme if we do that, but at least some reality will have entered the corridors of the Department of Transport.

Mr. Mitchell *rose*——

Mr. Snape: Is the Minister of State seeking to proffer violence or does he simply want to intervene?

Mr. Mitchell: I ask the hon. Gentleman to read my speech as he did not hear me when I delivered it.

Mr. Snape: I always read the Minister of State's speeches with great interest as they are usually more factual than those of his right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State.

I would like to draw the Minister's attention to a petition from the War Graves Commission. I understand from some communications that I have received from my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott), who takes a deep interest in these matters, that the War Graves Commission is petitioning against the Bill because it cannot get a satisfactory reply about the fate of Trinity Gardens where the terminus will be built. I further understand that the Tower Hill war memorial is on the site of Trinity Gardens. That is a war memorial to the 36,000 seamen who died in the two world wars.

The main point in the War Graves Commission's petition against the Bill is that it believes that it would not get satisfaction if London Regional Transport were to take over the development of the area. The House will be aware of a private Member's Bill which is going through the House and which has the support of both sides of the House. It proposes to make all military vessels war grave areas. Regrettably, it does not include the Merchant Navy. The National Union of Seamen and merchant seamen generally feel that, in the Government's eyes, merchant seamen are second-class people in death as well as in life.

Mr. David Mitchell *indicated dissent*

Mr. Snape: That is certainly why the War Graves Commission has petitioned against the London Docklands Railway (City Extension) Bill. The commission suffers from the same lack of information as hon. Members about the Government's intentions.

There is some justification for the Government's attitude. I understand it—once again, the Secretary of State has got it wrong. This happens frequently. Let us hope that, this time, he does not finish up in court as a result. Unless we receive proper information, I for one do not believe that the Bill will go ahead. As one who believes in railway extensions generally and in new railways in particular, I think that that would be eminently regrettable.

9.40 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I am grateful for having been given the opportunity to speak in the debate, because I have responsibility in my party for general planning matters and have a constituency interest as a docklands Member. I speak conscious of the interests of my colleagues who form the opposition on the Newham council and on the Tower Hamlets council and who are directly involved in and may, indeed, be running Tower Hamlets after May, when they will make their views more clearly known.

We welcome the announcement that the railway will operate in the public sector. The Minister of State must accept that that is a complete change of Government policy. Three options are available, none of which is ideal in its management. We welcome the fact that of the three groups—the Government, the LDDC and the LRT—the LRT will run the railway.

We still need answers to the questions that have been asked. If the debate has done one thing, it has revealed a certain amount of information. It has confirmed that what was always going to be a loss-making project, according to the Minister's analyses in the answers given in the House since November, will be financed generally, because it is a matter of general interest to London, and to east London in particular, that we should have this railway. It will not serve just the the people going to work at the Canary wharf scheme. As hon. Members representing constituencies north of the river have said, it has much wider employment implications. We welcome that. It will be helpful to know at an early stage the new arrangement between the consortium and the LRT, and the contribution that has been negotiated.

I am concerned to ensure that this scheme and others are properly integrated within London's transport systems. Various assurances are needed. We need to know whether, as the site development goes ahead, there will be substantial disruption.

Mr. Ridley: Why does the hon. Gentleman always refer to himself as "we"? Only the editor of *The Times* and the Queen are allowed to call themselves "we".

Mr. Hughes: I think it is safe to say that I normally manage to speak for a united group of colleagues. Indeed, our unity is manifested by the presence of my hon. Friend the Member for Woolwich (Mr. Cartwright), whose views I think I reflect adequately.

We want an assurance that, as building takes place, there will not be massive disruption at the bridge crossings —especially Tower bridge, which is raised from time to time—as this would clearly disrupt commerce in central London. We need to know whether that aspect has been taken into account.

We will need to know——

Mr. Ridley: "We"?

Mr. Hughes: The House will need to know, and the public interest requires that we know, exactly what is likely to be the view of the Government and the promoters in response to the views expressed by the hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Morris). The hon. Gentleman appeared to be saying, unless we on this side of the House misunderstood him, that the City is not happy with the revised scheme as now proposed, that it does not find it acceptable and that, therefore, it has not reached agreement with the promoters on the right way forward. This is a second go at the scheme. Clearly there is not agreement, and I hope that the hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Thorne) will bear that in mind.

The matters of substantial concern are reflected in the Instructions that have been tabled. People living in my constituency and in other dockland areas north of the river appreciate that a development such as this can have massive benefits. We hope that that will be so, and that is why my hon. Friends and I will not oppose the measure on Second Reading.

At the same time as producing a properly integrated transport system in south-east London, it must be acknowledged that there are still bits of the jigsaw to be put in place—the Minister knows of my interest—and we look for links between this scheme north of the river and access to similar development sites south of the river, with proper integration between the two. I say that because at present, in the area south of the river, my hon. Friend the Member for Woolwich and I have a white hole in our transport system, with no light railway, let alone extensions, proposed.

May we be reassured that land values will not escalate, pricing local firms and housing interests out of the market? We must feel certain that local firms and jobs will not continue to be relocated as part of a scheme which, though acceptable and advantageous as a development, could be a substantial threat to other interests. I hope that we shall receive those assurances, in part from the promoter tonight and, later, from interested parties. Without those assurances, my hon. Friends and I will not be satisfied.

9.47 pm

Mr. Neil Thorne: By the leave of the House, I will——

Mr. Spearing: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is it possible for other hon. Members to be called prior to what will be the second speech from the promoter of the Bill?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Thorne), speaking for the promoters of the Bill, rose. It would at this point normally be his turn to speak, and I think that the House would now wish to hear him.

Mr. Mikardo: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I would think it wrong if my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing), an objector to the Bill, a proposer of an instruction which was not called and an hon. Member with a great constituency interest were not allowed to speak in the debate. On those grounds I urge you——

Mr. Speaker: Order. That does not arise.

Mr. Mikardo: With respect, Mr. Speaker, it does.

Mr. Speaker: Order. If the hon. Member for Ilford, South, who began by asking for the leave of the House does not have the leave of the House, he cannot speak. Does he have the leave of the House?

Hon. Members: No.

Mr. Speaker: In that case, I call Mr. Spearing.

9.48 pm

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): I assure the hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Thorne) that I understand why he rose. About 10 years ago I was responsible for a private Bill on behalf of what was then London Transport. That Bill was concerned with buses. I appreciate his predicament, knowing what it is like to be the promoter of a measure of this type, and I hope that he appreciates my position.

This has been a remarkable debate. It has shown how the Standing Orders of the House in relation to private business do their work. We have had two surprises, both within the last hour. The first was in relation to the principle of public transport. My hon. Friend the Member for Bow and Poplar (Mr. Mikardo) is usually accurate. On this occasion he got it slightly wrong, in that I am not opposed to the principle of the Bill. It could be a valuable addition to the infrastructure of rail transport in London, something which I have for long championed, and it is refreshing, after some vacillation, to see the Government Front Bench apparently agreeing with that.

Secondly, I have discovered that I am to some extent attracted to the Bill because it promises to provide more employment, increased opportunities and a degree of regeneration in east London, perhaps affecting the London borough of Newham. We have to ask ourselves what type of employment and whether it will be an advantage, on balance, to the whole of east London.

I have some doubts about the nature of the desire for increased employment. My hon. Friend the Member for Bow and Poplar has already explained that, surprisingly enough, the LDDC is giving notice to quit to people on the margins of the enterprise zone, people who are providing a service to the City. The firm that he mentioned is thriving because it is there, handy for the City, but the LDDC is asking it to get out, despite the fact that 25 people are working there, no doubt on relatively modest incomes. The same thing is happening in my area, in the Silvertown viaduct, where the LDDC has sent letters to my constituents telling them that it wants to acquire the area by compulsory purchase, so they will have to get out.

We hear that the railway will increase employment for east London, and the LDDC has agreed it in principle, but I then look to what is happening in Silvertown, particularly the compulsory purchase orders on small firms. These are the very enterprises that the Government, day after day, say that we should have, the firms that are very much in favour with the Prime Minister, and with the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who went to give the firm in my hon. Friend's constituency a certificate. In principle — the words that encapsulate our feelings—we are in favour, but we want to know what the practice will be.

There are also problems with the line that is already being built. The London borough of Newham wants a station built at Pudding Mill lane, but the map issued by London Regional Transport says of this site:

"Future stops when funding permits."

We want the stops there, and at Carpenter's road, to serve an area of employment. If the line already being built cannot have extra stations — it is only a fast track, however useful a form of transport—what real concern has the LDDC or the LRT for employment? Perhaps the trouble is the cash limit of £77 million. Perhaps some arrangements can be made, because the stations are not particularly big.

The second surprise on the turn round of private as against public enterprise are the City objections. When I looked at the LRT plan which came to us about three or four days ago and saw the revised layout for the Bank station, I thought it ingenious. I thought, "Right, they've got it." The original plan would have made the tube subways around Bank station congested, and was not on. However, this one looked all right and I assumed that it had been cleared with the corporation of London. Now we hear from the hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Morrison), properly speaking on behalf of the hon. Member for Calder Valley (Mr. Thompson) that that is not to the liking of that body. We are surprised by that opinion, although it has come late in the day.

Several points have worried us. The first is ownership. In the last hour there has been a change. Private ownership was insisted upon by the Secretary of State for Transport, logically in a way. Now, in face of the facts of life, he has had to change his view. However, I detected that the Minister was not happy about what he had to say—he will correct me if I am wrong—because he said that he does not rule out future privatisation if that is considered desirable by the Government. The Minister is having it both ways. He says, "We will get it built by private enterprise because the consortium wants it." That is despite what the Minister wants. If it makes money—I do not suggest that it will, but it might make money—the Minister says that it can be privatised. And if it makes a loss for the Consolidated Fund, it, like British Leyland, can be sold. If it were put into private hands after a number of years—if, heaven forbid, the Government continue for that long—it might be sold not to General Motors but to a consortium. There would be no guarantee then about the level of fares. Although our gravest doubts about ownership have been set at rest to some extent, question marks still remain.

When we entered the Chamber today we thought that this enterprise was going to be funded by Mr. Travelstead and his colleagues. However, we now find, although the Minister did not make it explicit despite his careful reading of his script, that it is to be funded partly by the consortium, presumably at the level of £30 million to which it was committed in the written answer of 27 November. We must therefore assume, because I do not think that the Minister spelt it out, that the Government will provide the balance, which will be in the region of £40 million to £50 million, including perhaps £10 million for London Regional Transport to carry out the agency work.

Is the Minister able to tell us whether that money will come out of the Consolidated Fund? Presumably it will, with the balance to be made up by the Department. However, discussions may be continuing on that matter.

The House has a right to know the answer to this question. This is taxpayers' money. All Conservative Members are anxious that taxpayers' money should be spent properly or not spent at all. They do not believe in public transport. The Secretary of State for Transport has shown his lack of faith in public transport by his previous

[Mr. Nigel Spearing]

Bill, which is not an Act, that covers buses. We know where that has led him—straight to General Motors. We should like to know how much of the money for the construction of this line is to come from private sources and how much of it is to come from the Consolidated Fund. Is it to come out of the transport supplementary grant? Is it included in the public expenditure White Paper?

All of these questions have yet to be answered. It is unlikely that any Bill dealing with railways has come before the House in the past with so many unanswered questions and with so many big changes having been announced during the closing period of its Second Reading debate. It is possible that the promoters are not entirely in charge of the timetable and that events have caught up with them. For instance, what about the master building agreement? We have been told by the Secretary of State for Transport, who I am glad to see is on the Treasury Front Bench, that it depends upon the master building agreement for Canary wharf going ahead. The two go together. There is doubt now about how quickly the railways Bill will go through. If the master building agreement is not agreed by the end of March or by April, why go to all the expense of promoting a Bill which will involve a lengthy Committee hearing? The City corporation will back the petitioners to the hilt, will it not? We should be told whether or not the promoters intend to proceed to the next stage of the Bill if the master building agreement is unlikely to be dealt with.

I turn to the impact of the docklands light railway on the London Borough of Newham. We have heard that money is available for the western extension——

Mr. Neil Thorne *rose in his place and claimed to move,* That the Question be now put.

Question put, That the Question be now put:—

The House divided: Ayes 126, Noes 5.

Division No. 95] **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Alexander, Richard
Alton, David
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Ashby, David
Atkinson, David *(B'm'th E)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Best, Keith
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Peter
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Hon Peter
Bryan, Sir Paul
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon A.
Butterfill, John
Carlile, Alexander *(Montg'y)*
Cartwright, John
Cash, William
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Cope, John
Crouch, David
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dicks, Terry
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Dover, Den
du Cann, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Dunn, Robert
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forth, Eric
Fox, Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Galley, Roy
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gow, Ian
Greenway, Harry
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Ground, Patrick
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Barney
Henderson, Barry
Hickmet, Richard
Hirst, Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Cannock)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Jones, Robert *(Herts W)*
Key, Robert
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knox, David
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lawrence, Ivan
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lyell, Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Major, John
Malone, Gerald
Mather, Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Merchant, Piers
Mitchell, David *(Hants NW)*
Monro, Sir Hector
Moynihan, Hon C.
Neale, Gerrard
Neubert, Michael
Norris, Steven
Ottaway, Richard
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Page, Sir John *(Harrow W)*
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Portillo, Michael
Proctor, K. Harvey
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Rees, Rt Hon Peter *(Dover)*
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Roe, Mrs Marion
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steel, Rt Hon David
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Thorne, Neil *(Ilford S)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Waddington, David
Wallace, James
Ward, John
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wheeler, John
Whitfield, John
Wiggin, Jerry
Wigley, Dafydd
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Wrigglesworth, Ian
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Gary Waller and
Mr. Rob Hayward.

NOES

Campbell-Savours, Dale
Haynes, Frank
Prescott, John
Skinner, Dennis
Weetch, Ken

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Don Dixon and
Mr. Alf Dubs.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Question put accordingly and agreed to.

Bill read a Second time and committed.

Local Government

10.10 pm

Mr. Roland Boyes (Houghton and Washington): I beg to move,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Local Government Re-organisation (Compensation) Regulations 1986 (S.I., 1986, No. 151), dated 31st January 1986, a copy of which was laid before this House on 7th February, be annulled.

The regulations are concerned with compensation for the loss of employment and for diminution of emoluments for members of staff of the Greater London council and the six metropolitan counties. An early release scheme, supposedly designed to create vacancies in other authorities to make way for metropolitan county staff, completes the package of measures put forward by the Government for dealing with the staffing consequences of abolition. However, there are several problems about the package.

It is no consolation to say that it could have been worse. The initial proposals of the Government were very unsatisfactory. It was only following pressure from the Association of Metropolitan Authorities and the Trades Union Congress local government committee that improvements were made. The package of measures has done little to assist the management of change, it has produced inequity and disparity of treatment in different metropolitan county council areas, and it is too late. The early release scheme, which might have helped by reducing the number of compulsory redundancies, has only been made operative through a circular dated 26 February 1986, just five weeks before abolition.

About a week ago I talked at some length in the Chamber about the problems created by only five weeks' notice of the regulations being given. This evening I shall let Sir Philip Woodfield, chairman of the staff commission, speak on my behalf. In the *Municipal Journal* of 28 February 1986 he wrote:

"The uncertainty has been added to by Government delays. Only recently has it laid before Parliament the main transfer order and the compensation regulations and promulgated the early release scheme. It is not sufficient to say that the main outlines of the proposals were announced some time ago. The delay in putting out detailed arrangements for the early release scheme in particular has much reduced its value and anyway people ought not to be expected to make crucial decisions affecting the rest of their lives without seeing exactly how they would be affected."

I should like to consider the circumstances of those who leave the employment of a metropolitan county council to take a lower-paid job in another local authority. That move is itself a blow, but it could become a permanent feature for many. The Government's initial proposals were for a lump sum payment which would have led to greater unfairness for some people. The scheme in the present regulation, although better, has some drawbacks, which the Government could remedy even at this late stage.

An employee will get up to £5,000 a year. The cash for compensation is calculated according to a formula in the regulations, which is arrived at, roughly, by subtracting the contractual wages paid in the new job from the contractual wages, overtime payments and bonus payments paid in the original job.

Payments are to be made one year in arrears, so the first is not due until 1 April 1987 for many staff. However, it is possible for residuary bodies to make certain interim payments. I hope that other residuary bodies will follow the example of one in the west midlands that has determined to make monthly payments. That will help to reduce the hardship experienced by loyal officers of local authorities who will suffer from a much reduced income.

The compensation lasts for seven years, but half payment is made in the eighth year. The Government might like to extend the period of time during which compensation is payable. There are important conditions for eligibility spelt out in regulation 3(7)(2)*(a)* to *(e)*. Regulation 3(7)(2)*(b)* states that "an employee must have had three years continuous local government service by 1 April 1986 to qualify for compensation. I have been approached by several representatives of the metropolitan counties who suggest that the requirement should be for no more than two years. I should be glad if the Minister would consider that carefully. Such a reduction would bring eligibility into line with eligibility for payment for compulsory redundancy. The choice of three years is quite arbitrary.

Redundancy payments are a less straightforward matter. There is a problem, because there are two schemes for calculating redundancy payments — a national scheme and locally agreed schemes. Three metropolitan county councils—South Yorkshire, Tyne and Wear and West Midlands—have been prevented from implementing local schemes by the undoubted sharp practice of the previous Secretary of State. I refer to the use of retrospective legislation in March 1984 to prevent them from establishing their own severance schemes. On 1 March 1984, the then Secretary of State said in a written reply:

"The second will ensure that any terms which are incorporated into existing or future contracts of employment after 1 March 1984 and which relate to compensation for redundancy or detriment will have no effect where they would entitle an employee to an amount greater than that provided for, in due course, in the main abolition legislation."—[*Official Report*, 1 March 1984; Vol. 55, c. 276-277.]

It will be noted that the date I mentioned in the former Secretary of State's reply is 1 March. He actually gave the written answer in the *Official Report* on 1 March 1984. I find that an unacceptable practice.

As the Minister is aware, my constituency is part of the metropolitan county of Tyne and Wear. I shall use Tyne and Wear as a illustration of the iniquitous situation that has arisen as a consequence of the decision of the former Secretary of State. Officers will claim that it is the first time in the history of industrial relations, both inside and outside the public sector, that two different sets of conditions have applied to people being made redundant in the same industry. It is not good enough. It is unfair and unjust. Many of the staff concerned—in fact I would say all of the staff—have given many years of loyal service to the Tyne and Wear metropolitan county and they feel that the Government are using them as political pawns. Even if the abolition of the metropolitan county was a political battle between Members of Parliament at Westminster and councillors on local authorities that is no excuse for the fact that the officers, who were not a part of that political process, will be the ones who will suffer. I find that totally unacceptable. Staff are dismayed at the treatment after serving for many years to the best of their ability.

It is not the wish of the local authority that this problem has arisen. Well before 1 March 1984 my local authority is on record giving a public commitment to a local scheme

[Mr. Roland Boyes]

that provided a safety net, vital in the north east, an area of extremely high unemployment. It is part of the northern region, as you know well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, which has the highest unemployment level in Britain.

Those people who are aged over 50 will find it particularly difficult to find another job if they are made redundant when the abolition day is reached. It has been suggested in a most disgraceful front page of the *Daily Express* that the schemes are "gravy trains". I cannot understand the *Daily Express*. I knew that it was a backward newspaper but for it to print a front page lead now about a scheme that was announced on 1 March 1984 is taking things too far. The article, by Mr. Don Coolican talks about a "gravy train". I know that hon. Members on both sides of the House have worked in local Government, as I did for many years. We know that some of the directors—I was an assistant director of social services —could be considered to be well paid, but many of the clerical staff, typists and other people who work for local authorities are far from well paid. To describe what some people in a local authority will obtain as a redundancy payment as a "gravy train" is downright misrepresentation of the true facts and it is a disgrace. It is an insult to the workers, who will already suffer badly by being made unemployed, without having such scandalous and scurrilous material written about them.

The people who face this uncertain future would have been quite happy to have given more years of their lives to serve the people of Tyne and Wear diligently. Tyne and Wear has been used to illustrate the problem but it also affects the staff of two other metropolitan counties, South Yorkshire and the West Midlands. I received a letter from three members of staff of the South Yorkshire county council, with a detailed argument supporting the case for better redundancy pay. They wrote:

"It seems totally wrong that officers employed by South Yorkshire, and by Tyne and Wear and West Midlands and made redundant by abolition should be treated differently from colleagues in the GLC, Merseyside, Greater Manchester and West Yorkshire on the basis of virtual accidents"—

I think that that is a good phrase—

"of timing; accidents relating to the timing of approval of severance schemes in relation to government deadlines.

It may be argued that the GLC, Merseyside, Greater Manchester and West Yorkshire simply eluded the government's efforts and behaved irresponsibly in adopting over-generous severance schemes. This is just not true; it is the scheme proposed to be imposed on South Yorkshire, Tyne and Wear and the West Midlands which is the exception. The scheme is the worst ever applied in the public sector. It compares badly with schemes operated by other public bodies such as the NCB, British Gas and Water Authorities. It is understood that it also compares badly with private schemes such as those operated by ICI, GEC, Courtaulds and Marks and Spencer."

Certain rights were acquired by the GLC and the metropolitan counties — Greater Manchester, West Yorkshire and Merseyside — and in general their contractual schemes give employees a higher level of compensation entitlement than the scheme that is set out in the regulations. Under the present arrangements, and excluding superannuation benefits, a person aged 58 with 34 years' service earning £15,000 a year would receive the following amounts if he worked for the following authorities: Greater Manchester, £20,193; West Yorkshire, £17,163; south Yorkshire, only £8,221. By luck, or by choosing a certain geographical area in which to live and work, an individual may receive almost £21,000 while someone living in another area such as south Yorkshire would receive only £8,000. That cannot be right and it is not right.

After representations to the Government by the Association of Metropolitan Authorities and the Trades Union Congress, the scheme was improved for staff within the 40-50-year age group. However, there are other disparities that are worth mentioning. For example, a local authority worker is treated differently from a civil servant. The following example shows how payment will be calculated for a local authority worker as against a non-mobile civil servant. I do not criticise those who receive more than others. My contention is that metropolitan county staff should receive the same as civil servants.

On abolition, a member of staff of a metropolitan council aged 40 years with 20 years' service will receive 40 weeks' pay. A non-mobile civil servant would receive 65 weeks' pay. A member of staff of a metropolitan county aged 50 years with 30 year' service would be given 82 weeks' pay and the non-mobile civil servant would receive 104 weeks' pay. These are examples — I could give many more — that we would like the Minister to consider.

It is disgraceful that only five weeks remain in which to consider these matters. I hope that the Minister will bring the arrangements for the staff of the metropolitan counties into line with those for civil servants.

The Government's main objective was to abolish the GLC and the metropolitan counties. I cannot be sure, but I hope that it was not part of their policy to create two different tiers of redundancy payments and to pay some staff more or less than others. I hope that the Minister will consider carefully the following questions. First, will the hon. Gentleman allow a scheme to operate which was agreed in detail after 1 March 1984, which is now available and which was declared publicly before 1 March 1984? In other words, it can be demonstrated unequivocally that there is no sharp practice.

Secondly, if the Minister cannot agree to that, will he consider closing the gap between the payments that are made under the two schemes for those aged over 50 years who will experience the greatest difficulty in the job market? We would like to see a closing of the gap between the better paid local schemes and non-local schemes. I stress that by closing the gap I mean bringing upwards the scheme we are discussing and certainly not bringing it down from any of the schemes that have been agreed locally. I ask the Minister seriously to consider closing the gap.

Thirdly, will the Minister take a generous attitude to the problem? The numbers involved will be relatively small When we spent 200 hours on the Bill, the Government talked of possibly 8,000 or 9,000 people being made redundant. We know that, although too many will be made redundant, the numbers will not be of that magnitude. In view of this the Minister has a chance to take a genereous attitude to the problem.

Fourthly, will the Minister agree to look specifically at the compensation that will be obtained by those people, many under 60, who have contributed for over 40 years to a superannuation fund? I understand from a letter from the chief executive of the West Midlands county council, Mr. Hender, that

"such officers should be compensated by having redundancy compensation payments on the same scale as that provided under Clause 4(1); that is, two weeks' pay for each year of service."

Fifthly, will the Minister confirm that, as regards reorganisation under the Local Government Act 1985, section 84(1) of the Employment Protection (Consolidation) Act 1978 applies to persons who are affected by local public holiday arrangements? I can see that there could be difficulty here where public holidays, associated extra-statutory holidays and concessionary holidays, interrupt continuity of service. Mr. Hender says, giving an example:

"we have situations where people have left say, Walsall corporation on a Maundy Thursday and have commenced work with the West Midlands County on Wednesday after Easter, the first day of their new contract of employment."

Before anyone thinks that that does not sound serious, let me say that normally I am dealing with a different industry, with a miner with 40 years' service, who receives only 10 years' redundancy pay after 40 years down a lousy, stinking, dirty mine, all because there was a few days' gap between the final part of his employment for the last 10 years and the main part of his employment.

The legislation ensures that staff on maternity leave at 31 March who are not transferred to a successor authority will be entitled to receive from the appropriate Residuary Body any outstanding statutory maternity pay even though their employers cease to exist. However, women employees of the GLC and metropolitan counties also have contractual rights to maternity pay in excess of the statutory provisions, which under present regulations they will lose. We believe that it is completely unfair that the staff concerned should lose such contractual entitlements, which could easily be met by the Residuary Bodies. Women on maternity leave will be unable to make themselves available for other employment or to compete effectively for other jobs, because of their pregnancy or their recent confinement. They will be in a disadvantaged position compared with their colleagues. A continuing entitlement to contractual maternity pay will at least help to provide some compensation. I hope the Minister will take this on board.

Another problem that could well arise is when some people have worked for local government up to 1 April 1974 and then were compulsorily transferred on that date to employment with a water authority or health authority. Then, on various dates since April 1974 they have voluntarily left their water authority or health authority employers and rejoined local government, without any break in service. In effect they could be considered as returning to their natural local government service. However, it would be considered that there had been a break in service for the purpose of redundancy payments under the present scheme. Will the Minister consider a move from local government to a health or water authority not as a break in service but as continuous service for redundancy pay purposes?

Finally, there are implications for the Inner London education authority. There has been no indication so far that the powers of section 31 of the London County Council (General Powers) Act 1921 will be applied to any of the new bodies set up under the Local Goverment Act 1985. If those powers are not applied to the new ILEA, the provisions referred to in paragraph 5(a) of a letter which I have received from the GLC—

"to provide better compensation terms generally than those available to redundant local government employees elsewhere in the country mainly in the area of lump sum redundancy payments and particularly for those under the age of 50 years"—

—will be applicable only to those employees who are transferred to the new ILEA under a statutory transfer order, and will not be applicable to many employees recruited by the new authority after 31 March 1986. The protection will be secured under the Act because the terms are contractual.

Moreover, the powers will not be available for use in the way described in paragraph 5(b) and (c) of the GLC's letter, that is:

"to provide better compensation terms for specified groups of employees in special circumstances (eg for certain professional staff under 50 years at the time of the 'Cutler cuts' exercise in 1978)",

and

"to enable improved early retirement terms to be offered in individual cases, (particularly senior officers) where there has been political pressure for the individual's services to be terminated."

Therefore, it is vital that the powers in respect of those employees are applied to the new ILEA.

The Government face a test tonight. Can they give the reward that loyal, hard-working, conscientious staff of the metropolitan county councils and the GLC deserve? Abolition day is coming far too quickly, but the Government still have time to reconsider the proposals, and to consider all the disparities that have been created by the announcement of the former Secretary of State on 1 March 1984. Will the Minister consider my questions and arguments carefully so that on the dreadful date all members of staff will be properly compensated for the many dedicated years of service that they have given to the metropolitan county councils?

10.37 pm

Mr. John Whitfield (Dewsbury): I have listened carefully to the remarks of the hon. Member for Houghton and Washington (Mr. Boyes) about the regulations. I do not purport to understand them as closely as he obviously does. However, I know that they are extremely beneficial to the employees of the bodies to which they relate. We as caring Conservatives would not have it any other way, provided those many benefits accrue to those who are genuinely made redundant as a result of the abolition of the county councils and the GLC.

I understand the expression "to be made redundant" to be without work for a period. However, from my experience in west and south Yorkshire, where many of my constituents work and live, many of the employees of the authorities are having their cake and eating it. The gravy train, to which the hon. Gentleman referred and which appalled us all in 1984, has indeed come out of the sidings once again and is up and running in 1986. A considerable number of officers and others who work for these authorities have three choices before them. First, they can calculate what benefits and other payments would be due to them under the regulations, such as those we are considering tonight.

Many people have spoken to me at my surgery complaining that the regulations were not available early enough. In that point, at least, I would agree with the hon. Member for Houghton and Washington. The second choice that these people have is whether to join the district's successor authority or the joint boards to which the functions which they have been administering have been transferred. Their third choice is to consider what other jobs are available in the private or other sectors as an alternative to local government service.

[Mr. John Whitfield]

What a marvellous choice that is. It is a "no lose" situation. It is certainly a choice which the many unemployed people in my constituency who have not had the benefit of working in local government would give their right arms to have.

The hon. Member for Houghton and Washington referred at length to the situation—which he thinks is a poor one—involving the officers of the South Yorkshire county council. I draw to the attention of the House a particular case, that of the chief executive of the South Yorkshire county council, Mr. Harris.

I make it clear that none of the remarks that I wish to make tonight are in criticism of Mr. Harris. He was an excellent chief executive of that authority and a much sought-after individual for his skills in administration. However, in October 1985, because of his undoubted skills, he was head-hunted and offered a job running a very successful barrister's chambers in London. The job was so attractive—it must be like my job here—that he was prepared to take it and commute weekly from west Yorkshire, where he lives, to London.

One would have thought that his employers, the county council, and those involved would have commented on Mr. Harris's stroke of luck and wished him all the best in his new career. However, there was a certain possible redundancy payment and certain pension implications of Mr. Harris's situation, which meant that it was important that he remained in local government for some further months until, I believe, April 1986. Mr. Harris has a job one day a week with the residuary body which will deal with the winding up of the council and for that I am told he is paid at the rate of £10,000 per annum. He works for the residuary body on one day a week and for the rest of the week he is in London conducting the affairs of a successful set of chambers.

The Minister should be aware that it is this type of thing —I would not like to use the word exploitation, rather it is the opportunity available to the poor, long-suffering hard-working, underpaid officers of the local authorities which are being abolished under the Local Government Act 1985 — which is bringing this legislation into disrepute. The Government were unfortunately very much party to the implementation of the reorganisation of local government in 1974 and we received a lot of just criticism from what flowed from that.

We are now engaged in a similar, though very much better, operation which will bring the administration of local government that much nearer to the people and I am in favour and support this measure. However, we are attaching to this radical legislation benefit packages which are far too beneficial for certain individuals and which are bringing the whole legislation into disrepute.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): This is an important point, but some clarification is needed. I know nothing about the individual in question. The hon. Gentleman appeares to be saying that that individual is being retained by the residuary body at a salary of £10,000 a year for an unknown period. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that the residuary body has nothing to do with local government because it is the body appointed to wind up. I hope that the hon. Gentleman is not drawing from the facts which he has put to the House the conclusion that local government schemes—past, present and future—are to blame. The residuary body is simply a body brought in by the Government which has total discretion as to who to employ and which appears to be the subject of the hon. Gentleman's criticism. That criticism appears therefore to be wrongly directed at local government and its excesses.

Mr. Whitfield: The regulations apply to people who have been employed by the metropolitan county councils, by the new authority or by the residuary bodies.

Will my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State assure the House that he and the officials in his Department will give detailed scrutiny to this type of case? Will my hon. Friend do everything in his power to ensure that the people who benefit under the regulations — there are many—will receive only their absolute entitlement? If measures are used in this way, the implementation of the Local Government Act 1985 is brought into disrepute.

10.46 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise a matter that comes within the context of the regulations. I hope that the Under-Secretary of State will be able to give me some assurance. It undermines some of the intentions of the regulations which may be generous but which need to be tidied up. Many people will be scurrying around furiously in the next few weeks trying to work out where their future lies when the authorities for which they work are abolished.

The problem relates specifically to a discrepancy and inconsistency and, therefore, to inequality between the two sorts of people who will be working in similar jobs and similar relationships after 1 April to the ones in which they are now working yet whose terms and conditions of service will not remain the same as they are now. They are affected in the context of ILEA.

The old education authority is coming to an end and the new one is starting. The new authority is taking on people in two ways. It is taking on people who are designated for transfer who, to all intents and purposes, will continue in the service of one authority with, therefore, unbroken terms and conditions of service. It is also recruiting people who will start a new period of employment. Inevitably, many of these people are, as of today, ILEA employees.

ILEA has been technically a committee of the Greater London council, which will be abolished at the end of March. Many of the functions carried out by ILEA staff are, in other departments, carried out by staff paid for and managed by the GLC but effectively seconded on an agency basis to work for ILEA, as has been done for weeks, months or years.

There were endless debates in Committee on the Local Government Bill in which various examples of departments were given. Among the common service departments, the engineers' department has many people within it who are employed by the GLC but are working permanently for ILEA on specific projects with people from other departments who perhaps are ILEA employees.

The Minister will be aware of the problem that I raise because there has been correspondence about it between county hall and the various departments. Taking engineers as an example, those who at the end of this month cannot be designated—because they are not working for ILEA now—will have to apply to and be appointed by the new ILEA. Although they may then have the same salaries

and terms and conditions of employment as they have now, should they be made redundant in two or three years' time, they will not have the same benefits as those who have already been designated and transferred across to the new ILEA or who have worked for the authority all the time.

It is interesting to consider those working in the architects' department. I understand that the staff in that section were en bloc attributed to ILEA, so they will have continuing terms and conditions of employment. Accordingly, should they face a service variation, in particular redundancy, they will not be prejudiced. In other words, from 1 April there will be a difference of benefit between two people who are today in the same team doing the same job. Through no fault of theirs, they may be treated differently at a future date. That could make for bad relationships. If the Minister replies, "I appreciate that, but it has nothing to do with us," that will be totally unsatisfactory because it is only because of the abolition of the authority and the creation of the new ILEA that the situation arises.

If the Minister replies, "They could have opted out, applied for the new jobs and thereby gained," we shall remind him that there is a cut-off point after which people cannot be designated across. In other words, there is no individual or collective option for people such as engineers to benefit from parallel conditions and terms of employment.

Will the Minister undertake to do something about this problem between now and the cut-off point in a few weeks' time? For example, will the Department, with the Department of Education and Science, consult those affected to ensure that the relatively minor adjustment that is needed to solve the problem is made? I appreciate that that cannot be done tonight; this instrument must be accepted or rejected and cannot be amended. The necessary amending regulations could be laid under section 53 of the Local Government Act 1985. This is not a technical matter. It affects the professional lives, working relationships and potential career prospects of people, many of whom are extremely senior, widely experienced and highly competent staff, whom nobody has criticised for their back-up service, given over many years, to ILEA or the GLC, or both.

I look to the Minister for a strong assurance that we can make some progress to remedy the severe anomalies that affect the education authority for our capital city.

10.55 pm

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): The Minister will know the point that I am about to raise, as I speak in support of my hon. Friend the Member for Houghton and Washington (Mr. Boyes). There is no need to go over the points that he made, because he adduced a powerful argument against the problems that have been caused by the abolition of the metropolitan counties. The Minister knows that I feel that they should never have been abolished. If they had to be, many of the problems that have, and will occur, could have been prevented. The services should have been run side by side, and gradually the responsibilities should have been transferred from the metropolitan authorities, just as happened in 1974.

The hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mr. Whitfield) talked about the gravy train in 1974, but that was not for those made redundant but for those in work. Many officers, because they were going into areas with larger populations, received great salary increases because all salaries were based on those of the chief executive, who was in charge of a greater area. That was quite in accordance with procedures, so there was nothing wrong with it, except that, finally, the cost was far in excess of what anybody expected.

I am concerned about those who are being made redundant, particularly those in South Yorkshire, who, through no fault of theirs, have found themselves being treated differently from others in the same grade. I worked for a long time with the NCB, and, sadly, one of my duties was to make people redundant. However, we never treated people in the same grades differently. They were treated alike throughout the length and breadth of the country. There were times when legislation changed, and cut-off points had to be adhered to, but they were not on any particular body but spread throughout the country. In its rundown of the industry, the board has always treated everybody in the same grade alike. That is why the board's redundancy scheme was successful. When enhanced payments were introduced, everybody enjoyed them.

Those involved in the redundancy in the metropolitan counties are not on a gravy train. They are facing the most traumatic experience in their working lives. Sometimes for the first time, they are realising that they are vulnerable to the problems of the system. People who thought that they would be working until they were 60 or 65 are suddenly finding themselves unwanted.

I listened carefully to the hon. Member for Dewsbury, who talked about the choice of working for the metropolitan counties, but these people have no choice. They have no job. That is what abolition was about—savings in public expenditure. Those savings were talked about in Committee, and it was shown that the only saving that could be made were through the loss of jobs and staff.

My area has a 20 per cent. unemployment, and a male unemployment rate of 25 to 26 per cent., so what choice is there? In my area, where unemployment is 21 per cent. and male unemployment is 25 or 26 per cent. what other jobs are available? The people know full well that in some cases they will never work again. It is no gravy train. This will be compensation for losing a job and having to bring up a family in the atmosphere of having lost that job.

We are not talking about statistics. This House talks too often of statistics, without realising that people are behind those statistics. Sometimes they are single people, or they may have a family. This is not a gravy train. Most people would continue with their jobs rather than be made redundant if they had the choice. Let us forget that gravy train and concentrate on what will happen on abolition. I did not want abolition. I have said that. But it has come about and we have to face the problems when they confront us. When we consider the problem of abolition, we can treat people alike.

I always fear, especially with this Government, that all this talk of levelling tends to level down rather than up. I hope that will not happen in this case. In many industries, those who receive redundancy payments under statutory provisons have always received enhanced payments. That has occurred in mining and steel, as well as in private industries. When we talk of the running-down of private steel works in our area, we know that redundant workers always receive enhanced payments. When directors are made redundant, they do not receive statutory industrial payments but what used to be called a golden handshake.

[Mr. Allen McKay]

Whatever it is called now, it is compensation for losing a job. That covers all of us. We are not talking of anything that is different for anybody else.

Our system tries to treat people differently. I accept that there will be a cut-off date now. The date does not affect everybody equally; it affects everybody unequally. We ask the Government to consider that situation tonight and to recognise the anomalies that will be caused by putting the date into the Act.

I argued at the time that it should never have been there. The problem is that on 31 March those working for Metropolitan counties will be affected by the same legislation throughout the length and breath of the country. They will be made redundant by that legislation.

We say that they must be treated alike. The Government must ensure that the enhanced payments available to some authorities will be available to the three authorities caught in the trap. It will not cost much or lose any credibility for the Government. It will prove that there is some feeling left in this Government for the effects of their legislation. People will be affected. The Government should consider now those who will be affected by the measure. Let us consider it and bring it in, and make sure that of all the Government's follies this will not be another one.

11.3 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Richard Tracey): I much appreciate — indeed, I share — the Opposition's view of the importance of the debate, and of the compensation regulations.

The hon. Member for Houghton and Washington (Mr. Boyes) has spoken warmly of the staff of the Greater London council and of the metropolitan councils. The Government share that warmth towards the staff, if the Government do not share the Opposition's view of the authorities for which those staff work.

It is slightly ironic that Oppostion Members should pray against the compensation regulations. It would be most unfair on the staff if at the eleventh hour Parliament were to reject the regulations. That would be the logical result of granting the prayer.

Mr. Simon Hughes: The Minister knows that the only way to debate this matter is by using the technical device of praying against the regulations. I hope that he will accept that nobody wishes the beneficial effects of the regulations to be prevented. However, we want to make sure that what has not been covered is dealt with by having it debated and answered in the House.

Mr. Tracey: I shall try to answer the points that have been raised, among others, by the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes).

The need for the regulations is urgent. There are 25 days to abolition day. Already the staff of the Greater London council and the metropolitan county councils are rearranging their lives either to fit into the new structure or to find new pastures. Although the contents of the regulations are, as I shall show, widely known and although their effect is retrospective to Royal Assent to the Local Government Act 1985, it is right that the staff of the GLC and the metropolitan county councils should know exactly what Parliament is to make available to them by way of compensation for redundancy or for financial detriment.

For that reason, we on this side of the House would have been keen to see the regulations approved by Parliament many months ago. Part of this debate has focussed upon an apparent delay by the Government. However, it has proved to be impossible to ask Parliament to approve them earlier than this, principally because we were determined to give the Trades Union Congress and the unions what might be described as a last gasp opportunity to put their views to us before we took our final decisions. We had persistently tried to talk to them, but they had rejected all of our many invitations to them to talk to us about the way that abolition would affect their members' interests.

I understand that the refusal of the TUC and the unions to talk to us was determined by a Labour party national executive council resolution which banned anyone from talking to the Government about abolition. It is up to them to deny that fact, but that is what we have always understood and that was fairly apparent during the debates in this House on the legislation. This matter fell under the same umbrella.

Our first invitation to the unions and to the Association of Metropolitan Authorities, representing the employers, followed upon our White Paper in October 1983, two and a half years ago. We said then that we would talk to them about all staffing issues, including our proposal to base the compensation terms for redundant staff on those generally available to local government and also our proposal that we would provide compensation for staff who suffered detriment because they had to move to jobs at lower rates of pay.

The TUC and the AMA refused to discuss these matters with us. Only the Federation of Managerial and Professional Officers' Unions—now FUMPO—had the courage and the common sense to take up our invitation, while making their opposition to the principle of abolition clear.

We repeated our invitation on subsequent occasions. One such occasion of great significance for the issues before us tonight was in March 1984. On 1 March 1984, the Government announced to Parliament that we would take steps to disallow compensation terms other than those to be set in the abolition legislation. We did this because we believed it to be right to set nationally applicable terms for a reorganisation of this kind and of this scope and scale.

The steps that we took were to place two provisions in what became section 53 of the Act. The first one requires compensation to be paid only in accordance with regulations to be made for the purpose — these regulations. The second — implementing our promise that we would not take away, retrospectively, anyone's legal rights established before our announcement — protected contractual rights to better compensation which any officer had obtained on or before the day of our announcement. Indeed, there has been some discussion of those very terms tonight.

In doing this, we followed well-established precedents for Governments to protect forthcoming legislation against pre-emptive action by interested parties. It was, as subsequent events have underlined, a very important step, both for the staff and for the abolition authorities. We

again invited the representation of both to discuss such matters with us. But still the TUC and AMA stayed away from the negotiating table.

We repeated our invitation late in 1984. We had introduced the Bill with many clauses relating to staff. We had published our proposed terms for redundancy compensation, including the possiblity of some enhancements for the 41 to 49 age group. We had secured majorities on the floor of the House not only for the principle of abolition but for the date of 1 April 1986. We invited the TUC and AMA to talk. Once again, they sat on their hands.

The TUC stayed put until 14 July 1985—that is, eight months ago. Then, only two days before the Royal Assent to the 1985 Act and nearly two years after our first invitation, it sat down to discuss with us staffing aspects of abolition.

I suggest that we would have been well within our rights to say, there and then, that it had come too late to discuss compensation issues. We could reasonably have decided to get on with the complex task of making the regulations. That would have minimised the uncertainties facing staff.

But we chose not to. We gave the TUC the opportunity to negotiate in earnest. We also included the AMA, which came hurrying along to see us on the coat tails of the TUC, a mere three months after, in October 1985; and still asking for more time! During those negotiations, we published consultation papers on detriment compensation and on an early release scheme, and we provided the TUC and AMA with all the help and guidance we could about the staffing provisions of the new Act.

Finally, after four months of tough negotiations—I will say that for those across the table from us—we made our final decisions, which were announced by my noble Friend the Minister of State on 13 November. Knowing how important the terms were to the staff, we gave our decisions full publicity so that, during the time it would take to transform the terms into a statutory instrument, everyone concerned — old and new employers, individual officers and union officials — would know precisely what the terms were.

Even before our final decisions were made we had, of course, made considerable strides in drafting the necessary regulations. We were offered help by the TUC, the AMA, FUMPO, NALGO and the staff commission with the technicalities of drafting. This we accepted, and I can readily say that we are very grateful for that help. The regulations are the better for it, in our view. But the process of consultation, responses, and redrafting took us into this year, when we laid the regulations at the earliest practicable opportunity.

Given the late hour, and given that the House has known the substance of the terms—since well-publicised terms—since 13 November last, I do not intend to go through the terms in detail. We have indeed, placed a memorandum in the Library which does this.

I should like, if I may, in the time remaining to me to deal with the points which have been raised by hon. Members on both sides of the House, most particularly by the hon. Member for Houghton and Washington, who spoke from the Opposition Front Bench. The hon. Gentleman talked about the terms and why, indeed, the terms applying to the staff of the GLC and the metropolitan counties were not the same as those applying to the Civil Service.

We made it clear as long ago as 1980 that the Crombie terms were no longer appropriate. In deciding on the terms set out in the regulations we started with the existing local government provisions but we took account of the unique circumstances which have come about as a result of abolition. We took account of the priorities that the unions in particular identified for improving those terms.

We have set terms which are fair for people who through no fault of their own have had their working lives disrupted by the legislation which they could not have anticipated up to three years ago; legislation which, I must tell the hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. McKay), we agree with and feel strongly about. But we fully accept that the staff could not have anticipated it entirely up to three years ago. We still say that the terms which have been set are fair on the ratepayers who will foot the bill.

We have been asked why we set three years as the qualifying period. Initially we proposed a qualifying period of five years' continuous local government service, including, in the case of the GLC and the metropolitan counties employees only, two years' service with that employer. But in the light of consultations we decided to relax both requirements. We decided that the appropriate qualifying period for compensation lasting as long as eight years could not be set at less than three years. I remind hon. Members that the Crombie code, the sort of code that has been discussed for Civil Service workers, and indeed the Crombie code used in the 1974 reorganisation of local government, prescribed the qualifying period of five years.

The hon. Member for Houghton and Washington also talked about the timing of detriment payments. He is correct to say that entitlement to compensation for detriment will arise at the end of each 12-month period. He is also right to say that each compensating authority can make payments on account before the end of each period. That is a fair and flexible approach. It reflects the reality that detriment can only be based on comparing year with year, but at the same time it allows the compensating authority to make timely payments during each year.

The hon. Gentleman compared local government staff with those who had been transferred compulsorily out of local government to the water authorities in 1974 and who subsequently rejoined local government. Such staff are not able to reckon either their water authority service or the local government service which preceded it in calculating their entitlement to a statutory redundancy payment. That is not the direct result of the regulations in relation to abolition. The point here applies generally.

Mr. Boyes: Tell the people who are affected who have worked in the water industry or the Health Service why. Explain in detail why they will not get the compensation for that period when they worked in local government before 1974 and were compulsorily transferred into those other industries.

Mr. Tracey: The difference was made clear at the time when the original transfer was made. It was not a question of being transferred from one area of local government to another. This was a quite different matter. Indeed, that point is well known now. That is a perfectly fair answer to the hon. Gentleman. I think that it is well known to people who were transferred into the water authorities.

The hon. Gentleman asked why an employee who already had 40 years' service would not have his pension

[Mr. Tracey]

enhanced by added years. The abolition compensation terms are based on the general local government superannuation and compensation arrangements which provide that such a person cannot accrue more than 40 years' service by the age of 60. Therefore, a person who already has 40 years' service when he reaches 60 does not receive added years.

Many of us will have sympathy with what the hon. Member for Houghton and Washington said about maternity rights. Any woman who has by the time of abolition established her right to maternity pay under employment legislation will be able to get from the appropriate residuary body any part of her entitlement which is outstanding when the GLC and the metropolitan counties are abolished. However, the position of any contractual entitlements is less clear. If such entitlements survive termination of a contract of employment they will be met by the appropriate residuary body, but it is far from clear why that group should be specifically compensated if such entitlements are lost and compensation for redundancy is available. Other groups, such as the long-term sick and people on compassionate leave, are equally deserving. It would be invidious to make distinctions. The point about maternity rights has been raised with my right hon. Friend by my hon. Friend the Member for Crosby (Mr. Thornton) and it will be explored in the Department.

The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) pinpointed anomalies affecting staff who work for the Inner London education authority. Staff transferred by order will retain their existing contractual rights. Staff transferred to ILEA will retain London Local Act terms, but recruited staff will be offered normal local government terms. We do not consider that the difference is a sufficient reason for extending the London Local Act terms generally to new London bodies.

The hon. Gentleman made some fair points about what he described as extraordinary anomalies. I undertake to consider them. I do not want to raise his hopes too high, but as we are a compassionate Government we shall examine the anomalies again before we reach our decision at the end of the 25 days.

Mr. Simon Hughes: I am grateful to the Minister. I shall forward the correspondence and the documents to him almost immediately. He and I appreciate the great urgency, because time is short. Perhaps the matter can be pursued with the Government outside the House in a matter of days so that we can try to overcome what may seem to be a small problem but which is a big one for the people concerned.

Mr. Tracey: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, we shall read the correspondence with interest.

The hon. Member for Houghton and Washington referred critically to the article in the *Daily Express* about gravy trains. My hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury (Mr. Whitfield) spoke passionately about examples that concern his constituents and others in the north of England. I cannot comment on schemes as raised by the *Daily Express* and my hon. Friend as I am not aware of the terms, and to comment would be unfair to individuals. My hon. Friend reflected deep-seated anger at excessively generous terms being worked out. We have felt that some of the terms are extremely excessive if that is possible.

Mr. Boyes: Surely the Minister will not now base a case on one example given by the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mr. Whitfield). The Minister is about to generalise from one individual. I tried to explain, as the *Daily Express* concedes about the GLC:

"most of his 4,000 staff will get between £1,000 and £3,000."

The hon. Member for Dewsbury is a director of Cullingworth Textiles Ltd. and of Caldaire Independent Hospital plc and has the trade of solicitor and notary public, and he is objecting to some people from the GLC and the metropolitan counties getting compensation of between £1,000 and £3,000. That really is hypocritical.

Mr. Tracey: The hon. Gentleman is wrong to say that I am generalising. I do not want to make general points but, as he has mentioned the commercial world in regard to my hon. Friend, perhaps I ought to read some of the *Daily Express* leader of 3 March which said:

"private companies use money freely raised in the market place. Local authorities use money extorted from their hapless ratepayers. There is a world of difference."

I do not subscribe to the precise language, but the sentiments are not entirely unreasonable and are shared by a good many people. We have not tried to change the terms which were established before 1 March 1984. I am afraid, however, that we cannot level up in local authorities that did not negotiate deals before that date as those terms would impose a completely unacceptable burden on ratepayers. No Government could accept that decisions taken by each authority should determine the terms to be set nationally in a statutory reorganisation.

The Government have worked the regulations out fairly and patiently, given the amount of vacillation, time wasting and, indeed obstructive behaviour, of the Trades Union Congress and some of the local government unions. I commend the regulations to the House.

Question put and negatived.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 80 (Standing Committees on European Community documents)

USE OF SEWAGE SLUDGE IN AGRICULTURE

That this House takes note of European Community Documents Nos. 9576/82 and 7719/84, draft Directive and Amendment on the use of sewage sludge in agriculture; and affirms the need to ensure that a directive, whilst incorporating measures to protect human health and the environment, does not inhibit the safe use of sewage sludge on agricultural land.—*[Mr. Sainsbury.]*

Question agreed to.

Drugs Misuse and AIDS

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Sainsbury.]*

11.29 pm

Sir Bernard Braine (Castle Point): I am grateful to Mr. Speaker for making it possible for me to raise a grave and urgent matter—the connection between misusers of drugs and the spread of the dreaded disease AIDS. I do so in my capacity as chairman of the all-party committee on the misuse of drugs, which spans both Houses of Parliament.

Drugs misuse is serious enough. Since 1979 there has been a rapid and disturbing increase in the number of addicts. It is now estimated that more than 60,000 people regularly misuse drugs, with heroin misuse being most common, but many other drugs are involved, including amphetamines and sedatives. The vast majority of those who are affected are under 30, and many are in their teens.

Moreover, there is a continuing increase in the number of new addicts. My all-party committee on drug misuse has been advised that in 1985 there was probably a 25 per cent. increase in the number of new addicts as compared with 1984. Although the Customs and Excise has continued to seize very large quantities of illicit drugs and is to be warmly congratulated on its efforts, this has not stemmed the rise in addiction. The purity of illicit drugs now available to addicts does not seem to have declined and there has been no significant rise in the price addicts pay for drugs on the street. Since there is no real shortage, addiction is likely to go on increasing.

The damage caused both to the young people involved and to the nation is incalculable. The Select Committee on Home Affairs described it as the most serious peacetime threat to our society and few would disagree with that assessment. But now an even greater threat has been added to what is already a serious social problem—the risks associated with infection by the HTLV 3 virus and the development of AIDS.

In the United Kingdom the first case of AIDS was reported as recently as the end of 1981. Since then the number of cases detected has increased rapidly. By the end of last year 275 cases had been reported, 216 of them in London and most of the remainder in a few large urban centres in England. Since then I think that I can say with some authority that 144 of those people have died. The long incubation period of the disease dictates that the number of cases will increase steeply for several years. Predictions suggest that we can expect a further 300 to 400 new cases this year and by 1988 there may be about 2,000 more.

In public health terms, even more significant is the fact that about 20,000 people, mostly men, are at present infected with the HTLV 3 virus. That figure can be expected, at the very least, to double annually unless steps are taken to inform people how to reduce the risk of developing AIDS by changing their sexual habits.

It has to be said that the incidence of the disease in Britain has so far been substantially lower than elsewhere. In September 1985, Britain ranked ninth out of the 21 reporting European countries. The incidence in the United States is about 13 times higher than it is here, and by October 1985 more than 13,000 cases of AIDS had been reported in that country. I am sure that my right hon. Friend will agree that there is not much comfort to be gained from the fact that this dreadful disease, for which there is no known cure, is currently less prevalent here than elsewhere.

Let us consider how the disease can be spread. We know that the virus which underlies AIDS can, in addition to spreading between practising homosexuals and among drug addicts who share needles when injecting drugs, be transmitted by men to women during normal intercourse, by an infected mother to an unborn child in the womb, and probably by women to men during normal intercourse.

We have already been warned. Reports from Edinburgh show a high rate of infection with the HTLV 3 virus among drug users who have injected themselves. It seems that 57 per cent. of drug misusers tested in a general practice in one area of the city are infected. In Dundee, all those who have been found to be infected by the virus have been drug misusers who inject drugs. For the rest of the country there is admittedly a lower rate of infection, but it is rising. A relatively short time ago the rate was 5 per cent. I am told that it is now as high as 10 per cent.

This infection in drug misusers is a very serious problem. Although sharing injection equipment is the route of transmission, the addict remains infected for the rest of his life. Even stopping drug misuse is no protection from AIDS, although this may reduce the chances of the full syndrome developing in someone who is infected. Importantly, men and women are equally at risk. Non-drug using partners can become infected, as can babies born to infected mothers. Given that many drug misusers overcome their addiction and return to more normal lives, they may nevertheless infect others who are at present not considered to be at risk and have not the faintest idea that they are at risk.

It is clear that urgent and sustained action is necessary to check the spread of this dreadful disease. If it is not checked, it will become endemic among injecting drug users and it is likely that it will infect others who have never injected drugs and have never had any reason to suppose themselves to be at risk.

I raise this matter because I am anxious to know how the Government view this appalling prospect. Can my right hon. Friend tell us what plans he has to educate the public about this serious health matter? Can he tell us what should be done to limit the spread of infection? Does he not agree that the medical profession needs educating as well as the public? Has his attention been drawn to an appallingly irresponsible booklet entitled "Sex for Beginners" which has been published by the British Medical Association, which unbelievably speaks of some men enjoying anal intercourse? There is no qualification, no warning, only a crude indication that anal intercourse is a practice which some people accept as normal. Is this not an encouragement to activity which is anti-social and dangerous in the extreme? Surely the BMA should be told to withdraw the booklet, which in this context is irresponsible in the extreme and must be offensive to many doctors. Will my right hon. Friend take immediate action on this? I ask him now to take immediate action.

There are other questions which I must put to my right hon. Friend. As drug misusers are at serious risk, what steps are being taken to make them aware of the dangers of injecting drugs and sharing equipment with other drug addicts? I know that the Government are alert to these problems and I am not criticising my right hon. Friend and his Department. I know that extra money has been made available recently, but what funds have been allocated

[Sir Bernard Braine]

specifically to ensure that adequate steps are taken both to inform drug misusers of the dangers I have mentioned and to train those who work in this area—brave spirits—helping drug addicts? I know, too, of the work which has been undertaken to prepare posters and leaflets for drug misusers and I welcome the efforts made by my right hon. Friend's Department to support preventive efforts of this sort.

May I take the opportunity, on behalf of the all-party committee, to thank the chief medical officer for England and Wales and his colleague, the chief medical officer for Scotland, for the way in which they have taken us into their confidence in this matter? In return, I can say that my committee has complete confidence in them and their approach to the problem.

However, the efforts of my right hon. Friend's Department are merely preliminary steps to what must be a sustained campaign. What additional steps does my right hon. Friend propose to take to ensure that the resources needed for effective preventive work are mobilised before HTLV 3 infection and AIDS reaches the levels throughout Britain already reached in Edinburgh? Incidentally, the level in Edinburgh seems to be comparable to that in New York. That is a dreadful statement to have to make.

In some circles it is proposed that needles and syringes should be made more readily available to reduce the likelihood that injection equipment will be shared between drug misusers. Is that not strange logic? If dirty, reused needles and syringes are the principal means of spreading infection among drug users, would not a freer supply result in the means of infection being more widely available than is now the case? Is this not the equivalent of trying to control an epidemic of smallpox by issuing vials of smallpox to the population at large? If, as seems to be the case, drug misusers who turn to injection almost inevitably use the injection equipment of someone else, would not the proposal infect many more people than might otherwise be the case? While there may well be good clinical grounds for providing clean injection equipment to drug misusers within the context of a controlled treatment programme under professional medical direction surely no ethical or clinical grounds can be offered for increased availability outside an authorised treatment programme?

Moreover, I believe that there may be doubts about the legality of such a course when equipment is provided in the belief that the person supplied will use it for the purpose of taking illegal drugs.

The Home Office has stated its intention of tackling the problem of cocaine sniffing kits. Would not the sales of needles and syringes to addicts, intent on injecting illegal drugs, come into the same category? Is it possible that supplying such equipment is tantamount to inciting, assisting, aiding or abetting the commitment of offence? I should be grateful if my right hon. Friend would comment on those points. I hope, too, that he will agree that tackling HTLV 3 infection must be a priority. Failure to respond now will inevitably result in untold social harm and immense cost as those who are victims of this appalling disease will eventually have to be cared for by the health service. I repeat that we are dealing here with a disease for which there is no known cure. The chief medical officer for England and Wales told my committee that a vaccine to treat the disease is not expected in less than five years. Here we have an instance where prevention is better than cure, especially as we do not have a cure and cannot hope to have one for several years.

This is the most serious problem that we have had to face for years and clearly there is no room for complacency. If drug misusers are to be assisted, the means must be provided to allow them an alternative to continued drug misuse. The Government's prevention campaign is to be welcomed. We have a long way to go, but a start has been made. Now an equally forceful campaign must be mounted to ensure that those already involved in drug misuse are aware of the dangers that they run from AIDS. Education is only part of the answer. Without effective treatment services which attract those most at risk, education will be of little use to those already addicted.

In the United States, where experience of this problem is well in advance of our own, education has been accompanied by a very substantial increase in treatment services for drug misusers. These have included methadone treatment programmes to move drug misusers away from injection and to help them to become drug free. What plans do the Government have to ensure that there will be an increase in treatment services in this country?

With the possibility that HTLV 3 infection will spread rapidly unless adequate measures are taken, decisions on central Government direction and financing should be taken now. To leave hard-pressed health authorities to determine priorities in their own good time will inevitably mean that in a few years they will have little or no choice. Treatment of those who have AIDS will then become a priority in health spending whether we like it or not. Increased treatment services now is a cheaper and more humane option both for drug misusers and the population generally. "The Guidelines of Good Clinical Practice in the Treatment of Drug Misuse" suggest a short and rapid drug detoxification, and a referral of more difficult cases to hospital services. If such services are not available, those most likely to be infected are the ones least likely to be offered help and most likely to spread infection through the population.

I know that my right hon. Friend and his colleagues take this matter seriously, as does the chief medical officer and his colleagues. My concern tonight is to elicit from my right hon. Friend what plans he has to ensure a coherent and co-ordinated response to this most serious threat to public health. But I also feel that it is my duty to warn that, while it may still seem to many that this is a minority problem, without adequate attention and resources being devoted now to its containment it will soon cease to be a minority problem and will then demand far greater resources and bolder responses than have so far been envisaged. Time, I admit, is running out fast.

11.47 pm

The Minister for Health (Mr. Barney Hayhoe): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Sir B. Braine) for raising this important and worrying subject of drug misuse, and the spread of the AIDS virus, HTLV 3. He does so with authority, as chairman of the all-party committee on drug misuse. I wish to make it abundantly clear that the Government attach high priority to a co-ordinated programme of action to control and limit the spread of the AIDS virus as a means of safeguarding public health. Before I mention the

measures that the Government are taking, it may be helpful if I say something about the AIDS virus and its spread in the United Kingdom.

The AIDS virus is not highly infectious. It is not spread by normal social contact, such as shaking hands, coughing, sneezing and sharing washing, eating, drinking and toilet facilities. Normal routes of transmission are through intimate sexual contacts, or exposure to infected blood products. Despite the limited ways in which the infection spreads, many people in the United Kingdom have been exposed to the virus. To update the figures of my right hon. Friend, at the end of February 305 full clinical cases of AIDS had been reported, of which 157 had died. The majority of cases—88 per cent.—were in homosexual men. Only three cases have been reported where injecting drug misuse was the main risk factor.

The number of cases is only the tip of the iceberg of the problems posed by the virus. Many more people have unknowingly been affected. At present they have no symptoms of illness, but they must be regarded as infectious. A proportion, perhaps one in four, may develop AIDS.

It is difficult to estimate how many people are at present infected with the HTLV 3 virus. My right hon. Friend gave an estimate of 20,000, and that would be regarded by the experts as a realistic assessment of the present position. However, no reliable estimates of the proportion of drug misusers who have become infected by sharing and using infected needles and syringes have been made.

However, two recent, small scale studies in Scotland have revealed a disturbingly high level of infection. My right hon. Friend referred to one of those studies. This supports the view based on the experience of the United States, that drug misusers who are injecting drugs must be considered as a high risk group for exposure to the virus.

While it is possible to identify groups within the community which at the moment have a higher risk of exposure to infection, the infection can spread outside these groups. For that reason, the Government have adopted a broad strategy of co-ordinated action aimed at minimising the risk for both the high risk groups and the general public.

Let me outline the main parts of this strategy. Information is collected by the Communicable Disease Surveillance Centre and expert medical advice is provided by a high powered and authoritative, expert advisory group. I warmly welcome my right hon. Friend's comments about the way that his Committee has been assisted by the chief medical officer of my Department, a most distinguished epidemiologist, and also by his opposite number in Scotland. There is a committee to monitor the spread of the infection and advice on measures to reduce it and that has branches in Scotland and Wales. There is also an inter-Departmental Ministerial steering group chaired by myself and backed by an official group to co-ordinate strategy on wider issues.

Specific measures to improve the safety of blood and blood products have been taken, including the screening and testing of blood donations and the heat treatment of blood products. Testing facilities are now generally available together with a counselling service for those found to be infected.

Additional resources have been provided for the three Thames regions—North East, North West and South East—which are treating some 75 per cent. of the AIDS cases.

General advice and guidance has been issued, some directly by the Government, for example to the health professionals and to the local education authorities—and some by voluntary, charity and private agencies funded by the Government—the Health Education Council, the standing committee on drug abuse, the Terence Higgins Trust, the Scottish AIDS Monitor are all organisations which have produced posters and leaflets highlighting the particular dangers for injecting drug misusers.

That material explains the way that the virus is transmitted and particularly emphasises the risks of infection associated with the sharing of injection equipment, needles and syringes. Information on this route of transmission of infection will also be provided in the forthcoming national public information campaign on AIDS which is in an advanced state of preparation with £2·5 million—a very substantial sum—having been allocated by the Government for that campaign. I hope that my right hon. Friend will understand that I cannot preempt the detailed content of that campaign this evening, but I hope that further details will be available soon. These are all important steps aimed at controlling the spread of the virus which causes AIDS.

I should like to respond to the point made by my right hon. Friend about another measure which some people are advocating for controlling the infection in drug misusers—the suggestion that needles and syringes should be made more freely available.

The transmission of the AIDS virus through contaminated shared needles and syringes is extremely worrying, but, like my right hon. Friend, I am not persuaded by the evidence that I have seen that clean syringes and needles, freely available, would necessarily deter established injecting users, whether or not receiving prescribed drugs, from sharing their equipment with other drug users. I am inclined to believe that there is a real risk that greater availability of needles and syringes, by encouraging drug users to experiment with injection, could make matters worse. Much evidence shows that first injections and further early injections are made by using borrowed equipment before injection becomes a regular practice for the individual concerned. I do not believe, according to the evidence as presented to me, that the greater availability of "clean" equipment, if one could so describe it, would have the effect that many argue in reducing the use of contaminated needles.

As drug misusers realise the gravity of the threat to their health from the HTLV infection, I hope that they will cease sharing their equipment. I hope that this debate will act in that direction. Better still, let them seek help so that they stop injecting or taking drugs altogether. Priority is being given to treatment centres with this aim in view.

My right hon. Friend referred to doubts that had been raised about the legality of supplying equipment in the knowledge that the person supplied is going to use it to take illegal drugs and asked whether similar measures to those being taken in relation to the sale of cocaine sniffing kits could be adopted. The new offence which will be created by an amendment to the Drug Trafficking Offences Bill in the case of cocaine kits and other paraphernalia which may be supplied for the purpose of administering illicit drugs will exempt syringes and needles, so as to avoid any measure which could even encourage illicit drug users to re-use such items, with the attendant risks of AIDS and hepatitis. I hope that my right hon. Friend will agree that that is wise.

[Mr. Barney Hayhoe]

My right hon. Friend referred to the BMA booklet "Safe Sex for Beginners". I have studed a copy of it. My right hon. Friend was right to express grave concern about the way in which the document refers to anal intercourse without even mentioning that such intercourse carries a high risk of transmitting this virus. The booklet was published some time ago. I understand that the BMA is well aware of this concern, and I gather that this serious omission will be remedied in a reprint of the booklet which should be published shortly. I am sure that my right hon. Friend welcomes that as I do.

AIDS is a serious public health hazard. Growing dangers must not be minimised. Nevertheless, it should be seen in perspective. My right hon. Friend was almost certainly right in predicting that some 2,000 AIDS victims will be identified in 1988. We should not forget that some 100,000 people will almost certainly die this year from smoking-related illnesses. We need to see these matters in perspective.

My right hon. Friend is absolutely right to draw our attention to the particular and dreadful dangers linking drug misuse with this horrifying disease which, as things stand, is incurable. Great efforts are being made by the medical fraternity in the United Kingdom and overseas to find a cure, but the right way to stop infection is for people to change their habits, to cease casual and promiscuous relationships. Those unfortunate people who misuse drugs must be careful to avoid the dangers to which we have referred.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at one minute to Twelve o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 7 March 1986

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PETITION

Shops Bill

9.35 am

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): I thank you, Mr. Speaker, for giving me leave to present a petition from constituents of mine who are gravely distressed by detailed reports of the Government's proposals to withdraw the regulations relating to trading on Sundays.

This petition is not the result of the standard reflex reaction of the traditional Sabbatarian school of philosophy — not a bit of it. Rather is it based on a broad and genuine concern for the welfare of the community, the maintenance of accepted and agreed conditions of work and the protection of the family unit.

The petition was entrusted to me for presenatation by the Rev. Tony Bell of St. James's parish in Hardwick, the Rev. Richard Martin of St. John's parish in Grindon and St. James's parish in Thorpe Thewles and the Rev. Peter Hirst of St. Aidan's parish in Billingham. They express their opposiion to the provision for unlimited Sunday trading in the Shops Bill that is currently before Parliament, recognising that Sunday has special characteristics as a day of rest, recreation and worship for the benefit of our family and community life. They ask that

"your honourable House do maintain legal limitations on Sunday trading to ensure that the special character of Sunday be protected."

To lie upon the Table.

Employment Rights

9.36 am

Mr. John Evans (St. Helens, North): I beg to move,

That this House condemns Her Majesty's Government, whose economic, social and anti-trade union policies have, since 1979, tripled unemployment and placed the greatest burdens on those least able to bear them, particularly women, young persons and the low paid, through the reduction of internationally agreed minimum legislative standards ensuring basic social, human and employment rights for Britain's workforce; deplores the increasing bitterness and frustration that characterises Britain's industrial relations, exacerbated by the Government's anti-trade union legislation, which has thrown considerable doubt on basic trade union rights whilst encouraging the worst possible management practices, as evident in the News International dispute at Wapping; and calls upon the Government to reverse these disastrous policies of confrontation and attacks upon Britain's workers and their trade unions, which have created so much poverty and strife throughout Great Britain, and replace them with a policy of economic expansion and conciliation and co-operation between employers, trade unions and the Government, based upon a positive framework of rights for Britain's workforce.

Mr. Alan Howarth (Stratford-on-Avon): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Eventually, at 7 o'clock last night, I was able to obtain from the Table Office a copy of the motion that the hon. Member for St. Helens, North (Mr. Evans) invites us to debate this morning. At 7 o'clock last night the Table Office did not have it printed; it was available only as a typescript copy.

It seems to me to be neither courteous nor for the convenience of the House that the terms of a motion that we are to debate should be tabled at such a very late stage. The motion is lengthy and specific and deals with concrete points. I ask you, Mr. Speaker, whether it is in order that it should be tabled at such a very late stage for debate this morning.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I do not think that I need any help. The motion is in order. Due notice was given, although it is generally for the convenience of the House to have a little longer notice of motions like this so that we can all see exactly what the debate is to be about.

Mr. Skinner: I wish to point out to you, Mr. Speaker, and to the House——

Mr. Howarth: Is it a point of order?

Mr. Skinner: Yes, it is a point of order, in view of what Mr. Speaker has had to say. Mr. Speaker made specific reference to the fact that it would be for the convenience of the House if these motions were tabled earlier. There are countless occasions when this Government table motions within a few minutes—not at 7 o'clock but a few minutes before the rising of the House. There have also been a few occasions when the Government have demanded on the same day a switch from Committee stage to Report stage and we have had to table manuscript amendments within an hour — *[Interruption]*—so the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) wants to talk to his Front Bench.

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North) *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. We do not want to take time out of this debate. Does the hon. Gentleman want to be helpful?

Mr. Cook: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I wonder whether it would have been helpful to those who

[Mr. Cook]

are expressing their distress, like the hon. Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Holt), who is doing it so vociferously at this moment, if my hon. Friend the Member for St. Helens North (Mr. Evans) had held a press conference before putting his motion on the Order Paper.

Mr. Speaker: This sounds like a really good Friday morning. I shall answer the point of order raised by the hon. Member for Rolsover (Mr. Skinner). What I have said about the need for adequate notice applies equally to the Front Benches as to the Back Benches. I call Mr. John Evans.

Mr. Evans: I am grateful Mr. Speaker. With respect, may I point out to the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) who raised the point of order, that I did seek the guidance of the Table Office on what the procedures were. They advised me, and I followed the rules of the House to the letter. May I also point out to the hon. Member that I tabled the title of the motion calling attention to employment rights some nine days ago. Surely the hon. Member had the wit to read what the subject of the debate would be and thus appreciate precisely what the topic would be. I accept your point, Mr. Speaker, that we have spent too long on this rather ridiculous point of order.

Although I am delighted to have the opportunity to sponsor a debate about these most important issues that are facing us, I am bound to draw attention to the fact that once again the Minister for Employment in not in attendance for a major debate on employment and employment rights. One is left with the feeling that Cabinet Ministers simply never stop running away and are only too happy to leave such debates to Parliamentary Under-Secretaries. However, I acknowledge the presence of the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment.

Unemployment is the greatest issue facing our nation and it is right that the House should examine the question of mass unemployment. It is right that the House should examine the Government's treatment of the problems of unemployment and their economic and social policies which have created unemployment. It is also important that the House should review the Government's attack on the disadvantaged, an attack which has taken place over the past six years on women, young children and all those who are, unfortunately, reduced to claiming social security benefits. At this point it is most important that the House should examine the Government's attack on trade unionists and their organisations. It is important that we ensure that full examination is given to those aspects of Government legislation that have created the situation in Wapping, which is a disgrace to an industrial society.

I start by dealing with the issues in reverse order to that in which I outlined them and begin with the Government's attack on trade unionists and their organisations. It is an attack which has been mounted over the past six years. At the outset may I declare an interest in this subject as a sponsored member fo the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers. I am a lifelong member of that organisation and I am inordinately proud to belong to it.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): Does the hon. Member care to say whether he thinks the three-month strike by the AUEW in 1979 helped the employment prospects of its members?

Mr. Evans: To be perfectly frank, I do not recall a three-month strike in 1979. Perhaps if the hon. Gentleman catches your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, he will have the opportunity to remind the House of that strike. Suffice it to say that any industrial dispute involving members of the AUEW is always in the interests of those workers. The AUEW's record will stand comparison with any organisation to which the hon. Member may wish to refer.

Since 1979, it has been central to the Tory Government's policy to break, or to cripple, the power and the influence of the trade union movement. That power has been built up over many years, often at the behest and support of successive Governments. Until the present Government came to power, every other Government had recognised that the trade union movement should, by rights, have a powerful part to play in the nation's affairs. When one examines the history of the past six years, one recognises that the anti-trade union legislation and the mass unemployment created by the Government are inextricably linked. A major part of the Tory attack on the British working people has been to attack their institutions and to attack working people's ability to defend themselves, their jobs and their standard of living.

Over the past six years there have been four major pieces of legislation that have had a detrimental effect on the trade union movement. The first attack was the disgraceful Social Security Act 1980, which deducted £15 a week, subsequently uprated to £16 a week, from the social security benefit of the family of any individual on strike. That was the first stage of the Tory attack. That legislation applied to unions, such as the mineworkers union in their year-long struggle with the Government. That union had never paid any strike benefit but, nevertheless, the families of the striking miners and other individuals were denied £16 from their pittance of benefit.

Following the Social Security Act 1980 there came the Employment Act 1980. I had the privilege as acting as Opposition Whip during its stages in Committee and through the House. This Act mounted the attack on the closed shop and restricted the right to picket. It restricted secondary action in furtherance of a trade dispute. That Act has created the nightmarish situation that now exists at Wapping. A ruthless employer, Mr. Murdoch, of News International, has been able to use the law in a way which, I submit, the House never intended.

The Secretary of State at that time was the right hon. Member for Waveney (Mr. Prior) and the law that he put on the statute book has been subsequently amended, altered and shaped by the judges and the legal profession so as to allow what was never intended by section 17 of the Act. It has allowed Mr. Murdoch and other employers to construct a chain of limited companies to create a legal fiction of separation. If, at company A the work or the business is being interrupted by a perfectly legitimate industrial dispute, the law on secondary action can be brought into play at company X although it is owned and operated by the same employer, because a chain of small private limited companies have been erected between them, even though the same work is being done on behalf of the same employer. The workers in that context have been denied their job opportunities and denied their work. Subsequently they have been denied their rights to such things as redundancy payment and the right to claim unfair dismissal and to take such claims to a tribunal. I am sure no decent citizen would attempt morally to justify the scenario that exists at Wapping.

What was intended by the Employment Act 1980? I remind the House that the Committee considering the Bill met on 32 occasions for almost 100 hours. I remind the House that there was no guillotine on the Bill. Indeed, there was no suggestion that the guillotine should be applied to the Bill. We went through the Bill clause by clause, line by line, and examined every aspect of the Government's intentions in that Act.

The Committee spent no fewer than five sittings on clause 14 — subsequently clause 15 — on secondary picketing. The Solicitor-General was in attendance for long stretches of our debates on clause 14 and our attempts to define and bring out into the open the position in relation to secondary picketing. The Committee never discussed secondary action.

On 19 February — the ninth sitting of the Committee — the Government published a consultation document on secondary action. The Committee had therefore sat for quite some time before the document was produced. The Committee spent some time deliberating whether it should discuss clause 14 on secondary picketing without seeing whether the Government intended to do anything about secondary action. On 18 March, at the 24th sitting, my hon. Friend the Member for Bow and Poplar (Mr. Mikardo) sought guidance from the Chair and asked:

"Would it be in order for me to seek to move a change in the order in which we are considering the clauses in order to defer our consideration of clause 14 and deal with some other clauses in the meanwhile?

May I, with your kind indulgence, Mr. Goodhew, explain the thought behind that request? Clause 14 covers very much the same ground as the Government's working paper. Indeed, the clause and the working paper are not merely interlinked but are intertwined. It will be impossible to discuss clause 14 without also discussing the working paper." — [*Official Report, Standing Committee A*, 18 March 1980; c. 1287.]

The Chairman accepted a motion, which my hon. Friend moved, to postpone consideration of clause 14 until after consideration of new clauses. The Government resisted that motion and, after a short debate, and in view of what the Chairman said, my hon. Friend withdrew his motion. In retrospect, we should probably not have withdrawn it but pursued the important point that any proposals on secondary action should have been examined in Committee.

On Report, the Government produced the blockbuster new clause 1 which covered no fewer than eight paragraphs and 54 lines. It comprised the most monstrous and complex legal jargon which nobody understood at the time, not even the Secretary of State. During the debate in the new clause on 17 April 1980, I said:

"In this case the Secretary of State frankly admitted that there was little knowledge in Parliament of what the complex clause actually meant. We must all sit back and wait and go through goodness knows how many industrial disputes before the judges finally determined what the clause means."—[*Official Report*, 17 April 1980; Vol. 982, c. 1546.]

In an intervention to the Secretary of State at column 1500 I asked him to define what the new clause meant, and he admitted that we would have to wait until the issue had been tested in the courts. We now know how the judges have interpreted it. The debate on secondary action at that time related to a judgment by the House of Lords in the Express Newspapers v. MacShane case, in which the House of Lords judgment stated clearly that secondary action under the 1974 Act was subjective and that, as long as the individual felt that he was acting in furtherance of a trade dispute that his members were involved in, there was no question of any action being taken against him. The All England Law Reports states:

"On the ordinary and natural meaning of s. 13(1) of the 1974 Act, an act was done 'in . . . furtherance of a trade dispute', and that the person doing that act was accordingly protected by s. 13 against an action for tort, if he honestly believed that the act might further the cause of those taking part in the dispute . . . the test of whether the act was done in furtherance of a trade dispute was a subjective one, and it was not necessary for the person doing the act to prove that it was reasonably capable of achieving his object. Since the evidence clearly established that the defendants honestly and reasonably believed that the action taken was fairly 'in . . . furtherance of a trade dispute', it followed (Lord Wilberforce, applying an objective test, concurring) that the appeal would be allowed and the injunctions discharged".

Because of that judgment, the Government thought that secondary action had to be defined. The Secretary of State said:

"The MacShane judgment appears to affirm that statute law gives to trade unions virtually unlimited authority to damage whomsoever they choose, as much as they choose, without fear of penalty, if, in their judgment — which no court may question — such action seems to be in their interests. In effect, the last as it now stands is a licence to spread industrial action far and wide beyond the original dispute, putting at risk the jobs and businesses of people who are in no way connected with it. No responsible Government could allow the law to remain in that state, and I would suggest that that view must also apply to the Opposition."

It is important to recognise the background to that debate. The Secretary of State was saying that, because of the House of Lords judgment two months before, the Act had been defined in a way that the Secretary of State in 1974 had never intended.

On Report, The Secretary of State confirmed our belief that the law was being interpreted quite differently from what was intended when he said:

"There is a deep-rooted trade union tradition of industrial action to prevent goods from being supplied to or from an employer in dispute. The Donovan commission acknowledged that, as did the Court of Appeal in developing the test of remoteness. The new clause recognises this tradition where secondary action is employed because the primary action is only partially effective. However, it withdraws immunity from secondary action if it is used only as a vehicle for spreading the disruptive effects of industrial action beyond those who are actively supplying goods to or receiving goods from the employer in dispute during the dispute.

The principle underlying the clause is that secondary action is justifiable only to the extent that it is used to put direct pressure on the employer in dispute." — [*Official Report*, 17 April 1980; Vol. 982, c. 1488-89.]

I submit that that is precisely what the trade unions at Wapping are intending to do and what the then Secretary of State implied was allowable under the new clause but which the courts have developed so that it is not allowed. Employees now find that their jobs are literally removed from under their noses and, because of the courts' interpretation of the 1980 Act, they have no claim or remedy against their employers.

If the Government had any honesty, they would restore to section 17 of the 1980 Act the meaning that it was thought to have when the Secretary of State put it through the House. The climate changed when the former Secretary of State for Employment was moved from office and passed to the vastness of Northern Ireland. We were then privileged to have the presence of the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) as the new Secretary of State.

Mr. Eric Forth (Mid-Worcestershire): Hear, hear.

Mr. Evans: The hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire, (Mr. Forth) says "Hear, hear," and reveals the feeling on the Tory Benches for the right hon. Gentleman. The right hon. Member for Chingford and the Prime Minister have constantly urged employers, time after time, to use the Tory Acts to bring the employees to heel. No one can seriously question that statement, as on innumerable occasions and speeches both the Prime Minister and the right hon. Gentleman used those expressions.

The right hon. Member for Chingford introduced the Employment Act 1982. That was a really vicious Act clearly intended to further shackle the trade union movement and to promote the concept of non-unionism. The then Secretary of State for Employment boasted that the Act that he was putting on the statute book was meant to promote non-trade unionism. He introduced what became known as the "scabs' charter" in which anyone who could prove that a job had been lost because of pressure from a trade union could sue the employer and join the trade union in the action, which could result in payments in excess of £30,000 to the individual for loss of employment.

Tory Members should study what happened since the Employment Act 1982 went on the statute book. Notwithstanding the hysterical outpourings from the former Secretary of State, Tory Members would find that the number of cases that have gone to tribunal under the 1982 Act can be counted on the fingers of two hands. None of them have been awarded anything like the level of compensation that the former Secretary of State provided.

That Act also substantially narrowed the definitions of the trade dispute to closely defined industrial issues. It created a situation in which trade unions could be fined for the so-called unlawful acts of their officers to the extent that unions with membership in excess of 100,000 could be fined £250,000 for any acts that were defined as unlawful. The trade union movement is smarter than that and few cases have appeared before the courts.

However, the 1982 Act tried to create an uncertain climate. The former Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Chingford, was also the architect of the Trade Union Act 1984. The purpose of that Act was largely to restrict the political rights of trade unions and to attempt to bankrupt the Labour party.

Mr. Don Dixon (Jarrow): Does my hon. Friend recall, in relation to the 1982 Act, that sections 1 and 2 introduced retrospective payments from 1974 to 1981 for the free-riders working in closed shops who happened to lose their jobs? Professor Jennard from Strathclyde university went round the country trying to find 400 free-riders to pay out £2 million in retrospectve payments that had been set to one side for free-riders during that period.

Mr. Skinner: All trade unionists could do with some of that.

Mr. Evans: I am grateful for my hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon) for making that important point. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) rightly said, many in the trade union movement would expect similar acts of retrospection to ensure that those who were loyal to the trade union movement in days of struggle would be treated in the same way as the Tory party treated the free-loaders and blacklegs.

An interesting point about the Trade Union Act 1984 is that it has largely blown up in the face of the Tory party. The present situation is that of the unions with political funds, all 33 that have balloted their membership have returned yes votes with massive majorities in favour of keeping those funds. Only four unions await a result and it is confidently expected that during the next two weeks they will also declare a yes vote with huge majorities for the maintenance of their political funds. It is also interesting that the Act, which was intended as a blow to the trade union and Labour movement, has caused one union that previously did not have a political fund to ballot its members and subsequently to create one. It is confidently expected that many other unions that do not have political funds but are currently balloting their members will establish such funds. As some hon. Members pointed out at the time, that legislation will perform wonders in politicising the membership of the trade unions and I am pleased that that result is being achieved.

Dr. M. S. Miller (East Kilbride): I ask my hon. Friend the Member for St. Helens, North (Mr. Evans) not to leave this point too quickly. My hon. Friend should extend our thanks to the Government for making the situation clear, but he should also stress that the situation is not quite what the Government expected.

Mr. Evans: At the outset I said that the Trade Union Act 1984 was intended to break the political powers of the trade union movement and to bankrupt the Labour party. That Act has blown up in the Government's face because of the splendid work that has been done by the trade union movement and in particular by the trade union co-ordinating committee. That exercise has politicised trade unionists the length and breadth of the country and that can only be beneficial to us, particularly when we come to the next general election, as Tory Members are fond of quoting at length that almost one-third of trade unionists voted for them at the last election.

Mr. Geoffrey Dickens (Littleborough and Saddleworth): Hear hear. We would not be here now if they had not voted for us.

Mr. Evans: The trade unionists will not be voting for Tory Members at the next election. That is certain.

One of the reasons why trade unionists will not vote for the Tories at the next election is that the Prime Minister continues to threaten to introduce further anti-trade union legislation. The Government are seeking to deny workers the right to combine to protect themselves and promote their interests. The Government are doing that because they allege that that will improve the operation of the labour market and alter the balance of power in favour of the employers. Those are favourite quotes from Cabinet Ministers and in particular from the Prime Minister. In other words, the Government's policies are in favour of market forces that would dominate and rule our lives.

The Government have carried out many measures to promote market forces. They have privatised public enterprise and services. They have made massive cuts in public expenditure, capital expenditure, infrastructure projects, and in current expenditure, and such things as pensions and supplementary benefits. The Government have also made uncivilised attacks on the disadvantaged. One attack is going through the House at present in the form of the Social Security Bill.

Mr. Forth *rose*——

Mr. Evans: I shall give way shortly, but I want to finish my point.

Cuts in housing benefit will reduce the income of millions of people and no fewer than 500,000 people in this country will lose more than £5 a week. The severe weather payments are a national scandal and the Government's attacks on pensioners ad claimants have been a disgrace. We have also seen the diminishing of women's rights in employment. They have been denied the primary right of maternity benefit for which women fought for generations. This Government, led by the Prime Minister, have reduced those rights. The Wages Bill, which is currently in Committee, is attacking the young people in our society. Millions of youngsters will suffer as a result of that Act reaching the statute book and they will see their pittance of a weekly income substantially reduced.

If the Government had increased the youth training scheme allowance in line with inflation, it would now probably be £8 or £10 more than it is. There is not much point in having a one-year, two-year or even three-year scheme, if at the end of that period the youngsters are simply dumped back into the unemployment queues.

Mr. Forth: At the outset of the hon. Gentleman's catalogue of inaccuracies he claimed that public expenditure had been slashed, grossly reduced, or some such thing. Will he remind the House of the proportion of gross national product that was taken up by public expenditure in 1979 and contrast it with the proportion that is devoted to public expenditure this year? In other words, will he substantiate the claim that there has been a cut in public expenditure?

Mr. Evans: I shall deal with the hon. Gentleman's question immediately. The major reason for the Government's un-Christian attack on the under-privileged is the size of the unemployment bill, which is the product of massive unemployment. That bill is just short of £20 billion this year. Unemployment is the reason for the massive increase in public expenditure since 1979. Unemployment has trebled since 1979. If the hon. Gentleman cannot understand that, it is time that he took up some other profession.

Apart from those considerations, unemployment is a colossal and incredible waste of money and human resources. Virtually all the wealth that has been obtained from the North sea has been poured down the drain of mass unemployment. That is one of the greatest crimes that this Tory Government have committed against our society. Despite the Government's rhetoric about the wonders of the free market, unemployment continues to escalate. It appears to be never-ending, despite all the Government's claims and all the bleatings and pleadings that we hear from Conservative Members.

Mr. James Lamond (Oldham, Central and Royton): And there are all the fiddles as well.

Mr. Evans: Indeed. There are now no fewer than 3·4 million benefit claimants, which is the euphemism that is used. However, that does not tell us how many are out of work. That is the fiddle that has continued for the past six years or so. As unemployment increases, so does the benefits bill, and that is why the Government have had to cut the value of the benefits that are paid to the unemployed. It is worth recalling the theft of the six month wage-related unemployment benefit, for which workers have paid. It cannot be regarded as a benefit that the Government provided and then withdrew. Workers paid for benefit through their national insurance contributions.

As all my hon. Friends are only too well aware, the Government fiddle continually with the unemployment figures. It was announced two weeks ago that about 60,000 unemployed would be taken off the register by a further judicious fiddling of the figures. I am pleased that the Minister for Employment has just entered the Chamber. I am pleased to welcome the chief fiddler to our debate.

Mr. Michael Foot (Blaenau Gwent): The second fiddle.

Mr. Evans: The Government decided to include those in the armed forces and the self-employed as being employed. That enabled the percentage of unemployed to be reduced at a stroke from 13·1 per cent. to 12·4 per cent. That is virtually unbelievable. I should like to know how many unemployed self-employed persons will be counted as being unemployed. If the employed self-employed are to be included in the employment total, presumably the Government will be prepared to include the self-employed unemployed in the unemployment total. It seems that the Minister for Employment does not understand the question.

Everyone in the House is only too well aware that the Government's policies over the past six years have created massive and almost uncontrollable unemployment in our society.

The Paymaster-General and Minister for Employment (Mr. Kenneth Clarke): Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will give me a definition of the unemployed self-employed. When someone is unemployed and looking for work, how does he know whether he is an unemployed self-employed person or an unemployed employee? When we assess the percentage of unemployment, we need to compare the number of people who are working with the number who are not, who are receiving benefit and who are available for work. One side of the equation must be those who are at work, which plainly means those who are working for employers as well as those who are working for themselves and those who are engaged in the armed forces.

Mr. Evans: I am grateful to the Minister. I am sure that the right hon. and learned Gentleman and I will read with great interest the intervention that he has just made to try to ascertain what it means. I am sure that many of us will go to many parts of Britain in our effort to find out what is meant by the definition of unemployed self-employed. It seems that the Government have no difficulty in counting the employed self-employed in employment totals. That is a measure of the fiddle that the Government are operating and perpetrating on the British people.

There are so many ways in which the Government have contributed to increasing the level of unemployment, and it would be perverse of me to go through them all. I shall mention a decision of the Government in 1980 which allowed the pound to rise to £2·40 to the dollar, which had a devastating effect on wide stretches of British industry. They tried to cope while the pound stood at that level against the dollar and they found it impossible. The effect

[Mr. Evans]

was devastating on so many British companies. Many of them went out of business because of that act of folly. Later on the value of sterling fell to £1·05 or £1·03 against the dollar and the Government did not intervene. That served to compound their incompetence and folly.

That is the main thrust of the argument of the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine), who, in evidence which was quoted in *The Guardian* yesterday, called for an attack upon Treasury power. The article states:

"The creation of a powerful Cabinet committee to overcome the influence of the Treasury on industrial strategy was demanded last night by Mr. Michael Heseltine, the former Defence Secretary."

The right hon. Gentleman should know better than anyone about the powers of the Treasury. He is a former Secretary of State of two of the greatest spending Departments, the Ministry of Defence and the Department of the Environment. He is denouncing the Treasury in the most vigorous terms for being responsible for much of the decline of British industry. In describing the control that the Treasury has, he said:

"It is like in commercial terms allowing finance directors to run a company. The books will add up but there won't be many sales."

I could not think of a better description of the British economy that has been created by the Government's act of folly.

We have seen slashing attacks on public expenditure

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): The hon. Gentleman has said that when sterling was standing at £2·40 against the dollar many British companies went out of business. Might I inquire of him which companies suffered that fate? Can he name one? While he is reflecting on that, does he recall that General Motors' first investment in Britain came when the pound-dollar parity was £1 to slightly in excess of $4.

Mr. Evans: I have no doubt that during the next few days I shall be receiving quite a few letters that will answer the hon. Gentleman's question. I am sure that they will contain the names and addresses of many such firms, especially small firms, throughout the country. They will set out the many businesses that had to cease trading during the time when sterling stood at £2·40 against the dollar.

Mr. Holt: The hon. Gentleman cannot answer the question.

Mr. Evans: The reduction in public expenditure——

Mr. Holt: The hon. Gentleman cannot answer the question.

Mr. Evans: We have seen cuts in bus grants and the subsequent collapse of bus sales. Local authority housing allocations have been cut, with the result that the backlog of housing repairs stands at about £20 billion. There have been cuts in local authority road maintenance programes and the roads of Britain are falling to pieces. There have been cuts in the nationalised industries' programmes and enormous problems are building up for our society. The decision to cut public expenditure programmes has given a further twist to the unemployment spiral. Every decision not to intervene because of the doctrine of market forces has produced an additional twist to the spiral of unemployment. Unemployment continues to rise, and it will do so remorselessly. Employment Ministers wring their hands and make statement after statement about unemployment flattening out, hopeful signs, expected employment rises, levelling off and signs that next year will be better. There are statements of good intentions time after time, but nothing concrete is done to bring to an end the remorseless spiral of unemployment.

Once prosperous regions, cities and towns now suffer from mass unemployment. They have been reduced to such an extent that they now qualify for grants from the EEC's regional and social funds—that is, they would qualify for grants if there were money available for those grants.

More than 7,000 people are out of work in St. Helens, North, which was once one of our great and prosperous northern towns, and almost 50 per cent. of them have been out of work for more than 12 months. Skilled craftsmen over 45 who have given a lifetime of service to Britain ask me at my surgeries, "Will we ever get a job again?" I can only reply, "Not as long as the Conservative party is in office carrying out these policies."

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. David Trippier): The hon. Gentleman seems to suggest that, if the Labour party were elected to office, it would be relatively easy either to hold the increase in unemployment or to decrease it. Why did the Labour party manifestly fail to do that the last time it was in power, when unemployment went substantially beyond the 1 million point to which the hon. Gentleman wants us to return? When unemployment more than doubled he manifestly failed to do anything about it.

Mr. Evans: I hope that, on reflection, the hon. Gentleman will withdraw that statement. I did not say that the next Labour Government would find it easy. In fact, the next Labour Government will find it dreadfully difficult, given the nightmare that the Conservative Govnerment will leave behind them, to get people back to work.

Mr. Dickens: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Evans: I shall not give way.

Mr. Dickens: The hon. Gentleman is wise.

Mr. Evans: I give way.

Mr. Dickens: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me this opportunity. As we are talking about high levels of unemployment, will the hon. Gentleman tell the House what methods the Labour party would employ to reduce unemployment which have not been tried and tried again, and failed on every occasion? In every unemployment debate, we get the same old answers and solutions that have failed time and time again. We get no new ideas.

Mr. Evans: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would not expect me to say that we shall launch a series of tea dancing classes — *[Interruption.]* Yes, it is cheap, because the hon. Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth (Mr. Dickens) makes cheap remarks. Under the last Labour Government, 500,000 more people were employed in 1979 than in 1974. There are now 2 million fewer people working than in 1979. If the Labour Government had used the same system of statistics as the Conservative Government are using, unemployment would have been less than 900,000 in 1979. That is the

truth. The last Labour Government proved conclusively that a Government who were concerned and determined would create employment. Every hon. Member, including members of Centre Forward, the previous Tory Prime Minister and Lord Stockton, have made it clear on innumerable occasions that unemployment can be conquered——

Mr. Dickens: How?

Mr. Evans: By Government action. The Government are out of step with everyone. The chambers of commerce are calling for programmes to tackle unemployment. The CBI and trade associations, including those in the construction industry, are calling for a programme of public works to tackle unemployment. The Tory wets, the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath), the TUC and the Labour party—everyone, bar the Government — are attacking the Government and calling for a programme of public works.

In the interview the Prime Minister gave a fortnight ago for the CBI magazine, she wrung her hands and said that Governments can create only artificial jobs. I remind the Prime Minister and Tory Members that there is nothing artificial about the unemployment they have created. It is massive and dreadful.

The greatest employment right of all is the right to work. That right has been denied to more than 3 million of our citizens. The Government are responsible. They have taken away that right to work. The Prime Minister's political epitaph will be "The Prime Minister for Unemployment". The Government stand condemned. If Conservative Members are so anxious to know what a Labour Government would do, they should resign. Hold an election and we will show them what we will do.

10.24 am

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): I begin by paying a small tribute to the hon. Member for St. Helens, North (Mr. Evans) for introducing this important subject, because it gives the House a useful opportunity to debate what is probably the cluster of the most central issues of concern to politicians. As it is Friday we can debate these matters at some leisure, in contrast to the more hectic mid-week.

Mr. Frank Cook: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, in complimenting my hon. Friend the Member for St. Helen's, North (Mr. Evans) on giving the House "a useful opportunity", he is effectively rebutting the specious and bogus point of order raised by the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth)?

Mr. Forman: I see no necessary contradiction between my suitably gallant remarks, which are in danger of becoming less gallant if the hon. Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook) continues in that vein, and the wise observations of my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth).

That is the extent of the congratulations that I extend to the hon. Member for St. Helens, North. His long and almost hysterical motion seems to be almost entirely wrong. Conservative Members have asked him what a future Labour Government might be able to do. Has he considered this simple point? He supports a party which appears to be committed to massive increases in public spending — according to recent calculations it will be £24 billion extra in total. Will that expenditure be any more in the interests of genuine employment than it was the last time the Labour party went down this route between 1974 and 1976? As all hon. Members will recall, it ended sadly and ignominiously in recourse to the International Monetary Fund.

I do not believe that the Labour party's solutions are credible. I am sure that is one of the main reasons why the party is languishing as it is.

Mr. Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): Obviously, Opposition spokesmen will say during today's debate that more should be spent on capital investment programmes. Does my hon. Friend agree that if that point is made it should be put in the context of capital investment in Britain last year, when it was at the record high level in real terms of £55 billion?

Mr. Forman: I accept the point that my hon. Friend has made so well. He underlines the fact that capital investment should be correctly and profitably made. The great bulk of that investment is in the private sector. Conservative Members make no apology for that. There is a role for both the public and the private sector to play in these matters. It is important for the House to realise that just because investment in the private sector has increased, it should not be derided. It is every bit as important as public sector investment, and it produces jobs.

I stress that in the past six or seven years the Government have not been, and are not now, anti-trade union. They are against the mindless and self-defeating militancy of a minority of trade unionists and their leaders who do not know what is in their own best interests, let alone the best interests of the country.

Mr. Dickens: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Forman: I should prefer to continue, if I may.

The Government legislation of 1980, 1982 and 1984 enhanced the power for ordinary trade union members. Those three stages, so far, of our trade union legislation have improved the balance between employers and employees and between trade union leaders and their members. I remind the Opposition, who may disagree with me, that opinion polls have consistently shown that the general public, including ordinary trade union members, have taken the view time and time again that trade unions in the past, especially in the 1970s, had too much power, not only for their own good, but for that of Britain. It was necessary and timely that the balance should be rectified.

The motion refers essentially to the central problem of unemployment, and it is to that that I want to address the brunt of my remarks. It needs to be pointed out, when the House is understandably concerned about unemployment, that on the other side of the equation—employment—we have seen some satisfactory progress since the depth of the recession. It is notable that, however one calculates these matters, the increase in employment, including some assessment for part-time equivalents, since March 1983, has been about 700,000 new jobs. I am sure that all Conservative Members share the deep concern about the unemployment which still exists in spite of the increase in employment. If there is one area——

Mr. Martin J. O'Neill (Clackmannan): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It was reported in the *Daily Mail* yesterday that a statement is to be announced this morning on the decision of the privatisation of Vickers. Is there any indication as to when——

Mr. Dickens: It is on the A[illegible]nciator.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ernest Armstrong): Yes, there is to be a statement.

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it not ludicrous that a statement of this importance will be made to a nearly empty House on a Friday morning when many of those Members with a deep concern in the matter are not able to be here because they were not aware that the issue was to be raised today? Is it possible for you to use your good offices? We made representations to the Government through the usual channels. We asked them to defer this until next week so that all hon. Members with an interest could hear the statement and take part in the questioning, instead of which the Government have insisted on dragooning it through.

Mr. Dixon: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is a disgrace that a statement is to be made this morning about Vickers when there is an early-day motion on the Order Paper on this subject signed by 101 Tory Members, tabled by the hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Franks), who will unfortunately not be in his seat after the next general election. However, he should be told of this sort of thing. Is it not the biggest rip-off of the lot when the Government have invested £200 million in——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must not pursue that argument. He must raise a point of order with the Chair.

Mr. Dixon: Further to the point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am trying to emphasise the importance of this statement. We gave £200 million being given to Trafalgar House, which is important to the 101 hon. Members——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must pursue the argument of whether it is in order for a statement to be made.

Mr. Skinner: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. There is an additional point. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) has said, the statement is being made on a Friday, when many hon. Members are absent. He implied that some people could not get here—I believe that they ought to be here—but I also believe that the practice of statements being made on a Friday should be investigated by the appropriate authority. The Government wanted to get the Tory Members who have been involved in signing the motion, away from the House, in particular the hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Franks), who has actively promoted the Trafalgar House scheme with the resultant loss of several thousand jobs in his own constituency. I have no doubt that he will have to pay for that at the next election. However, I believe that that is the reason why the Government have wangled it in this fashion today.

Mr. Gregor MacKenzie (Glasgow, Rutherglen): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am less than happy that any statement of consequence should be made on a Friday. I knew nothing of this statement until the point of order was raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill). It was not on the board when I came in and it was not on the television Annunciator. It has obviously been the subject of some conflict between the Labour Front Bench and the Government Front Bench. When we came into the House this morning there was no notice on the customary place. The customary place, for the benefit of those who have not been Members for long, is on the entrance to the Members' Lobby. I think that it is appropriate that there should be a short comment made by the Leader of the House on a statement of this kind.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: If it is on the same point of order, perhaps I can help the House. If the Government decide to make a statement on a Friday, that is a matter for them. They inform Mr. Speaker's Office. I understand that the Government want to make a statement at 11 o'clock.

Mr. John McWilliam (Blaydon): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This refers to the point of order that my hon. Friend the Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) raised initially rather than the one that has developed. I want to draw to your attention the fact that apparently yesterday's *Daily Mail* had details of a statement to be made in this House before hon. Members had heard it. I think that that is an abuse. It is an abuse that it appears in a newspaper before we have the statement and it is a serious abuse that it happens on a Friday when the hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Franks) is not in his place to hear the statement.

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am not surprised at this tactic being engaged in yet again. It seems to me a standard procedure for the Government to manipulate the procedures of the House in a manner designed to keep Labour Members particularly ignorant of their activities. I am concerned that the commercial undertaking which is identified with this Vickers proposal is Trafalgar House. I am concerned that there are familiar connections between that company and members of the Government.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is not a matter for the Chair and the hon. Gentleman knows that.

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am asking you to use your authority regarding this statement, because you are aware that the Opposition have continually complained about the Government making statements of great importance such as this on a Friday. I appreciate what you said earlier, that the Government have a right to be able to do this, but surely the Chair should be able to rule that the Government should at least give notice to the House when they intend to make a statement of this nature so that hon. Members interested in the statement can participate. How can hon. Members who have returned to their constituency to deal with interests there be here to question the Minister making the statement today? Surely, it should be the right of the Chair to determine whether the Government have given hon. Members the opportunity to be here to participate today? I am asking you to rule on that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman knows that statements are often made on Fridays. I am not able to instruct the Government whether they should make a statement.

Mr. Dickens: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it not right that when a statement is

ready to be given to the House that statement should be made at the earliest opportunity because, obviously, it will contain news. It is not necessarily just for those hon. Members who happen to be present at the time. It is also fully printed in *Hansard* and helps to avoid that which the Opposition have criticised in points of order, that is leaks. I feel that it is sensible to let us all know at the earliest opportunity. If a few hon. Members are missing, that is neither here nor there—it is just unfortunate.

Mr. O'Neill: Further to the original point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The point has to be made that when we have a debate on a Friday morning we come to the House to discuss one issue. Something has come to our attention in a newspaper, which many of us may not read regularly —the *Daily Mail*. Perhaps we ought to read it more often. There are procedures, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Rutherglen (Mr. MacKenzie) said, for letting us know about statements. A statement of this magnitude should have been announced in advance and should not have been announced on the annuciator at the time that it was. The House had been sitting for an hour before the announcement was made. It would have been for the convenience of hon. Members for the announcement to be on the board at 9 o'clock. It is a discourtesy to the House and I believe that it is the responsibility of the Chair to ensure that our interests are protected in these matters.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I think that Mr. Speaker has indicated that it is a great advantage to the House to have as much notice as possible when a statement is to be made. The point that has been raised is a matter for the Government. It is not a point of order for the Chair.

Mr. McWilliam: On a different point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You will agree that the decision whether to accept a statement is entirely a matter for the Chair, not for anybody else, and that that is where the decision rests. Therefore, the issue is whether or not you accept the statement.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am advised, and I was fairly sure of my ground when I said this, that if the Government advise Mr. Speaker of the intention to make such a statement, Mr. Speaker cannot reject it.

10.41 am

Mr. Forman: It is just possible that this is act two of a three-act speech. The central aspect of the unemployment problem, to which the House should pay the greatest attention, is long-term unemployment. Many Conservative Members wish that the Government would do even more in the Budget and on all other available occasions to tackle the problem. It can be approached in a number of ways.

Clearly the community programme has already been a great success. It needs to be extended at the most rapid sensible rate. Clearly the enterprise allowance scheme has also been a great success, and it would be a good idea to relax some of the terms and conditions of this excellent scheme to make it possible to expand it further. Clearly the job start experiment, which has so far been introduced only on a pilot basis, should be extended further, because once again it establishes the principle and cost-effectiveness of a measure of subsidy for employment. The Employment Select Committee, in its interesting recent report, gave added weight to the arguments to extend those measures further.

The motion also refers to the problems of management. I hold no brief for the recent actions of Mr. Rupert Murdoch. However, it has been well said that those who have gone on strike in that part of the printing industry have effectively dismissed themselves. That is sad. In many cases when employees go on strike they confidently believe that their employer will wish to re-employ them because it is not thought to be in the employer's interests that they remain on strike. In this case, because of Mr. Murdoch's plans and dispositions, their action effectively amounted to their own dismissal. That is a tragedy, and it does not appeal to me any more than it does to Opposition Members.

Mr. John Prescott (Kingston upon Hull, East): Labour Members will have some sympathy for the hon. Gentleman's remarks, but is he aware that many of those workers were not involved in the dispute but were dismissed by Murdoch as a total action? What is the hon. Gentleman's position towards those workers?

Mr. Forman: The story is complicated, and I fully confess that I have not followed the details as closely as has the hon. Gentleman. Nevertheless, this seems to have more of the stuff of an industrial tragedy than anything else. Even at this late stage I wish that a move towards a more sensible resolution could be made. Clearly there is a problem, in that there is not a great deal of alternative employment for workers in the traditional skilled trades in our inner-city areas. That links up with what I shall say later about adult training and re-training.

It is unfortunate that for a long period the behaviour of certain elements in the printing industry has been almost a byword for restrictive practices. Those restrictive practices could not have continued for as long as they did without the connivance of weak and, and in many cases, incompetent management. Newspaper proprietors and managers of earlier times have a great deal to answer for in that respect. They allowed trade unions to control the hiring and firing procedures almost entirely, they allowed manning levels on existing machines to be determined by the unions rather than by themselves, and they effectively gave the unions a veto over the introduction of new technology which, as the House will know, stood idle for many years before it could be brought into production. That has more the element of tragedy than anything else. As so often in our long and distinguished history, we bring many problems on ourselves.

Mr. Frank Cook: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Forman: I should prefer to continue, as many hon. Members wish to speak.

I agree with the motion that we need a climate of economic expansion in the interests of employment and, equally, an atmosphere of industrial co-operation if we are to succeed, proper and provide new jobs, which both sides of the House wish to see. The Government, through their macro-economic policies, have produced precisely that climate of expansion and done better than many of their predecessors. I remind the House, if it needs reminding, that we are now in the fifth year of a satisfactory rate of economic growth. Manufacturing productivity is improving at a faster rate than in France or Germany, albeit from

[Mr. Forman]

a low base, and new jobs are being created, especially for women and part-time workers, and, I am glad to say that in the more successful parts of the private sector, also for full-time male workers.

Obviously, we wish to encourage as much industrial co-operation as possible in all parts of industry and commerce. The best of British management already manages to bring that about, but we must look for ways to bring the standards of the average management up to those of the best. That implies the need for further measures, possibly in the Budget, to encourage employee participation through wider share ownership for the general public, and especially for employees. The way ahead has beeen signposted to some extent by firms such as Baxi Partnership, the National Freight Consortium and the John Lewis Partnership, all of which involved their workers much more fully, partly through this mechanism. We should seek to find every sensible way to make progress towards what Professor Martin Weitzmann has called the "share economy". Sensible progress towards more revenue sharing would be preferable to the rather self-defeating pay scrambles of the past, and to the insistence on some of the traditional restrictive practices, which have damaged our competitive position.

The most serious emerging employment problem is not the legislative problem, to which the hon. Member for St Helens, North drew our attention, so much as the inherent conflict between insiders and outsiders within the employment market. That is a serious problem, and there are all the signs that the interests of the so-called outsiders —the part-timers, the self-employed and people working on a consultancy basis — are growing and improving. We welcome that, because it is partly responsible for the growth in employment. However, the interests of traditional insiders, particularly those who lose their jobs — those who were originally in male full-time paid employment—are not so attractive, especially with the decline of manufacturing industry.

In British industry and commerce, those who are secure insiders and who take steps to hold on to their jobs and to increase their pay, as can be seen from the figures for average earnings, do so at the expense of those who are insecurely outsiders and who would like to get in. I am not sure whether we can solve the problem easily or quickly, but the thrust of Government policy to deal with the problems of unemployment must now be dkirected principally at the sector of the unemployed who have not recently received sufficient attention—the middle-aged male family man who would like a full-time job and probably had one in, for example, manufacturing industry before he became redundant, and who wishes and needs to return to paid full-time employment to support his family.

The classic model of the nuclear family of the husband in full-time work, a wife not working, except to look after the children—I do not wish to take on the feminist lobby, because I know of the work involved in being a housewife — and two children, is now more of a myth than a reality. It accounts for only about 18 per cent. of all families. We must direct our attention to the people in that category who seek to return to full-time employment, and who are finding it difficult to do so. In the interim, their income needs support and they need our understanding.

There are several ways in which that group could be helped. An obvious way — I pay tribute to the Government for their recent action on this — is to continue to maintain the real value of child benefit. Until family credit is introduced in the spring of 1988, child benefit will be an important part of Government assistance for less well-off working families. Secondly, we must give priority in the Manpower Services Commission's strategy and in all the training programmes to the needs of adult training and retraining. We are helping too few people in this respect — only 250,000 — and I hope that the Government will give every possible support, financially and in other ways, to such training schemes. Thirdly, I stress that we have examples of successful programmes which are up and running. They include the community programme, the enterprise allowance and the job start scheme. I hope that Ministers will put their full weight behind those schemes so that, in the Budget, those measures can be carried forward.

The underlying factor in the interests of employment is that we must sustain a high level of economic growth, as the Government have done, and reduce inflation even further, as the Government are committed to do. If those two conditions are fulfilled, the private sector — to which my hon. Friend the Minister referred in the context of capital spending — will do the lion's share of the work. That is the way in which a healthy economy works and the way in which jobs have been created successfully in our partner and competitor countries.

If my hon. Friend the Minister wished to refresh his memory of ways in which we could complete our agenda of measures to deal with unemployment, I suggest humbly that he could do worse than re-read the checklist on the front page of the pamphlet "Work to be Done", published by my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, West (Mr. Maples) and myself, in which he will find several measures to which the Government have not directed their attention, but which could usefully be pressed on his colleagues in the Treasury.

I commend what the Government have done so far, but I urge them to do more, especially to deal with the No. 1 problem of long-term unemployment. They must focus their efforts principally on the needs of the adult unemployed, having satisfactorily dealt with youth unemployment through the youth training scheme. We must find ways of helping the middle-aged unemployed to return to gainful employment.

10.52 am

Mr. Michael Foot (Blaenau Gwent): I shall comment on several of the matters mentioned by the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman), especially on his remarks and others made during the debate about what is happening at Wapping. We must try to find a solution to that serious industrial dispute. I understand how eagerly the hon. Gentleman had to search to find matters on which to congratulate the Government. He congratulated them on maintaining child benefit, but I know that he, other Conservative Members and all Opposition Members have urged the full maintenance of child benefit. No one knows better than the hon. Gentleman that, were the Government to do that, they would have had to increase child benefit by considerably more than they announced a few days ago. I am glad to

support his demand that we should rectify the matter, perhaps in this Budget, and sustain child benefit at its proper level.

I shall comment later on the speech made by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment in reply to Monday's Adjournment debate on Wapping. It was a deplorable speech.

The motion lists many different forms of action that must be taken by the Department of Employment, in which I have a special interest. I must clarify some of the misconceptions that have been spread, not necessarily by the Under-Secretary of State—he is young to the game—but by some of his Conservative predecessors at the Department, who have tried to spread strange tales about what it achieved during the Labour Government.

The main work of the Department falls into four categories, all of which must operate successfully to obtain a decent employment policy. First, the Manpower Services Commission was set up a little before we came into office in 1974, but all the substantial expansion and financing of the MSC, and the special role that it was asked to play in the training programme, which remains of such great importance, was the work of the 1974 Labour Government. Some Ministers have said, absurdly, that we were not interested in training programmes, but we spent greatly increased sums on training. We allowed the Manpower Services Commission to go full speed ahead with the work, and we wanted to graft the new training programmes on to the programmes that preceded them.

Unfortunately, the Conservative Government inflicted serious injury on many training and apprenticeship schemes. Their conversion to a better training policy arrived belatedly. If the Minister looks back at what we did on training, he will know how puerile is the tale that our approach was not ambitious and intelligent.

The Labour Government established the Health and Safety Commission and, therefore, extended safety provision to about 5 million people who had not had it previously. That aspect of the Department's work is increasingly important, especially since the development of the chemical and nuclear industries. I vividly remember the enthusiasm of the chief inspector of factories for the establishment of the commission. I am glad that even this Government have not dared to destroy it, although its effectiveness has been considerably impaired by the shortage of inspectors and the Government's failure to recognise what could be achieved by an imaginative programme for extending health and safety provisions into many other areas.

My hon. Friend the Member for St. Helens, North (Mr. Evans) mentioned what the Government have done, through a series of measures, to curb employment rights or remove them altogether. It is especially offensive that people who have never had to worry about their salaries should wish to cut the salaries of many youngsters and others. It is also offensive that, after so much effort was made to extend employment rights to women and to set up a programme by which that could be carried forward, during their six years in office the Government have been searching for ways to curb the extension of rights. We must ensure that we carry forward the work that was initiated during the years for which the Labour Government is sometimes attacked.

The Labour Government also established the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service. That has a direct bearing on the Wapping dispute and on how we might find a way out of it. Neither side of industry could accuse ACAS of being non-independent. It was established for that purpose, and great credit is due to its two main directors during its life, Jim Mortimer and his successor, both of whom carried out their tasks excellently. One advantage that the Government possess is that they could use ACAS in this dispute and in others much more effectively than they have. I urge them to do so.

Some Conservative Members—the worst offender is the chairman of the Conservative party, who had a brief and disastrous spell at the Department of Employment—try to say that the Labour Government did not contribute to industrial relations. However, we established the main independent body on which any sensible development of industrial relations must now depend. I hope, therefore, that the Government will pay particular attention to the constructive proposals that I shall be making later in my speech about the way in which we should seek an honourable and decent escape from the terrible dispute in Wapping. More than 5,000 people have had their jobs taken from them in the most shameful and shocking manner and it is the duty of the House of Commons to try to find a way out.

I see that the Minister for Trade is getting ready to speak. I thought for a moment that he had come to speak on behalf of his old Department, the Department of Employment, but I gather that he has risen on the stepping stones of his dead self to higher things at the Department of Trade and Industry—or perhaps he has descended to nether regions altogether. If I, like the Minister for Trade, had had a good job at the Department of Employment and was doing it fairly decently, I should not have gone off to join those racketeers.

It being Eleven o'clock, MR. SPEAKER *interrupted the proceedings, pursuant to Standing Order No. 5 (Friday sittings).*

International Tin Council

11 am

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives) (*by private notice*) asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will make a statement on the breakdown of the negotiations with the International Tin Council and the attempt to resolve the debts of that council.

The Minister for Trade (Mr. Alan Clark): The Government regret that the protracted negotiations between the International Tin Council and its bank and broker creditors have now broken down without reaching agreement to resolve the tin crisis.

We have constantly made it clear, following suspension by the ITC of its operations in the tin market on 24 October last with gross commitments exceeding £800 million, that the United Kingdom was prepared to accept its share of the liabilities of the ITC, and we called on all other members to do likewise.

It is especially unfortunate that the breakdown of negotiations has come at a time when substantial progress had been made towards resolving the tin crisis in an orderly fashion. Had the ITC member countries collectively shown a greater sense of urgency and responsibility from the outset, a solution might have been found. Discussions between members of the European Community were protracted, and formal negotiations by the ITC began only at the end of January. However, the final breakdown of negotiations was caused by the refusal of some producer countries to accept the proposals.

At this late stage, it seems unlikely that a settlement can now be reached in order to secure a return to orderly trading in tin. If a substantial number of other ITC countries were prepared to make a new effort to resolve the crisis, the Government would of course be willing to join such discussions. But it must be clear, as it has been throughout the earlier discussions and negotiations, that the United Kingdom Government are not prepared alone to take over the responsibility for the ITC's debts.

The Government deplore the failure of certain other Governments to agree to meet their share of the commitments of the ITC. That failure undermines good faith and integrity in international financial dealings.

Mr. Harris: First, I pay tribute to the Government for the lead that they have taken in trying to achieve a resolution of this complex international problem and for their willingness to put up £50 million as their part of a bid to achieve a solution. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is a real tragedy that the negotiations have broken down after having got so far, and that the ramifications of that failure of negotiations are truly enormous, making the Westland affair look like a minor financial incident?

Does my hon. Friend agree that there are enormous implications for the whole future of London as a commodity trading centre, major implications for the Third world and—this is my particular preoccupation—extremely worrying implications for the Cornish tin industry? May I press my hon. Friend the Minister and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to act with real urgency over the problems of the Cornish tin industry? May I impress upon my hon. Friend that, through no fault of its own, the Geevor tin mine in my constituency is really at risk now that the talks have broken down? Will the Government respond urgently to the request for special temporary assistance to enable the Cornish tin industry, and Geevor in particular, to survive?

Mr. Clark: I am obliged to my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) for the tribute that he paid to the Government's efforts to solve the crisis or to prevent it reaching its present dimension. The United Kingdom has played a leading part throughout in attempting to achieve a solution and in offering contributions greatly in excess of the 4 per cent. that we are bound under the agreement to contribute to costs.

I agree with my hon. Friend that at this early stage the implications, both in global terms and in the effect on the City, have yet to be seen in their entirety. I know that my hon. Friend has a particular constituency interest, and the whole House will applaud his efforts to draw our attention to the plight of his constituents. The Government are very much aware of that aspect, but we feel that it would not be appropriate to take action until the market has at any rate stabilised, so that we can see what the prospects for commercial trading in tin and the economics of mining it are likely to be. Once the market has stabilised and we see what the commercial prospects are, we would of course be willing to consider applications for grant towards the cost of capital investment. Those grants will be made in the light of the market conditions prevailing at the time.

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): I am grateful to the Minister for coming here and giving us a fairly interesting historical analysis of the situation leading up to today's statement, but he has said nothing about where we go from here. He has put forward no positive proposals. The negotiations have been running into trouble for more than four months, and collapse must have been a strong possibility throughout. What are the Government's contingency plans? Is the Minister seriously telling us that, having been aware for four months of the crisis that was liable to occur, the Government have not one positive proposal to make, apart from the suggestion that they might give some grant if someone is silly enough to invest in tin mines which will have no market for their product?

The Minister seems unaware that the price of tin is likely to collapse as 16 banks begin to offload 45,000 tonnes of tin on to the market. What does he think that that will do to the 13 brokers who are at risk for up to £550 million? Many of those brokers also deal in other commodities, so there may be repercussions way beyond the tin market, putting at risk the survival of the whole London metal exchange. The Minister seems completely unaware of all that or of the fact that there is about to be chaos in the world tin market.

What plans does the Minister have to help the Cornish tin workers, for whom his hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) has pleaded, if the price of tin collapses below the level at which it is viable to produce it, for example, at Geevor? Does the Minister appreciate that if he has no plans to help, this could mean the end of tin production in the United Kingdom?

Mr. Clark: In answer to my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives I stated the Government's position in relation to the Geevor tin mine and tin production in Cornwall. We view the situation with great concern, we are watching it very closely, and at the appropriate moment we shall judge the level at which grants should be made for investment.

The right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) fell somewhat short of his objective in accusing the Government of failing to intervene on a greater scale to prevent chaos in the City. I am not sure what the right hon. Gentleman was recommending. We have already taken the lead in the efforts to solve the crisis. Our offer of a contribution to finance the agreement was extremely generous, both in absolute terms and in relation to our treaty obligations. Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman will enlighten the House on whether he is really suggesting that yet more taxpayers' money should be thrown into an extremely uncertain and difficult situation. He mentioned the difficulties that will face certain brokers. Is he suggesting that they should be individually bailed out by the Government?

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): Does my hon. Friend accept that the United Kingdom was the only member of the International Tin Council prepared to stand behind its legal obligations? Is it not deplorable that other members, including members of the EEC, and in particular, West Germany, have refused to do so? What possible future can there be for international trade agreements if member states refuse to stand behind their legal obligations?

Mr. Clark: My hon. Friend's view is uncomfortable, but valid. At every stage the United Kingdom has done its best to bring about a solution to the crisis. It is regrettable that delays, indecisions, and a certain optimism—I am not the best person to judge that—prevented any of our Community partners or other countries from coming forward with positive suggestions. As to the future, it may be possible to reach agreement and for all the parties to mount a salvage operation, but at the moment the prospects look exceedingly bleak.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): Is the Minister's statement not a deeply irresponsible and shocking abdication of Government responsibility which will be noted with appalled reactions throughout the City? Last night why did the Minister not respond positively to the proposal by Mr. Jacques Lyon that the Government should take a lead in the rescue plan and not simply rail against other countries for their failure to take a lead?

Does the hon. Gentleman have any understanding of the consequences, not only for the City but for the banking system, of the collapse of the London metal exchange, which is at risk because of the Government's supine response to the crisis? Has the Minister nothing more to say to the 1,500 workers in the tin industry, and will he examine proposals for investment in the industry?

Mr. Clark: I am amazed at the hon. Gentleman. He knows the lead that the United Kingdom has adopted throughout. He has heard from both sides of the House how we received almost no support from the other partners to the agreement. He has heard the size of the sum—£50 million—which the United Kingdom has put on the table.

Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that we should have increased the sum, and not put it into the founding of a new tin council, which would take over the obligations, but paid it directly to the City? What is the hon. Gentleman suggesting? It would be wrong and irresponsible to increase the sum and to use taxpayers' money for direct grants—if that is what the hon. Gentleman is suggesting —to those who are in difficulties in the City of London.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): Is my hon. Friend aware that the International Tin Research Institute is in my constituency? Is he aware also that I hope he will continue to attempt to drag European and other Governments, kicking and screaming, towards an agreement on tin? Does he agree that without that agreement container commodities for food and drinks, including bottles, will not have the strength or unbreakability which is needed? Tin is essential.

Mr. Clark: My hon. Friend is right. The prospects are bleak. I do not know about dragging Governments kicking and screaming, but if there is a general perception of the gravity of the problem, the original possibilities remain. It has proved so difficult to achieve unanimity that the possibility of finding a solution is not promising.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is the Minister aware that if he started by being concerned, not about speculators in the City but about the more than 1,000 workers engaged in the tin mining industry, and if he was prepared to strip himself of the dogma, he might be able to find a solution? Tin is a non-perishable commodity. If the Government want to keep the tin industry and to keep the tin miners and others in jobs, the Minister would take the stance that he took in October 1984 with another valuable commodity —gold. At that time the Government were not much bothered about market forces or uneconomic units of production and decided to save Johnson Matthey Bankers by nationalisation. The same process could be developed in the tin industry.

A previous Government took a similar attitude when Rolls-Royce got into an almighty mess. People felt that something should be done, so it was taken over. If the Government seriously want to look after the jobs of the tin workers and ensure a continuing tin industry, they would dismiss questions about the London metal exchange and get on with the job of saving the tin mines in Cornwall.

In the absence of the Liberals, who do not seem to be interested, will the Minister take the questions on board and do what was done with JMB and so save the jobs and the industry?

Mr. Clark: I appreciate that the hon. Gentleman could hardly let his chagrin fail to show. We are not bailing out the London metal exchange, although I am sure that that would be the solution that the hon. Gentleman would have predicted.

Mr. Skinner: I did not say that.

Mr. Clark: I can understand the hon. Gentleman's chagrin at the fact that we are not running true to the stereotype that he describes. I have already explained the measures that we envisage taking to help the plight of the Cornish tin miners. The miners' problem is different in quality from that of others who are in difficulties because of the situation. The hon. Gentleman is so ready— understandably — to condemn certain aspects of the Common Market and the CAP and the accumulation of mountains, and I was interested to hear that his solution is the accumulation of a giant mountain of tin.

Sir Antony Buck (Colchester, North): Is my hon. Friend aware that I sympathise with him in having to deal with a difficult problem? Will he comment further on the attitude of our allies, because it seems that they, and West Germany in particular, have not fulfilled their obligations?

Mr. Clark: The House can reach its own conclusions and read the press, but I do not want to pick a fight with any of our Community partners or with any of the other countries involved. The facts speak for themselves. The failure to achieve harmony, a united attitude, or a level of contributions is at the root of the mishap.

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): Has the Minister tried to solicit American involvement as a means of rescuing the industry, or are Americans who invest in this country interested only in cleaning up profits and milking the economy?

Mr. Clark: I understand that America is not a member of the International Tin Council.

Vickers Shipbuilding and Engineering Ltd

11.18 am

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and President of the Board of Trade (Mr. Paul Channon): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement.

I have today given my consent to the sale of Vickers Shipbuilding and Engineering Limited to the VSEL Employee Consortium plc. Its offer consists of a downpayment of £69 million, together with a profit-sharing arrangement for the period 1986 to1992, which could provide British Shipbuilders with further payments of up to £40 million in 1992 and 1993. The consortium has undertaken to complete and fund the remainder of the work on the submarine facilities project, which will modernise the production facilities at VSEL and enable the company to complete the Trident submarine programme in accordance with the Ministry of Defence's requirements.

As far as the Trident submarine programme is concerned, the consortium on Wednesday gave the Ministry of Defence an undertaking that it would negotiate a contract for the first Trident submarine on terms, price, programme and conditions which represent a significant improvement to the Ministry of Defence on the terms previously offered by VSEL while it remained under the control of British Shipbuilders.

The House will be aware that the consortium's bid was not the only one for VSEL. The commercial terms of the other bid were judged by British Shipbuilders and its financial advisers, in so far as they affected British Shipbuilders, to be superior to those of the consortium's bid. But there is a further term in the other bid, which I am bound not to disclose without the bidder's permission, which I found very difficult to accept. British Shipbuilders, moreover, acknowledged that other interests beyond the remit of British Shipbuilders to consider are involved in the sale. I agree with this. I have therefore decided that the consortium's bid is to be preferred. I wish the consortium well.

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): I strongly object to the right hon. Gentleman's grave discourtesy. He was aware that the Opposition had asked that the statement should be deferred until Monday, and not only did the Government persist in going ahead with it today, but they ensured that I received a copy of the statement only at 10.53 — seven minutes before the House was due to break into the morning business. As the Government were able yesterday to indicate to *The London Standard* that they planned to make some form of statement today, how on earth can the Secretary of State justify the discourtesy to the Opposition?

I also object to this furtive device of slipping such an important announcement through on a Friday. It is not only that it has taken up rare private Members' time—though that is an important consideration for hon. Members. It has also denied many hon. Members with a deep interest in this major policy decision a chance to ask questions on this important statement. Why was the matter so urgent that the statement had to be made this morning?

Does not the whole saga reveal the tensions and disagreements that exist between the Ministry of Defence

and the Department of Trade and Industry? Have we not clearly heard over the last two weeks the squelch of firm government? First, we had the extended deadline; then, within hours, the extension was cancelled; then the Government were to take the bids without first settling the contract for Trident; then, after Tuesday's deadline, according to *The Guardian*, the Government demanded theoretical terms for the Trident contract. I note from the statement that there are still no firm terms. When can we expect them to be finally negotiated?

How realistic was it to expect either of the parties to end months of haggling within a couple of days and give the Secretary of State a firm price? If, as *The Guardian* says and as the right hon. Gentleman's statement reveals, the terms in relation to Trident are purely theoretical and are only an indication of good will, how was the Secretary of State able to decide between the merits of the two bids? How was he able to decide whether the valuation was soundly based? What was the basis on which he eventually decided? I note that the right hon. Gentleman said that there is an element of confidentiality, but the House is entitled to more information about what led him to choose the bid which he says was the less commercial. Is it true, as has been suggested, that Trafalgar House was allowed to submit its bid after the deadline?

Hon. Members will want to know what assurances are given in the bid that has been accepted about the future of Cammell Laird and about the security of employment of those who will be affected by the decision. Is it not the ultimate absurdity that the Government are selling into private hands our only yard which is capable of producing nuclear submarines? Is it not an abuse of public funds to do that after £200 million of public money has been invested in the yard?

Mr. Channon: I am a little surprised at the terms of the right hon. Gentleman's question. The last thing that I expected to be told this morning was that our decision was an abuse of public funds. However, I apologise to the right hon. Gentleman and to the House for the fact that the statement has to be made this morning. I know that that is inconvenient——

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): The right hon. Gentleman is hardly ever here.

Mr. Channon: I am occasionally here. The House surely understands that once I had come to a decision it would have been quite wrong for me not to disclose it to the House at the earliest opportunity. To do otherwise would be a very serious mistake. I am sorry if the right hon. Gentleman and his colleagues have been inconvenienced, but I fear that there was no alternative.

I cannot accept what the right hon. Gentleman says about disagreements between my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence and myself. We have worked in complete harmony. I made clear in my statement the reasons why we have come to this decision, which I am sure will be welcomed by some Members.

Mr. Cecil Franks (Barrow and Furness): On behalf of the management, employees, local communities and the whole of the north-west, may I express deep gratitude and pleasure at my right hon. Friend's announcement? I am sure he will agree with me that the decision ably and amply demonstrates the Government's confidence in the north-west and their firm commitment to the principle of wider share ownership, with the opportunity for employees to share in the fruits of their labour. I assure my right hon. Friend that the premier submarine builder of the nation can look forward with great confidence to the 21st century and continue to serve the nation as it has for the past century.

Mr. Channon: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for his support.

Mr. Gregor MacKenzie (Glasgow, Rutherglen): During the discussions that the Secretary of State and his colleagues had leading up to the statement, was there any discussion about the apportionment of the submarine programme? The right hon. Gentleman will be conscious of the fact that we on Clydeside felt that we got a shabby deal on that matter, and, on behalf of my colleagues in the west of Scotland, I should like to know whether there is to be a reapportionment of the substantial submarine programme and whether we on Clydeside are to get a share of it.

Mr. Channon: With respect to the right hon. Gentleman, that question raises different issues from those with which I am dealing. However, I am told by my hon. Friend the Minister of State that the answer to his question is no.

Sir Antony Buck (Colchester, North): Is my right hon. friend aware that his statement will be widely welcomed on the Government Benches, particularly as he was courteous enough to apologise to the House for making a statement on a Friday, which, as a general rule, is inconvenient? Will my right hon. Friend confirm that his solution provides the best chances of the Royal Navy getting its ships and submarines on time and on cost?

Mr. Channon: I am sure that this provides a very good assurance for that to happen.

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement and express the relief that will be felt in Cammell Laird this morning about the decision that he has made. Before the right hon. Gentleman finally ties up the deal, will he see Wirral Members, so that we can ensure that Cammell Laird is effectively represented on the board that will run the new company?

Mr. Channon: I am extremely grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his support. I note the views in the latter part of his question. I am not sure that that is a matter for me, but I shall certainly study what he has said. I am, of course, always available to see hon. Members who wish to see me.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North East): I join my hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Franks) in congratulating the Government on deciding to privatise the yard. I am sure that all hon. Members from the north-west will join me in congratulating the Government on taking such an important decision for the largest engineering complex in the country and on their commitment to wider share ownership. I am sure that the committed work force led by Sir David Nicolson and Rodney Leach, will be successful in world markets as well as in satisfying all the requirements for defence in this country.

Mr. Channon: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his support.

Mr. John McWilliam (Blaydon): Will the Secretary of State accept that his statement is not acceptable because

[Mr. John McWilliam]

it is incomplete without the clause which he seems to suggest is commercially in confidence? Will the right hon. Gentleman tell us what was worrying him about that aspect, because I am sure that we would all like to know? Will the right hon. Gentleman also tell the House how many jobs he expects to remain in British shipbuilding after the management buy-out?

Mr. Channon: No, Sir. I made it clear in my statement to the House that I am bound not to disclose the terms of the other bid without the permission of the bidders. Therefore, I have nothing to add to what I said earlier. As to the second part of the right hon. Gentleman's question, that is a matter for the consortium.

Mr. Christopher Chope (Southampton, Itchen): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the wise counsels that have prevailed in this instance. May I ask him to confirm that 38 per cent. of the work force confirmed, when asked the question, that their principal reason for being in favour of the management buy-out and privatisation was that it would give them an incentive to work harder? Is my right hon. Friend also able to say whether the terms on which this agreement has been negotiated will not be such as to mean that Vosper Thornycroft will be unfairly hindered in its efforts to compete freely and openly in bids for merchant and Royal Navy ships?

Mr. Channon: I am sure that it can compete, and I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his support. I note what he said in the earlier part of his supplementary question.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): As a Member of Parliament whose constituency has for many years enjoyed a close relationship with Vickers through it subcontracting work, may I say that, of the options before the Minister, it appears that he has chosen the better one? However, it would be helpful if he could say more than he has done in answer to the questions that were put to him by the right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams). Is he able to say whether the arrangement includes the initial proposal that shares in the consortium should be offered for purchase by members of the local communities surrounding the shipyard?

Mr. Channon: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his support. I understand that the answer to the latter part of his supplementary question is yes.

Mr. Cyril D. Townsend (Bexleyheath): Is my right hon. Friend aware that his decision is likely to be widely welcomed in the defence establishment as sound and sensible? Will he comment on his discussions with the two bidders about the theoretical cancellation of the Trident programme in the event of a Labour Government being returned to power at the next general election, and say what guarantees, if any, were given to the two bidders about that possibility?

Mr. Channon: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for what he said in the first part of his supplementary question. However, any discussions with the bidders must remain confidential.

Mr. Eric Forth (Mid-Worcestershire): Will my right hon. Friend accept that this is an excellent example of a policy which is of the greatest benefit to taxpayers, employees and all those involved with the industry? Does he agree that there is nothing to be feared from the provision of vital defence supplies by the private sector, as this has been done very successfully in the United States for many decades?

Mr. Channon: I note what my hon. Friend said, and I am grateful to him.

Mr. Don Dixon (Jarrow): Obviously we welcome the fact that the Secretary of State has accepted this bid rather than the Trafalgar House bid. However, does he realise that what he has said today sounds the death knell for British Shipbuilders? By selling off its profitable warship yards the Secretary of State has virtually killed off British Shipbuilders. When Mr. Day goes to British Leyland, we must hope that he will not have the same effect upon our car industry as he has had upon our British shipbuilding industry.

Mr. Channon: With respect to the hon. Gentleman, I think that uncharacteristically he is being a little unfair.

Employment Rights

Question again proposed.

11.34 am

Mr. Foot: I should like to return to the topic with which I was dealing when I was so rudely interrupted by at least one Government botch, if not two Government botches, although I suppose that on the second count we must give the Government the benefit of the doubt, even though there are some difficulties there.

I said that I wanted to refer to the Wapping dispute. I say that all the more in the light of the reply, or the non-reply, that the Under-Secretary gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North East (Mr. Leighton) on Monday night. To all of the questions that were put to him by my hon. Friend about the Government's view on any of these matters and what they would do about them, the Minister gave no reply. He turned aside to other aspects of the matter.

This is a most serious dispute. It is serious for those individuals who have been sacked. From 5,000 to 6,000 people have lost their jobs without compensation, redundancy, or even any dole at the moment. It is a serious crisis for them. If this kind of industrial operation were to be repeated or tolerated by the Government of the day, the consequences for British industrial relations would be very serious indeed.

I have been interested in the printing trade for many years. Indeed, if I have any interest to declare in the matter, it is that I have been a member of the National Union of Journalists for 50 years or so. The NUJ has a deep interest in this dispute because its members have been profoundly divided by what has occurred. I shall try to keep my language as temperate as possible, because I am seeking, on behalf of those who have been so gravely injured—the members of SOGAT '82, the NUJ and others—a solution to the problem and I want the Government's assistance in achieving that aim.

To illustrate what happened, I shall quote from an article that was printed in *The Times* a week or so after the move to Wapping. This article was written by Mr. Longley, the religious affairs correspondent of *The Times*. I do not know whether the fact that he was writing as the newly appointed father of the NUJ chapel of *The Times*, the previous father of the chapel having refused to go to

Wapping, had anything to do with it. I think that we can understand his views and those of other journalists, either at *The Times*, *The Sunday Times*, or elsewhere. Let me quote a few of the things that were said in the article about what happened to the journalists. They can be multiplied much more when applied to the others who were involved in the dispute, including the printers.

Mr. Longley said:

"At *The Times* we keep our agreements. Collectively, we form ourselves into a chapel, and collectively, through the chapel, we negotiate new ones. At least, that was what we thought we did. It is the disturbance of that belief, and the emotional shock it caused, that has taken us through the ordeal of the past 12 days . . . The chapel has new officers. We are keeping to the agreement we made under duress."

He said that some of *The Times* journalists refused to accept the new agreement that was forced upon them. A few paragraphs later he describes the discussions that took place among *The Times* journalists on this matter and says:

"But the management demanded we move, and it had the law on its side. An eminent QC was briefed and consulted by this chapel, and in measured terms, with chapter and verse, he counselled us that our contracts required us to accept a new place of work, and new working methods. Our management may have had a moral obligation to seek a deal with us first, and even a legal obligation under the grievance procedure in each individual contract of employment, but it took leading counsel no time at all to find in our house agreement the familiar phrase: 'This agreement is binding in honour only'."

Some of us believe that in trade union affairs agreements made in honour are the very ones that should be honoured most. A few paragraphs later Mr. Longley said:

"While our eyes were on the word 'honour' in our house agreement, the management's eyes were no less on the word 'only', in that fragile phrase 'binding in honour only' . . . We felt it bound ; we felt it bound management. We still feel that."

In other words, the journalists who are now producing *The Times* at Wapping feel that they were subjected to duress, that their agreement was flagrantly broken by the management, and that the management should still be carrying out that agreement. If that is the view that is held by eminent journalists on *The Times* there ought to be concern among decent-minded people throughout the country.

Moreover, one has to consider the terms under which Mr. Murdoch's ownership of *The Times* was established. It is also mentioned by Mr. Longley in his article. He says:

"Finally, there must be questions about the constitution of *The Times* itself. Guarantees were given at the time of the acquisition of the paper by the present proprietor about the protection of its authority, quality, and editorial freedom. These principles are in fact intact at Wapping. But it is not easy to reconcile them with the threat to dismiss us all if we would not move."

I agree it is not easy to reconcile those points. It is even more difficult to reconcile that approach in terms of those printers, journalists and other trade union members who did not have the chance to move even if they were prepared to do so. They were told that they would be sacked. They had taken a ballot and had followed religiously the Government's prescriptions on how to approach a dispute, but they then found themselves in their present situation.

I think it is a matter of honour for anyone who reads the words of *The Times* correspondent to accept that Mr. Murdoch has acted dishonourably—those are the only words, in fact the kindest words, which can be applied to Mr. Murdoch.

When anyone examines the background to this dispute —I know it has a lengthy background—it is clear that from the beginning, especially from late 1984, the main unions concerned, SOGAT '82, the NGA, the NUJ and other unions have been prepared to negotiate. They asked for that right from the beginning. The negotiations took place on false pretences because at the very moment when Mr. Murdoch and his managers said they were negotiating about one aspect of the matter they were in fact negotiating on an entirely different conspiratorial affair. I cannot believe that any decent Government, or any Minister at the Department of Employment would think that that is a tolerable state of affairs. The Minister for Employment commented on Mr. Murdoch's behaviour and that gave some hope that the Government would assist in this dispute. However, the Government have proceeded to retreat from that position.

The reply of the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment to my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-East the other night was hopeless. I do not mean the reply was hopeless but it was hopeless for the future of British industrial relations. If Mr. Murdoch gets away with this, other employers—there may be others in this country as outrageous and barbaric as Mr. Murdoch — may seek to follow his practice. If that happens, industrial relations in Britain will be an absolute shambles—and a most unfair shambles.

The worst unfairness will not fall upon the people with highest salaries. It will fall, and is falling, on several thousands of people who lost their jobs some three or four weeks ago. They have no prospects of anything being done for them. The unions are trying to solve the problem and they are doing their best. However, their funds have been sequestrated and they are threatened with further sequestrations in highly dangerous circumstances.

I urge the Government, in the interests of decent people in the country, in the interests of decent treatment for individuals and their families and in the interests of decent industrial relations, to take responsibility for the matter. The Government must not wash their hands. They must seek ways to proceed. I believe that any Government who studied the events that led to this dispute would come to the conclusion that the unions were prepared to negotiate. They are still prepared to do so. The Government do not listen. Are they prepared to let the dispute grind on to lead to further injustices, further outrages on individual families and further injury to an industry and profession in which I take some pride? I certainly do not take any pride in the way in which divisions have been forced on so many journalists in this matter. I can understand those who refuse to go to *The Times*, but I can understand those who went. Some reconciliation must be sought, and any decent Government would recognise that.

I hope that, when the Minister comes to reply, he will say that he will go back and talk to his Ministerrs about this and see whether they can get proper negotiations in progress, negotiations which would seek to restore the jobs of many of those who have been sacked. The negotiations should also seek a solution on the proper use of new technology. It is false to say that this dispute arises from the refusal of the unions to engage in the use of new technology. Those who have listened to the leaders of Sogat '82 and the NGA know that that charge is a false one. They are seeking, and have always sought, intelligent negotiations. They thought they were near to that and anyone who reads the documents can see that. ACAS could read those documents and I urge the Minister to employ the services of ACAS.

In some disputes it is essential for the Department of Employment to undertake its old responsibilities. Some of

[Mr. Foot]

those responsibilities, quite properly, have been transferred to ACAS. ACAS has the expert skill to deal with some of these disputes. However, other disputes can only be dealt with by the Minister himself. I urge the Minister, with all the power I can, to take a humane and sensible view of our industrial relations.

I would like to say one word about another aspect of the question. The Minister intervened in the debate and taunted my hon. Friend the Member for St. Helens, North with the charge that we have not got plans that would work for sustaining people in employment. In the Government's first three or four years we attacked them for the huge unemployment they were causing and tolerating. They turned that aside and stated that one must look at the employment figures. The Government said that is more sensible. I do not deride that all together.

The Department of Employment, which I commend, went ahead with the White Paper "Employment: The Challenge for the Nation". I think one part of a page of the White Paper was placed there inadvertently. When I read it I thought it had come straight from Central Office. However, I know that there are still some expert statisticians left at the Department of Employment—a place I have the highest respect for—who ensured that the chart was put on page 7. I commend it to everyone who has studied the document—it is no doubt burned on the Under-Secretary's heart.

The chart on page 7 showed the number of people in employment in Britain over a considerable number of years. It showed the period of highest employment in Britain. Which was it? 1979-80—the very period when "Labour wasn't working." That was the period when more people were employed than ever before, certainly more than have been employed since. Therefore, when Saatchi and Saatchi plastered the hoardings—at a high cost to the Conservatives—they should have made the point that in that period of Labour Government the employment of our people was at a higher peak than ever before.

We had to deal with all the problems that the Government now face—the democratic factors involved, the problems of oil prices, international crises—all these problems. We dealt with all those problems and far from that Labour Government being incapable of dealing with the problems, this Tory Government's own chart shows how well we coped.

The contrast between the two Governments is very simple. In the last year or two of that Labour Government —much misused and abused by Conservative Members and not least the Chairman of the Conservative party—we had the highest number of people employed——

Mr. Holt: And the lowest productivity.

Mr. Foot: In the period under this Government we have the highest number of people unemployed. That is a sharp contrast.

11.49 am

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): I should have liked to congratulate the hon. Member for St. Helens, North (Mr. Evans) on his motion, but I am disappointed with its terms. Indeed, I cannot agree with a word of it. I am also disappointed at the attitude of Opposition Members. Why do they only look back? They have nothing to look forward to, but the British people, under the present Government, have a great deal to look forward to.

Why have we heard only about Wapping? Why have we heard nothing about Eddie Shah and the *Today* newspaper? Why has not one Opposition Member congratulated Eddie Shah on producing the newspaper with such high productivity? The right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) spoke about so many people who were, as he thought, employed under the last Labour Government. What were they doing, bearing in mind that 6,000 people were producing a newspaper that can be produced by 600? Is that what the right hon. Gentleman calls employment? Such overmanning is the cause of the country's difficulties. Our unemployment is the legacy of years of such nonsense.

Mr. Evans: The hon. Gentleman will not have a job after the next election.

Mr. Thurnham: Trying to solve the problems of the long-term unemployed is an important matter, but we shall do it only by having an economy that pays and works efficiently. Every line of the motion harks back to the dreadful old days when the country could not afford anything. That is why we got into such a poor predicament.

I can see why the motion was not tabled until so late last night—the hon. Gentleman must be ashamed of it. Every line of it is rubbish. It calls attention to a supposed diminution in employment rights. There has been no diminution. People have been freed from the domination of the trade unions. The Opposition say that they will repeal legislation which has been widely welcomed and which returns trade unions to their members. Why? People have been allowed to get on and work.

Why do we have to assume that everybody must be provided with a job? Why do we have so much less self-employment than other countries? For example, there are twice as many self-employed people in West Germany as there are here. The number of the self-employed has increased substantially under the present Government. Why is self-employment not even mentioned in the motion? The Opposition assume that everybody must be given a job by some all-powerful being.

Mr. Holt: By the state.

Mr. Thurnham: Yes, by the nanny state.

Mr. Prescott: The hon. Gentleman is a state employee.

Mr. Thurnham: Under this Government, opportunities have increased for the unemployed. The wider opportunities training programme is showing excellent returns for the cost by providing extra employment opportunities. Why do Opposition Members not accept the challenge of the pick-up programme? Why do trade unionists not ask for extra training rather than extra pay? If we were to listen to the arguments advanced by Opposition Members, we would think that everything was coming to an end, but average weekly earnings now tell a different story. We have been given a catalogue of how dreadful employment legislation is, so how is it that weekly pay in manufacturing industry has risen to £155 —an increase of 8·25 per cent. on last year? If everything is so dreadful, how can such increases, which are substantially above the rate of inflation, come through?

Why can we not look ahead? Why do we not look forward to the fruits that can flow from increased productivity, rather than moan about doing away with industries that carried far more people than they ever needed? I refer to productivity in the steel industry and the coal industry. What of the figures that we heard last night? All of a sudden, the Kent coalfield has turned around and produced twice as much per man shift. Is that not the type of employment and productivity for which we should aim?

Every line of the motion is rubbish. The House should not condemn the Government's policies. It should condemn the Labour Government's policies. I am not surprised that Lord Wilson of Rievaulx resigned in mid-term. I imagine that he could see all that was coming under his policies. The whole House has condemned the results of those dreadful policies. The country was suffering long before 1979.

The motion refers to burdens on women. Why are so many more married women now in work?

Mr. Prescott: Because their husbands have been put out of work by the Government. Look at some of the figures.

Mr. Thurnham: The hon. Member for St. Helens, North talked about wages councils. They are a classic case of an obsolete requirement which could only be called for by a retrospective party. Most of the workers in the industries concerned are on part-time work. Is not the family credit scheme the way in which to provide an adequate income, and much better than burdening employers to the extent that they can no longer offer a job?

The motion speaks of a reduction of internationally agreed standards, but productivity has risen far faster in Britain than it has in any of our competitor countries. There has been talk about fiddling the figures. The people who are fiddling the figures are those who are drawing benefit but are not available for work. Many have been shown to be fiddling the figures. When, in the latest pilot schemes, people have been asked to come in for an interview, a considerable proportion stop drawing benefit, to the extent that the welcome counselling schemes have been paid for by the reduction in benefits drawn. That is where the fiddling is.

Mr. Holt: When the inspector was known to be going to the unemployment exchange in Stockton, the number of claimants that week dropped by 10 per cent.

Mr. Thurnham: Exactly. Why can the Opposition not talk about that fiddling? The motion draws attention to international standards, but unemployment figures must now be calculated internationally. Why should we leave the self-employed and the armed forces out of the calculation so that the Opposition can go about saying that one in seven people are unemployed, although that is not the correct figure?

Every line of the motion can be shown to be utter rubbish.

Mr. Evans: This is tedious repetition.

Mr. Thurnham: The sole motivation for tabling the motion is the realisation that truth has at last caught up with large sections of the union world, especially at Wapping. It has been tabled as a last cry of a stranded whale which thinks that the sea will wash up far enough to take him back out to sea.

We have had a somewhat truncated debate and very good news of privatisation. The motion talks of poverty and strife being created. The standard of living of people in work is far higher than it was under Labour, and it is only by increasing productivity as a whole that we can do anything about the unemployed. My hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) talked about the need for measures to help the long-term unemployed and referred to the Employment Select Committee's report. I am pleased to see that Committee's Chairman, the Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton) present. I was a member of that Committee and advocated taking measures to help the long-term unemployed, especially the increasing number of people who have been unemployed for three or more years. All who want such measures implemented must accept, however, that they have to be paid for. They can be paid for only by a thriving and growing economy.

I am disappointed in the motion and hope that Opposition Members will pay strict and close attention to my hon. Friend the Minister when he replies.

11.58 am

Mr. Martin J. O'Neill (Clackmannan): I want to talk about the dispute at Wapping as a Member sponsored by the National Graphical Association and as one who takes an interest in the printing industry, as does my hon. Friend the Member for St. Helens, North (Mr. Evans).

The last occasion on which we had a debate on the printing industry in Fleet street was at about this time last year but in the early hours of the morning. That debate attracted rather fewer hon. Members than today's. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for St. Helens, North on enabling us to debate this important issue.

Mr. Holt: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. O'Neill: If the hon. Gentlman were to stop interrupting other Members' speeches, he might have time to make one of his own.

We are concerned about the 6,000 people who have lost their jobs at Wapping. Many of us are interested in the printing industry. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton), raised that issue in an Adjournment debate from the standpoint of a SOGAT '82 member. I approach the matter from the standpoint of the National Graphical Association. The dispute was created by management. Management sought to impose conditions that no self-respecting trade unionist could possibly accept.

It might be useful if I recount the background to the dispute. In 1980 construction started at Wapping. In 1983 the first faltering steps towards discussions on the possibility of the transfer of production of *The Sun* and the *News of the World* to Wapping were taken. The management said that it wanted substantial cuts in the number of people to be employed there. At that time the unions felt that those demands were unreasonable. They saw that move primarily as a means of buying time so that other matters could take place.

It is fair to say that the individual who was placed in charge of the negotiations, Mr. Bill O'Neill—I hasten to add that he is no relation to me, though perhaps he is on his mother's side—had responsibilities in Australia, the United States and the United Kingdom. That elusive individual was not present for discussions until December

[Mr. O'Neill]

1984, when it was implied that negotiations would be suspended pending the employment of Mr. Christopher Pole-Carew as an adviser.

That is rather like inviting the Russian social democratic party—as it was before the revolution—to cease its activities pending the promotion of Rasputin to a more responsible position in the Tsarist hierarchy. Mr. Pole-Carew does not enjoy the confidence of the print unions, and he has had a somewhat chequered career in that area. His appointment is an example of the lack of good will on the part of News International.

, In March 1985, Mr. Murdoch announced that there would be a new evening paper in London and that that would be launched in 12 months. In the intervening period there were virtually no discussions. It was only at the insistence of Brenda Dean, the general secretary of SOGAT '82, that discussions were arranged in December 1985. At that time the unions wanted a timetable for negotiations relating to the publication of the *London Post*. If progress could be achieved on the publication of the *London Post*, the unions wanted the talks to be extended to the production of the *News of the World* and *The Sun* at Wapping.

I am being deliberate in stating these facts, because one of the myths that has been created by Tory Members and others is that somehow there has been an inordinate delay in the negotiations and that that has been the fault of the unions. As I have said, in the period between 1980 and September 1985, most of the delays were the responsibility of the management in its appointment of controversial individuals with responsibilities elsewhere which were considered to be more important than meeting British trade unions.

One would have assumed that the negotiations over the *London Post* would have covered wages, conditions and staffing levels. Those are normally the fundamentals of any trade union discussion about production and new plant. Instead, the management laid down four non-negotiable conditions: that all agreements be legally binding on both the union and the individual; that no industrial action should take place in any circumstances; that there should be no closed-shop; and, finally, that there should be a complete, total and unfettered right of management to manage.

None of those conditions would be acceptable individually. As a group, they mean the end of trade unionism as we know it in Great Britain and as we know it throughout the Western world. I am sure that if Mrs. Aquino, in the Philippines, wanted to establish free trade unions in that country, the regulations and legislation that she would have to dismantle would be similar to the proposals that Mr. Murdoch put to the print unions in September 1985.

The National Union of Journalists, the NGA, SOGAT '82 and the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers rejected those proposals out of hand. They were not, however, rejected on the basis that nothing should be put in their place. Significant advances from the point of view of Fleet street management were offered. They offered the indexation of wages and they sought the right of members to transfer should work be moved to Wapping. They also sought the right of union recognition in traditional areas in the printing process.

That, in turn, was rejected out of hand by News International, and a trade union ballot followed. That resulted in overwhelming majorities to back the unions' position although that position had slightly altered by that time. The unions now agreed to concede certain points. They conceded that there would be no unofficial industrial action and that official action would be taken only after a secret ballot. For those who study industrial relations in the British press, probably the most critical of the offers that were made was that there would be binding arbitration capable of being unilaterally triggered by either side.

An offer of that nature is unparalleled. Equally, the degree of support that was achieved for that in secret ballots was also unparalleled. SOGAT and the AUEW voted in favour, by majorities of 5:1 and the NGA by a majority of 7:1. Armed with the mandate of the membership, the trade union officials were in a position to deliver the goods in a way that management could not previously have expected. They went further than claiming that they would do that at Wapping. At that time, as I have already said, the unions were discussing only the possibility of producing a new evening paper at Wapping and the possibility thereafter of News International producing *The Sun* at Wapping. The conditions were now to be extended to Bouverie street and Grays Inn road where *The Times* and the *Sunday Times* were being produced.

Those offers were spurned. Mr. Murdoch's reaction was simple and straightforward. He reiterated his previous demands and added that not only did he want his previous demands met, but he wanted cuts in the Bouverie street and Grays Inn road plants to reduce a work-force of 6,000 to between 700 and 800, and those 700 or 800 workers would be engaged on conditions which would be of his dictating. There would be wage cuts as well as redundancies. Those people who would be subject to redundancies would get the national minimum rate of one week's pay for every year served, whereas the normal practice in the printing industry is for redundancies to be on the basis of one month's pay for every year served.

On 24 January 1986, following a secret ballot and the failure to reach agreement between management and unions, a strike was finally called, the work-force was promptly sacked, and 6,000 people have been out of work since.

At the same time, current legislation has enabled the Murdoch management to establish what have come to be known as buffer companies. In effect, they are shell companies, but they have acted as buffers between the management and the work force and allowed the management to seek to outlaw secondary action. That process started in March 1985.

According to a detailed article that appeared in the *Financial Times* of 20 February, two companies were incorporated on 7 March 1985. These were Worthystock and Sparkcrown. The headquarters of the companies was given as 66 Lincoln's Inn fields, the address of News International's solicitors, Farrer and Company. By 7 May, Mr. G. W. Richards of Farrer and Company resigned as the director of both companies to be replaced by Bruce Matthews and Peter Stehenberger, who are directors of News International. Mr. Bruce Matthews is an Australian citizen and Mr. Stehenberger is a Swiss citizen.

On 11 June, Worthystock and Sparkcrown changed their names to News International Distribution and News International Supply Company, respectively, the latter's objects being described as

"the supplier of goods and services of whatsoever nature to proprietors, printers and publishers of newspapers, books, magazines and journals."

That process was continued when a firm called Tyrolese was established with two directors, Mr. G. W. Richards and Mr. J. Gordon. That was the same Mr. Richards. As before, by 2 September they had resigned and made way for Stehenberger and Matthews. Later, in September, the company changed its name to News International Advertising, with the object of providing advertising services to proprietors, printers and publishers, and so on.

That was the arrangement that was carried on throughout 1985. Shell companies were established in anticipation of industrial action and to frustrate any secondary action which might be taken under the law.

On 20 December a letter went from Mr. Richards, of Farrer and Company, to Mr. Matthews which had the explicit aim of securing the removal of the maximum numbers of the work forces of *The Sun*, the *News of the World*, *The Sunday Times* and *The Times* from their places of employment. The purpose was to remove those employees at the cheapest price and to secure the largest possible number of those individuals at the earliest opportunity thereafter as and when required. That was happening throughout the time when the unions were supposed to be engaged in meaningful negotiations with the management.

We know now what the management's motives were. News International was not seeking to introduce new technology. It is now well established and broadly agreed that the technology employed at Wapping is of an almost obsolete type in some areas. I was talking to some of the men at Wapping last night. They told me about the equipment which they believed to be in the plant. They believe that some of it is older than the equipment that they operated in Bouverie street and Gray's Inn road.

The fact is that Murdoch has sought drastically to decrease his costs. It is not his purpose to provide money for future investment in Britain. He is not seeking to provide further employment in Britain. That cannot be said of someone who is intent on reducing a labour force of 6,000 to between 2,000 and 3,000. No one knows how many are employed at Wapping. I stood outside the plant and watched buses going in that were carrying only two or three people. They were going in at speed, and I accept that they might have been carrying some who were lying on the floor—an exercise which is entirely unnecessary. The picketing at Wapping is peaceful. It is well organised and disciplined. It is carried out by men of the highest integrity. They are the essence of all that is best in British trade unionism.

Mr. Alan Howarth: I wonder what the trade unionists of the highest integrity to whom the hon. Gentleman has referred would think about a letter that Coventry city council sent to Lanchester polytechnic in Coventry, instructing it that no newspapers produced by News International were to be taken on the premises of the polytechnic? Can self-respecting trade unionists accept that in furtherance of an industrial dispute it is proper and acceptable that an academic institution should be denied the opportunity to take what newspapers it will, should be denied freedom of information and should be denied the free exchange of ideas?

Mr. O'Neill: Individuals have the freedom to choose. If a local authority wants to express solidarity with workers who are involved in a struggle, that is its privilege. The hon. Gentleman may buy South African grapes or Chilean wine; that is for him to decide. It seems that when trade unionists exercise similar decisions, it is a different matter.

Mr. Murdoch's actions have been concerned not with the introduction of new technology: They have been directed to an attempt to cut costs and to transfer massive profits out of the United Kingdom to finance his activities in the United States. There is something wrong with our corporate arrangements and company law when foreigners can come to Britain, acquire newspapers and export the profits, created by British working people, at the expense of workers' jobs. It would appear that they can export profits while undermining the working conditions of employees throughout an industry, leaving the British taxpayer with the bill for social security payments.

Mr. Chapman *rose*——

Mr. O'Neill: No, I shall not give way. I have nearly finished. I know that the hon. Gentleman wants to participate in the second debate on the Order Paper and I would not want to prevent him from making that speech.

Employment rights of British workers are being undermined with every hour that the Wapping dispute continues. The idea that people should be working in the conditions that prevail at Wapping is intolerable. Anyone who visits Wapping will understand that the term "fortress" is not exaggerated. Last night I heard stories of what is supposed to be going on in the place. Wretched people are working in intolerable conditions. They are intimidated by a ruthless management. Ordinary honest people are being exploited. They are frightened because they know that there are no other jobs to which they can go.

My hon. Friend the Member for St. Helens, North talked about the unemployment figures. The combination of inadequate company legislation and penal and spiteful anti-trade union legislation has led to massive unemployment and deterioration of the rights of working people. For those reasons, I commend the motion to the House.

12.18 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Mid-Worcestershire): I wish to take the attention of the House from the detail that we have heard about Wapping from Opposition Members to issues of a more international flavour in considering a problem that faces so many countries. Unemployment is not a phenomenon confined to the United Kingdom. Regrettably, it is one that is common to Europe. I say "Europe" advisedly, because I wish to draw some comparisons between the experience of Europe as against that in the United States and that in the far east.

It is instructive to consider the unemployment rates of a number of countries in the industrialised world. There are some valid, interesting and instructive conclusions to be drawn from the figures. In Spain, for example, the unemployment rate has recently increased to 22 per cent.

Mr. Prescott: That is the only country where unemployment has increased, apart from the United Kingdom.

Mr. Forth: That is in Socialist Spain. In Ireland, a country with a coalition Government with a Labour party content, the unemployment rate is 18 per cent. In

[Mr. Forth]

Belgium, a country with a coalition Government, it is 16 per cent. In the Netherlands, it is 15 per cent. In Italy, which has a coalition Government, it is 14 per cent. Regrettably, in the United Kingdom, the unemployment rate is 13 per cent. In France, with a Socialist Government, the unemployment rate is 10 per cent. and increasing. In the Federal Republic of Germany, which has a coalition Government, the unemployment rate is 10 per cent. and increasing.

Mr. Evans: What about Greece?

Mr. Forth: We all know that unemployment in Greece is about 5 per cent. That is the official figure. My faith in Greek statistics is probably much less than the hon. Gentleman's faith in them. We cannot necessarily look to the political nature, or, therefore, the economic policies of different countries and draw a straight-line conclusion.

Mr. Evans: As the hon. Gentleman obviously studies these matters, will he confirm that there is no common basis for measuring unemployment within the EEC, and the Greek figures prove it?

Mr. Forth: I agree that direct international comparisons are not necessarily valid. The Greek experience is interesting. Is the hon. Gentleman able to challenge the broad validity of the figures I have cited?

Mr. Ron Leighton (Newham, North-East): Did the hon. Gentleman, in his tour of Europe also look at the social democratic countries of Scandinavia, Austria and Norway? Norway, because of its oil supplies, has an unemployment rate of less than 2 per cent. The figures in Sweden and in Austria are similar. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will mention those facts as well.

Mr. Forth: I shall draw attention also to the experience in the United States in the context of its political system, political control, economy and experience of trade unionism. I believe that it is genuinely instructive for the House to consider international comparisons to avoid being drawn into false conclusions about our unemployment and the solutions that are sometimes offered by the Opposition parties. Perhaps I should more accurately refer to the Opposition party because, although the Labour party is well represented, I have searched the Opposition Benches in vain to see any representation by the other political parties. We can all draw the obvious political conclusion about the concern, or lack of concern, of the alliance for this vitally important problem.

Let us consider the solutions that can be sought in terms of politics. We are often told—perhaps we would have been told today if any alliance Member had bothered to turn up—that coalitions are the answer to the problem. We are sometimes told that one of our great difficulties is the fact that we have had a two-party system for too long and that, if only we could introduce a more balanced system of Government, with a coalition and centrist policies, that would be the answer. The figures I have cited amply demonstrate that many countries with coalition Governments of various kinds have failed to solve their unemployment problems. The unemployment problems are shared with other countries of different political hues. It would appear that we must, therefore, look elsewhere for the answer.

We may be told that the answer lies in Socialist policies. It is instructive to consider the recent history of France. We well remember the euphoria in 1981 when the French elected a Socialist Government. We were told that that was the answer to their problems. We remember Mitterrand and his Government putting into effect precisely the same sort of policies that are advocated by the Opposition. We were offered nationalisation, price control and an expansion of the public sector — the entire panoply of policies that are new being trawled out yet again by the Labour party and which were put into effect in Socialist France as recently as 1981.

The inevitable happened. All the events about which we warn our people happened in France. Inflation increased and the balance of payments was adversely affected. Eventually, the Socialist Government saw the light and had to adopt policies that most Conservative Members would describe as Thatcherite. They were the sort of policies that we are pursuing and recommending.

Partly as a result of that, the recent French experience has been favourable. The inflation rate is decreasing and the balance of payments position is improving. There, in the most classic sense, is an example of a country close to us geographically and similar size and structure which demonstrates that the answer to the unemployment problem, which we all share, does not lie in Socialist policies.

Let us compare Europe as a whole with the United States. They are of similar size and population, but their experience in terms of employment is different. In the past 15 or 20 years, 20 million jobs have been created in the United States but no net new jobs have been created in the EEC. Why? Since the last war, most European countries have pursued policies that have broadly involved ever greater control, state intervention and burdens on employers, whether they are financial, regulatory or of any other kind. Yet, the approach in the United States has been totally different. It has involved a much freer attitude towards the business community, mobility of labour and, to pick up the point made by the hon. Member for St. Helen's, North (Mr. Evans), a much lower rate of trade union membership. Labour Members talk about trade union membership as though it were something to be valued, but the experience in the United States is somewhat different. In the United States, people realise that excessively high trade union membership and activity are counter-productive in terms of jobs and employment. It cannot be a coincidence that in the United States employers find that, where the incidence of trade union membership is relatively low, they have prosperity and success. That is the opposite of our experience in the EEC and in Europe generally.

In the United Kingdom, IBM is an excellent example of this. Time and time again, it has a balloted its labour force on whether it wants to have a trade union and time and time again the labour force has voted against it. Why? The answer is that the employer is a successful one. It treats its employees well. The employees realise that they are getting better treatment and conditions without trade union involvement than they would if they had it.

The conclusions to be drawn from all this are blindingly obvious. The approach taken in Europe as a whole, in the United Kingdom and in many other countries since the war has discouraged the growth of employment. I was privileged to serve in the European Parliament between 1979 and 1984. It was obvious to me that the repeated

attempts by the Brussels bureaucracy to devise ever more ways of regulating industry and the private sector were counter-productive. I believe that the Government have now identified the answer — reduce the number of restrictions and regulations on employers.

Mr. Evans: As the Government have spent six years deregulating, will the hon. Gentleman tell the House why, under the Conservative Government, unemployment has continued to increase month after month to the highest recorded level in our history?

Mr. Forth: Unemployment has been a phenomenon of the post-war era. Every Government in Britain since 1945 inherited higher rates of inflation and unemployment than their predecessor. We were involved in an inexorable process through that period. I am suggesting that at long last we have realised that excessive regulation by Government was contributing to the ever higher rate of unemployment. I welcome the move by the Government, having identified that, to take a series of policy steps to redress the balance and reverse the process from which we have suffered since 1945.

Mr. Holt: I wonder whether, during his research, my hon. Friend has looked at the Canadian experience under the current Government. They have created 580,000 jobs in the past 12 months.

Mr. Forth: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I believe that he has identified another reason, from the policies being pursued in north America, why the motion before the House is totally misguided. The hon. Member for St. Helens, North is suggesting the usual tired old formula we have been offered so many times before and which has failed so many times before. As I have tried to suggest, it can be demonstrated, by comparison with other countries in Europe and the United States, that that formula will not work.

That is why I hope that the House will resist the motion and why I welcome the approach that the Government are taking to employment. I believe that the policies we are now pursuing give genuine hope for the future. They do not give in to the temptation to use what has failed in the past, and I believe ever more firmly that people know and understand that. When the people are offered another chance to choose at the next election, their choice will be the same and will be as wise as the choice on the previous occasion.

12.31 pm

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): The hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire, (Mr. Forth) was being extremely selective in discussing what happens in Europe. He did not discuss the position in Sweden, and he also ignored a number of other countries. The reason for the unemployment that has developed in western Europe, north America and elsewhere, where there is free enterprise and a competitive capitalist system, is to be found in the very nature of that system. As long as it continues, there will always be unemployment booms and slumps at varying levels.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for St. Helens, North (Mr. Evans) for giving us the opportunity to say a few words on this subject. The industrial relations legislation that has been brought in by dribs and drabs over the years since the Government came to office is the most anti-trade union and reactionary in the whole of Europe. We are told that the position in some European countries is worse than it is here but unemployment has increased more rapidly in the United Kingdom than it has in any other part of Europe. That point was made by my hon. Friend the Member for St. Helens, North.

There is a myth, and it has been mentioned again today by Conservative Members, that the trade unions got out of balance and that the power of the trade unions was too great. The argument is not new. It was first developed in a Conservative party lawyers' pamphlet entitled "A Giant's Strength". It was argued a lifetime ago. Incidentally, that pamphlet echoed the view of people in the United States of America, who, after the war, introduced the Taft Hartley Acts which restricted the powers and rights of the trade unions in the United States. Ever since the Taft Hartley Acts, Conservative politicians in the United States have followed that practice and used that argument. It is not true, it was not true then, and it has not been true since. The trade unions never had a great balance of power tipped in their favour. They were never more powerful than any bunch of employers.

The point about trade unionism is that workers arrived at the conclusion early on that in this type of society they had to join together to defend themselves, and to argue collectively to try to reach agreement with their employers. If they tried to do it alone, they ended up in a disaster. Conservative Members want each individual worker to go it alone.

Mr. Forth: Yes.

Mr. Heffer: The hon. Gentleman is an honest Tory and says yes. He is saying openly what all Conservative Members think. That is their basic attitude towards the working-class and trade unionists. They do not want us to have rights, powers, or collectivism, but want us to act individually. When we do that, we are sunk. We have rights and powers only when we work together. Even in 1906 British workers managed to convince a Liberal Government that something should be done to give them rights, which until then they did not have.

This Government have gone further than any other Government with anti-trade union legislation. The 1906 Act dealt with how unions' moneys could be used. It is an old argument to say that unions are above the law. The unions were never above the law. Immunities merely gave workers a certain measure of protection. Unions were never above the law. That protection has now been taken from workers and trade unions by this Government's legislation.

The Labour party has said that it will repeal the legislation, and we shall do so. We must therefore consider the sort of legislation that we shall put in its place. That is important, because we cannot merely get shot of Tory legislation and leave a big gap. We must give our people rights and protection.

When my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) was Secretary of State for Employment, he did a marvellous job. We are grateful to him for steering legislation through the House to get rid of the Industrial Relations Act 1971 when we were on a knife-edge. He also introduced legislation to restore rights to our people. We must do something similar.

When we introduce such legislation, I hope that it will not diminish the right of any worker to take industrial action. I am thinking, in particular, of workers who go on

[Mr. Heffer]

unofficial strike. The position cannot always be nice and tidy, with a group of factory workers suddenly finding their shop steward sacked and holding an official ballot. In my day in the shipyards, workers answered that by walking out of the gate until the shop steward was restored, because they had elected him. If workers did not like the shop steward, they could remove him whenever they wished.

Mr. Forth: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Heffer: I shall not give way. I do not wish to make a long speech. I hope that when we introduce legislation we shall not even think in those terms.

I am, and always have been, in favour of ballots in the trade union movement. My union on Merseyside used to elect a Communist as district secretary every year—the great Leo McGree. If we did not like Leo, we did not have to vote for him. The district committee, of which I was proud to be a member, and which we used to call the management committee, was elected every year. I agree with that, but we can go a little too far in thinking that ballots must be held in all cases.

I thought that we had given the executives of unions, who should be elected, the power at any given moment to call out their memberships to deal with any matters. I hope that we shall restore that right. There has been much talk about ballots, but I do not remember a ballot when we went to war over the Falklands. I remember the group of people who were, regrettably, elected to Government taking a decision and sending our troops to fight in the Falklands. Constitutionally, they were right to do so. If we can do it in time of war, we must give union leaders the power to do the same thing, in certain circumstances.

As to the internal affairs of trade unions, the Government are acting rather like the Jaruzelski Government in Poland. They have the cheek to say that they support Solidarity, yet they interfere with our unions, in some ways more than the Polish Government have done with their unions. That is not acceptable. If my union wishes to ballot each of its members to elect its general secretary, that is a matter for it. We used to say that members had to attend branch meetings four times a year —we called them star nights—and members who did not attend were fined. Votes were always taken at those branch meetings which meant that any member could look through the lists to see how many people had voted for Bill Brown and how many for Fred Jones. It was the best check that we could have had, because all the votes were recorded, and we could see how many branch members voted for whom. I hope that those rights will be restored to trade unions.

We must get rid of this class legislation, which benefits employers to the detriment of the ordinary working class. Workers' rights must be restored and the class legislation swept away. I say to my hon. Friends that in doing so —I have heard arguments about a Bill of Rights, but I do not know exactly what that means—we must restore all the rights of the workers and give them extra rights that they have not had until now. The balance has never been tipped in favour of the workers, but always in favour of the employers. This must end.

12.42 pm

Mr. Alan Howarth (Stratford-on-Avon): We owe the hon. Member for St. Helens, North (Mr. Evans) a debt of gratitude for giving us the opportunity to debate this subject, and I regret the somewhat acrimonious and politically partisan flavour of the debate so far. All of us who have taken the trouble to be here regard unemployment as a great evil. It is a great evil that people, through no fault of their own, should be trapped in unemployment, and it behoves us to foreswear, as far as possible, mutual recrimination. We must analyse and consider carefully and fairly the nature of the problem, and try to understand its causes and see what remedies there may be.

Some major causes of unemployment are beyond the scope of this or any Government to control. One is demographic—the shifting balance of our population. The interacting effects of high mortality in the second world war and the baby boom of the 1960s mean that, during the 1980s, many more people are joining the labour force than are retiring from it. It is an objective, statistical fact that it would be necessary to create an extra 1 million jobs during this decade if we were to stand still in terms of registered unemployment. That factor deserves to be more widely appreciated.

A second major cause of contemporary unemployment has been the recession of 1979-1981—the deepest, severest recession in world trade for 50 years. The causes of that recession—the oil price shock of 1979 and the worldwide withdrawal of Governments from budgetary and monetary excess—were again far beyond the scope and power of any United Kingdom Government to control. The painfully slow process of recovery from that recession has also been beyond the powers of the Government of our country to affect. Continuing high interest rates, currency instability, protectionism and the debt crisis are all reasons why the recovery from that deep recession has been agonisingly slow. A trading country such as ours, which exports some 30 per cent. of all that it produces, is inevitably highly exposed to world economic conditions and it is absurd to pretend that there is any way in which those enormous forces could have been sidetracked and this country sheltered from them.

A third major international cause of unemployment is the impact of new technology. By a cruel coincidence, while those other causes of unemployment have been operating we have been in a period of profoundly important technological change. The pyschological effect is clear for all to see. It induces deep pessimism and people frequently predict that there will never again be full employment, although there is really no reason to suppose that that will be so. In past periods of major technological change people have been similarly pessimistic. No doubt it was the fashionable orthodoxy of the day when the wheel was invented, and one can well imagine how people whose job it was to carry loads and haul weights would have feared very much for their future.

Fears of that kind are better documented during the Industrial Revolution, in the steam age when the impact of that new technology displaced people from old forms of work very rapidly and painfully. It was a natural human reaction on the part of the Luddites to destroy the new machinery on the assumption that there would otherwise no longer be any employment for them. Equally well documented, however, is the effect of that technological

change and the enormous growth in wealth throughout the 19th century in creating new job opportunities of a nature and pattern impossible to anticipate. The same will undoubtedly be true of the current information technology revolution.

The tragedy is that, for a period, new technology tends to destroy old jobs faster than it creates new ones. Unhappily, we are living through such a period. The job of political leaders and Governments in such a period is to explain what is happening, to take what steps they can to help those displaced in the process of change, and to remove the obstacles to change so as to shorten the period of adaptation.

Having drawn attention to three international causes of contemporary unemployment, it is right to consider some uniquely British circumstances and the way in which, through misguided policy in the past, we have saddled ourselves with a worse problem than we need have faced.

A distinctive feature of the British economy has been that many of our industries as well as our public services have been overmanned. By the end of the 1970s, overmanning was ubiquitous—not least in Fleet street, where it was a byword. We accommodated ourselves to that by allowing unit costs to rise and hoping that inflation and devaluation would somehow take care of the process. But in the end it did not work. We allowed this to happen very much because of the Socialist, corporatist ethos of the 1960s and 1970s, when big business and big Government were the vogue. Big business and big Government are a natural habitat for trade unionism. Sadly, too many trade union leaders attached less importance to assisting profitability and the creation of wealth in the interests of their members and society as a whole than to ensuring that the number of members in their own unions increased. In that way, too many connived in overmanning. That was unsustainable when the recession came and much of the overmanning was shaken out. It was a painful process. It need not have been so severe if we had not allowed the original overmanning to set in. The British people appreciate the reality. No one enjoys the experience. It is brutal and painful to go through such a rapid change, but the need for it is not doubted.

The second domestically generated cause of unemployment is the inflation that we allowed to establish itself in our economy. Every successive economic cycle since the war has been marked by new peaks of inflation followed by new peaks of unemployment. It is no coincidence that inflation, which doubled during the period of the last Labour Government, preceded doubling of unemployment.

Inflation destroys jobs in a variety of ways. Inflation saps the profitability of companies and undermines the capacity and confidence of people to invest. Inflation provokes aggression in pay bargaining because, naturally, pay bargainers want to recoup for their members the real value of earnings lost through inflation. That competitive aggression in pay bargaining means that the devil takes the hindmost, the weakest lose out and unemployment is increased.

Inflation leads to higher interest rates. In all those ways inflation destroys jobs. The Government are right to put the defeat of inflation at the top of their list of economic policies because it makes a direct contribution to remedying a major underlying cause of unemployment. There is no worthwhile trade-off to be had. We might once have been able to say that a little more inflation would be justified in the interests of a little less unemployment. We can no longer say that. Indeed, the right hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Callaghan) told the Labour party conference in 1976 that important truth. He was wise and brave to do so at that time.

A further British domestic cause of unemployment is the excessive amount of public expenditure and the associated high levels of taxation that have been allowed to develop over a long period. The Earl of Stockton is fond of criticising the Government for the severity of their policies, but when Harold Macmillan left office as Prime Minister public expenditure represented about 33 per cent. of GNP. By the time that the Conservative Government took office in 1979 public expenditure was into the 40 per cent. area. Unhappily, it has remained at that level. Public expenditure at that level entails high interest rates and a whole haemorrhage, through high taxation, of profits from the wealth-creating sector of the economy and that leads directly to higher unemployment.

The Government have been right to make their first priorities restraining of public expenditure and lower borrowing. But they still must bring down the excessively high levels of taxation from which the economy suffers.

Some good starts have been made. The Government have introduced reforms to corporation tax. Obviously, it was sensible in our present circumstances to remove the bias in the corporate taxation system in favour of using machines and discriminating against the use of people. Small businesses in particular have low rates of corporation tax as a result of this Government's reform. That is a useful and important start to the process.

The same is true of the abolition of the national insurance surcharge, which the Labour party was driven to introduce when it was in power because of its excessive public expenditure. That was a tax on jobs. Indeed, national insurance is a payroll tax which is inappropriate during endemic high unemployment. I am glad that the Government have made a start on introducing a more rational pattern into the national insurance system. Perhaps we can go further in that direction.

I am glad that the Government are proposing to reform business rates. If we move to centralised decisions on the level of business rates, that will remove some of the worst excesses imposed by the high-spending, extravagant and irresponsible Labour-controlled local authorities.

However, I fear that rates will still be the heaviest single impost on businesses and that they will ignore the profitability of individual companies and remain a textbook case of taxation without representation. I hope that we shall be able to go further in reforming local government finance. The indiscriminate havoc that high rates wreak on businesses and, therefore, on employment reinforces the strong case for tight control of public expenditure, particularly in local government.

The Government have embarked on a useful reform of capital taxation. The more that can be done to reduce capital transfer tax and capital gains tax, the more we shall be able to encourage wider share ownership, a more constructive, co-operative approach to industrial relations than our tradition adversarial pattern has allowed, more venture capital and more help to small businesses, which represent the best possibility for creating new jobs in our economy.

I know that the Government are also seeking reform of VAT. Decisions have to be taken on a European basis and

[Mr. Alan Howarth]

I am glad to have been assured that the Government are urgently seeking to lift the threshold at which companies have to pay VAT. My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment, who is to reply to the debate, may be able to bring me up to date, but I know that in 1981 about 93 per cent. of VAT was paid by companies with a turnover above £100,000, yet 75 per cent. of companies have a lower turnover than that. Nevertheless, all those companies had to make VAT returns even though, after that whole laborious process, the net return to the Exchequer was minimal. I hope that we shall succeed in lifting the threshold at which VAT is payable from the current level of, I think, about £20,000 to perhaps £120,000. That would lift a tiresome and bureaucratic burden from small businesses which have to suffer considerable compliance costs.

Progress on income tax has not been as rapid as many of us wished, but the imperative was to reduce borrowing. Even so, the Government have reduced the basic rate from 33 per cent. to 30 per cent. and have increased the threshold at which individuals start to pay tax by about 20 per cent. in real terms. The more that we can keep tight control of public expenditure and allow the growth that is taking place in the economy to express itself in the private sector, the greater will be the possibility of bringing down income tax, with all the dynamic and stimulating effects that that will have on our economy and its propensity to create jobs.

The Government are moving in the right direction in all those ways, but I know that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary has also been involved in lifting the burden of bureaucratic harassment that the legacy of successive Governments has imposed on our businesses. The major asset, particularly of a small business, is the energy of the boss. If he has to spend his energy in form-filling and bureaucratic compliance, he will have less energy and less time and scope to run his business to create wealth so that he personally can take on more people and also contribute to the general prosperity of society and help to regain our overall capacity to employ people.

The Government have made important inroads into the apparatus of bureaucracy. Price controls, income controls, dividend controls, exchange controls and hire purchase controls have all gone, yet there are still far too many statutes, statutory orders, EC directives, local government directives, quangos and judicial tribunals making demands on businesses. Many statutory bodies are charged with responsibilities involving, for example, health and safety at work, that we must all accept in a mature and decent society, but a great deal of superfluous bureaucracy and regulatory activity remains.

I was delighted when the Government produced the White Paper "Lifting the Burden" in July last year. It is an extensive, detailed, nitty-gritty document which sets out a full agenda of useful reforms. I hope that the Government will press on with them so that we shall have a less claustrophobic atmosphere in which people can do business. All of that will be helpful.

There is yet another area where reform is needed and where reform is taking place but which needs to be pressed further. That is reform of the labour market. "The labour market" is a chill, economist's term but it describes very important human and economic realities. There has been much criticism by the Opposition during this debate of the reforms of the industrial relations legislation that have been introduced by the Government since 1979. However, the cumulative effect of that legislation is enormously beneficial, not least because it strengthens the rights of individual trade unionists.

Its benefits are manifest in terms of industrial peace. During the last 12 months there have been fewer industrial disputes in this country than in any other year during the last 50 years. That must be a result in large part of the legislative reforms that have been introduced. It may be that we need to go further. I see no reason why freely negotiated collective pay bargains should not be enforceable at civil law, and the Government may judge it to be appropriate at a future date to introduce a change of that kind.

The reform of trade union legislation, combined with the reform of wages councils that were having very important effects upon the terms and conditions of work of about 3 million employees, is directly beneficial to employment. It was a crazy and destructive policy for wages councils to set minimum levels of pay that made it absolutely certain that the opportunities for employment, particularly of young people, were greatly diminished. Therefore I welcome the reforms that have been introduced.

I welcome also the encouragement that the Government's policies have given to labour mobility, the improved deal for early leavers in terms of pension benefits and the Government's support for personal, portable pensions. They are of great importance in achieving a more flexible, adaptable and mobile economy. That should go hand in hand with the necessary reform of the Rent Acts. It is very stupid if legislation has the practical effect of it not being in the interests of private enterprise to offer privately rented accommodation to those who may need to move from one area to another to find a job, who are willing to do so but who are prevented from moving because they cannot find a roof over their heads when they get there.

The education and training reforms that are taking place are all relevant to our need to produce a more skilled and adaptable labour force. This will be of long-term benefit to the prospects of employment.

There are no easy, quick solutions. Unemployment is a very complex problem. Those who care about unemployment ought to be willing to make an honest analysis of it and to consider fresh solutions. They ought not to object to a Government who challenge vested interests and who are prepared to reconsider the old othodoxies.

This Government's approach is to dismantle the obstacles to employment. The Labour party is tied to the old interests—the trade unions and public bureaucracies. It is tied to the old notions of large-scale Government intervention and large-scale Government spending. The Labour party proposes to go further. The right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) has a policy that is called "directed reflation". My right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury has provided a telling calculation of the cost of Labour pledges. He suggested—and it has not been repudiated—that if these pledges were to be implemented, value added tax would rise to about 41 per cent. That would plainly be absurd. The alliance simply wants to pull rabbits out of the hat and tinker with institutions. The Conservative approach is to liberate our economy, to work

with market forces, to remove distortions and to release private enterprise from fiscal and bureaucratic burdens. In 1979 and 1983 the British people welcomed this approach by the Conservative Government and I am certain that they will continue to endorse it.

1.4 pm

Mr. John Prescott (Kingston upon Hull, East): The hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) made a speech which reflected most of the speeches from that side of the House. It had little to do with the facts of the case or the judgments and issues involved. The hon. Gentleman said that what we had to do was reduce taxation and insurance payments in order to assist employment. The Government have done all that and we find that industry has gained about £15 billion in profits. That money did not go into investment, training or jobs. It went abroad to be invested in property and other kinds of investment. After six years, the achievement for which the Government had hoped has not materialised.

The hon. Gentleman discussed the question of how many days were lost through disputes. However, he actually spoke about how many disputes there are, rather than about how many days are lost. It is true that the number of disputes has halved but we are still losing almost as many working days through strikes, because although there may be fewer strikes they are bigger and they last longer. They are also more expensive. I remind the hon. Gentleman that the miners' strike cost £6 billion. The hon. Gentleman should pay attention to those important facts when he is addressing the House on such matters.

I offer my congratulations to my hon. Friend the Member for St. Helens, North (Mr. Evans) on his motion on employment rights. Conservative Members have said very little about employment rights. However, that is the subject of the motion and I want to use some of my time to deal with the reduction of those rights. My hon. Friend's excellent speech reflected his working experience and the length of time that he has spent in this House specialising in employment legislation. The House is richer for his speech. I want to follow up some of his contributions and deal with employment rights.

Very little has been said about employment rights. I was quite surprised when the hon. Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham) said that he was not aware that there had been any reduction of employment rights. That convinces me that many Conservative Members do not know what they are voting for when they go through the Lobby. Since 1979 there has been a constant catalogue of reductions of rights, and it is important to put some of these on the record. It might even be useful to remind the Minister of such employment rights, because that is what the motion is about.

The motion is concerned with individual rights. The Government's great claim is that they are extending most of their legislation in the name of individual rights and individual freedom. Such rights have been guaranteed by international conventions which successive Governments have been prepared to observe within our legislation. I shall spell out precisely what this Government have done in regard to individual rights and freedom.

I must express my grave disappointment that the Minister for Employment is not here to defend the reductions in rights. I spend an awful lot of time trying to get Ministers, and indeed the Secretary of State, to appear on television or to appear in the House to defend in open debate the measures that they follow. However, we have to learn from separate interviews—which they demand to do on their own—from articles or, indeed, as we have done, from the latest speech by the Minister for Employment, what Ministers consider to be important.

The speech of the Minister for Employment was made—a very convenient arena—at a Press gallery lunch. My right hon. Friend the Member for Blaneau Gwent (Mr. Foot) referred to the Paymaster General's speech when he said that he considered that the remarks made at that lunch gave some hope that the Government would do something about the print dispute. The Minister said:

"Rupert Murdoch's personal public relations could do with a little improvement".

Public relations? This man was geared up to sack 6,000 workers; indeed, not only to sack them, but to deny them their redundancy and pension rights. He carefully designed that. If this is simply a public relations exercise, it says a great deal about the liberal image of the Minister.

Later on the right hon. and learned Gentleman said:

"The Government will be watching the law on strikes with care. . . . We will watch to see whether unfair disciplinary action is taken against members who choose to work and keep their jobs".

If the Minister is concerned about justice, he should study the statisical analysis of the industrial tribunals, which shows that about 40 times more people are sacked because they are members of trade unions than are sacked because they are not members of a trade union. Perhaps the right hon. and learned Gentleman will concern himself with the injustices suffered by people who seek the human right to belong to a trade union. The right hon. and learned Gentleman came to the job with a liberal image, but he has been revealed to be as hard as anybody else about justice in industrial relations.

The motion is wide ranging and allows us to raise all the essential facets of industrial relations. We do not apologise for discussing the print dispute, the miners' dispute, or any other dispute. We do not duck the issue. We have a point to put. We believe that most of them are motivated and directly caused by the Government's legislation. That is why we shall repeal such legislation, lock, stock and barrel. I shall consider whether employment rights have been restricted and reduced, and the implications of disputes in the public mind, especially the miners' dispute or that involving News International.

I do not believe that anybody would argue that the right to work has been pursued since 1979. We can see that the Government's argument that reducing taxation will help to increase profits and lead to increased investment, increased employment, and lower inflation is patent nonsense, as we have been left with an extremely poor investment record compared with the rest of the European Community.

I have heard figures about unemployment. I should like to make it clear that the Labour Government inherited an unemployment rate of 1·2 million and that, when we left office, nearly 400,000 more people were in work although we had to contend with a population growth twice that experienced since 1979. We know that between 4·5 million and 5 million people are now available for work. The Government's labour force survey reveals that.

When we compare our economy with those of other OECD countries, we must go back at least one decade. High inflation and high unemployment have been features of most developed economies during the past few decades,

[Mr. John Prescott]

but the significant feature is that, under successive Governments, Britain's unemployment has always been at the average for the OECD. Since 1979, however, it has risen to about 2 per cent. above the average. The House of Commons Library has calculated that that increase is equivalent to about 1 million people out of work. The increase can be traced to the Government's policies. The hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Forth) picked out just a few countries which happen to be above Britain in the list.

In 1979, 10 of the 24 OECD countries had lower unemployment than the United Kingdom. In 1985, however—the last year for which figures are available—18 countries had lower unemployment than the United Kingdom. It is generally recognised that unemployment here has been higher, and that it cannot be put down solely to the world recession or to what has happened in other countries. There might be an argument about overmanning, which Conservative Members have deployed, but it cannot be argued that what has happened in Britain has been experienced in the rest of the Community.

Mr. Forth: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Prescott: I am afraid that I do not have time. It costs £20 billion to maintain such high unemployment. We believe that the Government have deliberately created unemployment in order to exercise a disciplinary sanction on the labour force. I have no doubt that mass unemployment is a deliberate part of Government policy. Their policies have created unemployment, and they knew that they would. I shall give some interesting evidence to support that view.

It is noticeable that the rest of the European countries are prepared to observe ILO convention 122. There is a new ILO convention which states that the Government will be prepared to pursue full employment as a matter of policy. Great Britain is the only European country which is not prepared to sign the convention and accept the commitment to provide full employment. That is a sign of the Government's priorities.

Mr. Forth: That is nonsense.

Mr. Prescott: The hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire says that that is nonsense. I just note that all the other countries believe that that is a decent standard, and we should try to achieve international objectives such as full employment and decent working conditions. Other countries believe that such matters should be the normal part of any developed and civilised society. Great Britain constantly sets its face against decent standards.

Mr. Forth: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Prescott: No, I shall not give way. I want to spell out some of the rights.

Mr. Forth: What about my rights?

Mr. Prescott: I think that the hon. Gentleman has had his rights, and I want to show that he has denied rights to other people. I am not denying the hon. Gentleman much by denying him his right to intervene, but many workers have felt the lash of the hon. Gentleman's vote in the House in denying their rights. I shall spell out some of those rights to justify my point.

The Government have an unprecedented record in denouncing international conventions. Never in the history of this country have we denounced international conventions on the scale that the Government have done. Never in the history of this country has there been such a rate of referral of cases to the European Courts of Human Rights. No other country has been taken to the Court of Human Rights so frequently since 1979. The Government are totally indifferent to the consequences of such referrals for civilised standards.

In the debate on the European Community earlier this week, when discussing treaty changes, the Government made it clear that they have a reservation about signing the new treaty. That information was given to me in a letter from the Foreign Office. Unfortunately I do not have time to quote the letter, but I shall show it to hon. Members if anyone is interested. That reservation is not about how much money we give to Europe or about the reductions in the power of Parliament. It is concerned with the working environment.

I shall quote just one passage from the letter dated 20 February from the Foreign Office:

> "The lifting of our reserve does not mean that the government has changed its attitude to the directive on parental leave, voluntary part-time work or employee consultation."

That means the Government have not changed their attitude to the Vredeling proposal that workers should have more information, consultation and representation. Those standards are accepted as normal in most of the more successful European economies, but are denied in this country. The one reservation that the Government had was on maintaining reasonable and decent standards for workers in industry.

I should like to discuss some of the conventions which the Government have denounced, thereby staining the character and civilised nature of this country. We have witnessed the Government not only denouncing of conventions, but setting their face against reducing the working week as a contribution to reducing unemployment levels. Britain is the only country that is setting its face against what clearly must be, if one believes in full employment, a contribution to reducing unemployment. I am sure that hon. Members on both sides of the House will agree with that proposition. The Government clearly do not.

The Government denounced the 1982 ILO convention 94 which called for fair wages to be paid to people. The Government's argument then was that their action would lead to more jobs. If anyone believes that the repeal of the fair wages legislation in hospitals and privatisation schemes led to better conditions he has not examined what actually happened, and in particular what happened to the Barking women, who were on strike for 12 months. There have been lower wages, fewer holidays, and fewer people in work. That policy is evident throughout the negotiations normally covered by fair wages. The facts do not bear out the idea that that brings more jobs.

The 1983 ILO convention 95 is now being dealt with upstairs in Committee. Under this proposal we will allow employers to deduct, almost at will, all manner of things under the Truck Acts. Other nations keep these provisions, but we will remove them to allow the employer more rights to make deductions from a worker's wages and to remove further protection for the individual.

The 1985 ILO convention 26, which is before the House, has led the Government to denounce the convention's proposals on minimum wages and wage councils. Wage councils and Sunday openings are

concerned with reducing the amount of wages and the number of people employed in industries concerned, in which the wage level is about £50 a week. Apparently it is believed by some hon. Members that such wages are excessive and that we must introduce legislation so that they can be reduced. There are many hon. Members who spend more on a lunch than the sum they believe to be a fair wage. They wish to remove minimum wage provisions for those who are least able to defend themselves. By introducing such legislation the Government will not be hitting the wealthy. They are not covered by minimum wage regulations. They are doing very well in the City and they do not need the protection of such regulations. Instead, they will be hitting the low-paid and the non-union organised, two-thirds of whom are women.

The Government's record of reducing the rights of women has been deplorable and unprecedented. The Government's proposals will have an adverse effect on two thirds of working women, who are already earning less than two thirds of the wages paid to male labour in the same areas of work. The Government have reduced maternity rights and have disadvantaged pregnant women. Their rights to go to arbitration and to appear before industrial tribunals have been restricted. For a time the Government resisted the concept of equal pay, equal value. Current legislation provides for the taxing of work place nurseries and there is discrimination against women in community programme work.

There has been a reduction of employment protection for women working at night. The right of women to work at night in the same way as men is put as a new right, but it has been done to extend the pool of cheap female labour. It is said constantly that the previous Labour Government reduced the number of wages councils. They did, but there were some essential differences. The Labour Government got rid of wages councils if they were convinced that there was proper collective bargaining at the place of work and reasonable wages. They asked ACAS to produce an independent report on the conditions in the industries concerned. That is rather different from getting rid of minimum terms and regulations applying to wages and premium hours, for example.

Mr. Trippier: We are not getting rid of wages councils.

Mr. Prescott: That is the sort of rhetoric that we have come to expect from the Minister. The Government have embarked on a number of major reforms, and that is why they have had to denounce international conventions. They have had to do so because of the major changes that they wish to introduce. The changes will hit especially the low-paid, particularly women.

That brings me to the Government's attitude to collective bargaining and collective representation for trade unions. The breach of conventions to which I have referred extends to European legislation and the European Court of Human Rights. A notorious example is the breaching of the ILO convention on the freedom of association. The hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon told us that he is a director of an association that is concerned with freedoms. However, he voted in favour of what the Government chose to do to trade unions and trade unionists at GCHQ. Individuals who wanted to remain in trade unions and wished to retain that right were crushed by the legislation which the Government put on the statute book with the support of the hon. Gentleman. They were denied the right to belong to a trade union. They were almost accused of being subversives and spies who were giving away information.

It is interesting to consider the Government's different approaches to confidential and security information and the breaching of it. We know what they did to Miss Tisdall and Mr. Ponting, and we know also that when the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) did the same thing openly; not a word was uttered about prosecuting him. The right hon. Gentleman was responsible for the prosecution of civil servants who had released information. In one instance, the courts found that there had not been a breach of security.

Civil servants have been denied basic rights, and women's rights have been restricted, to say the least. If anyone hopes that our courts will defend rights of freedom, any reading of a House of Lords judgment that took up this issue will find that the right has been given to the Government to determine what is a matter of security, and then to crush the rights of those who work in the areas where these matters arise, even if there is no evidence to justify their determination.

That judgment is an important factor in regard to the rights of those who were faced not only with the sack and pressure, but with bribes. They were bribes in the sense that the Government believe that one can purchase anything if the price is right. Many brave trade unionists refused all those financial inducements and resisted those pressures. They are still fighting for the right to join a trade union. A Labour Government will, without hesitation, return that right to the people involved in that struggle for trade union and civil rights.

It is no wonder, with the Government taking this action on industrial relations, that many employers adopt a similar attitude. It is no wonder that MacGregor was imported to take those actions in the mining industry, at a major cost to us. Ten months after the strike there is still no fair assessment of whether a pit should close, as we were told constantly in the past there would be. About 500 miners still do not have their jobs back, even though the industrial tribunals and courts have found them innocent of the charges laid by the NCB. No one rushes in to ensure that their rights are protected and justice observed in a state industry.

The Government were indifferent to what was to happen. According to *The Guardian* of 28 February, MacGregor has entitled one of the chapters of his new book, "How we made Scargill start the strike". We know that MacGregor's methods were similar to those that Murdoch claims for the strike that he started. *The Guardian* article of 28 February refers to the panic at No. 10 and how Mr. MacGregor was summoned and told by the Prime Minister:

"The fate of this government is in your hands."

If that had been said to the trade unions, every Conservative Member would have said that Britain was being run by the trade unions. If it is a manager or a boss, and the Prime Minister whines that the future of Britain is in the hands of MacGregor, we hear not one protest about the Government's responsibilities and rights.

Mr. Heffer: Does that not underline the Government's nonsense during the miners' strike, when they said that they were neutral and that they were not fighting the

[Mr. Heffer]

miners, but were standing apart from the battle? Is it not proof that, from the word go, the Government were against the miners and did their best to crush them?

Mr. Prescott: There is no doubt about that. MacGregor certainly believes it. We shall have to wait to hear whether the Government deny that case. MacGregor was certainly party to that action. He has made that clear. Small employers are being encouraged in the same way. The Silentnight dispute is still going on.

Mr. Trippier: It is small.

Mr. Prescott: It is a small dispute and a small employer compared with the scale of the miners' strike and the NCB, but a great justice issue is involved. No one cares to hear the concern of the employees or to help when that employer smashes his point of view on the employees at Silentnight.

I have written to the Minister for Employment about another multinational in Lincoln — the brake maker, Clayton Dewandre. That United States multinational company has moved in. It wants a new contract and wants to reduce the labour force. It want to pay lower wages and to negotiate away many workers' rights. This is what is called a "give back" deal. Give back everything to the employer, and he offers the possibility that one in two employees will get a job.

The same is true of BP shipping. We have got rid of our BP fleets and given the company over to a management enterprise body which has negotiated a new contract. This contract is made under Swiss law, and our people have to accept the terms and conditions laid down under that law. They have to give away the rights which they are guaranteed in our legislation and indeed by the ILO convention.

Murdoch's actions are perhaps the most offensive of all. Many hon. Members have referred to the News International dispute. Murdoch has been spilling the beans in *The Guardian*, which refers to the interview that he gave to the *New York Times*. *The Guardian* states:

"Mr. Murdoch disclosed that long-term meticulous planning went into his Wapping set-up to ensure that in the case of a strike he could fully exploit the Thatcher Government's trade union laws."

That is painfully clear. There cannot be any doubt about it. That is precisely the accusation that we make against Murdoch and News International. He planned the dispute, set up the fortress factory, surrounded it with barbed wire, and introduced fleets of lorries, posses of lawyers, courts and injunctions to make the best use of the legislation.

My hon. Friend the Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) made clear precisely how that policy had been pursued. He even mentioned how much money Murdoch was to gain from the actions. He said that £80 million would be saved on the redundancy payments out of that agreement. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent made clear, that issue has exposed a number of important matters to which we have to address our minds in any future industrial relations issues.

This dispute has exposed such things as the refusal to negotiate. Murdoch would not have been able to refuse to negotiate in America, but apparently he can do so here. It has exposed the fact that ballots of the workers, even if they agree with the dispute, carry no influence whatsoever. It has exposed the use of a breach of contract, which has been central to our industrial relations law, to deny the basic rights and provide for the sequestration of trade union funds.

The judge dealing with the sequestration said:

"The purpose of the court was to uphold the rule of law and not become immersed in the complexities of industrial relations."

He went on to say that he was not concerned with the merits of the dispute. Somebody should be concerned with the merits of the dispute. The House should be concerned and should support call for ACAS intervention.

If we have legislation which shifts the balance to the employer, which is what this legislation does, and has little to do with justice or collective bargaining, it is about time that the legislation was reviewed. The secondary picketing rights and the secondary action rights which the Minister referred to on Monday have already been used in courts and been thrown out by them. They have no meaning whatsoever. Therefore Murdoch was able to set up new companies and avoid even what limited rights were put into the Government's legislation.

It is clear that the legislation was designed solely to assist the employer, and many unscrupulous employers are using it to that effect. That is why we have more use of sequestration and more use of the courts. That is not in the legislation, but it comes out of the use of the courts in a way that employers have never made use of them before. That is a major development in creating greater confrontation and less legislation. We believe that the Government's legislation is designed to increase that confrontation. Our job is to achieve the very opposite—co-operation.

Let me make it clear, as I have before, but it is sometimes misunderstood, that we will get rid of the trade union legislation introduced by this Government. We say that, not with any embarrassment or as an ideological necessity, but because we recognise the need to bring co-operation back into this country and to obtain the co-operation necessary to get the economy moving again. In case anybody thinks that that is a peculiarly Socialist view, I should point out that most of the countries which have better economic records than ourselves, higher levels of employment, and higher levels of inflation because of higher levels of investment, have achieved that with legislation which at least guarantees the rights which this Government have stripped away, such as the right to information, consultation and representation.

All those are positive rights which the Labour movement is now discussing in the review of that legislation. I believe that a positive framework of legislation can be found for that. Ireland, which has a similar legislative base to our own has similar complaints and is now reviewing and changing the legislation in a fundamental way which may differ from our approach. The Labour movement has started its discussions, and by the end of the year the form of our legislation will be clear. The electorate will not be in any doubt that we shall have a different form of industrial democracy to extend democratic rights of individuals at their place of work which are presently denied by the Government. That will be underpinned by trade union legislation to achieve that end.

It is deplorable that a Japanese company such as Nissan can buy time on television in this country to tell Britain that its workers in Japan work with the management, that they sit down in the same canteen and wear similar overalls. It says that by these means it gets greater

productivity, co-operation with the trade unions and better investment. What a comment on the state of industrial relations in Britain that that is put forward as a good example to follow. It may be a good example. We want co-operation. I am not saying that we want the same as that, but the Labour movement has started putting together its alternatives ready to be placed before the electorate.

The workers have a major contribution to make in getting our economy together. They should have democratic rights at their place of work which are not taken away from them when the gates close behind them. We shall put those rights in a framework which will begin to achieve what we know we can achieve — getting people back to work while guaranteeing them justice and democratic rights in the name of democracy, which the trade union movement has been more to the fore of bringing about than have the Government.

1.34 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. David Trippier): I congratulate the hon. Member for St. Helens, North (Mr. Evans) on initiating this debate. Labour Members have frequently referred to employment rights. I, too, am extremely concerned about employment rights, and the rights of those who do not have jobs. I am concerned about the rights of employers to employ people without being cluttered with a whole raft of unnecessary regulations. The hon. Gentleman is concerned about the protection of the rights of those who have a job. I am concerned about the encouragement of enterprise and the creation of genuine jobs. I am anxious to develop a whole range of policies designed to improve the flexibility of the labour market and to equip individuals for the jobs that are becoming available.

I am sure that I do not need to remind the hon. Gentleman or the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) of the winter of discontent in 1979, which led to the fall of the Labour Government. The hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer) conveniently forgot about that. Throughout the country there is no doubt about what led to the demise of the Labour Government. It was on every television set and in every national newspaper.

Mr. Heffer: I did not forget that. At the time I told my people that they were taking a stupid step in taking on the trade union movement by making an unnecessary 5 per cent. calculation about wages. If the hon. Gentleman had been in the House for as long as I have, he would know that I said that from the Government side at that time.

Mr. Trippier: I have great respect for the hon. Gentleman, and if he says that he said that, I am sure that he did. My point was not about the 5 per cent. limit but about the flying pickets. Trade unions benefited from the legislation introduced by the Labour Administration, legislation for which the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) was partially responsible. It was wholly unacceptable, and led to the demise of the Government of which the right hon. Gentleman was a member.

Obviously, the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East wishes to forget that, and the hon. Member for St. Helens, North did not even refer to it. One of the most damning indictments of the effects of the industrial relations that were perpetuated by the Labour Government came from a committee set up by the former Labour Prime Minister, now Lord Wilson of Rievaulx. The Wilson committee commissioned a firm of consultants to conduct a survey into constraints on investments facing companies. High-ranking representatives in many medium-sized companies were interviewed and the report states that the researchers were

"frankly surprised at the strength of feeling that was held"

on employment legislation by many companies. The main concern was that companies experienced increasing difficulties in adjusting the size of the work force to fluctuations in market conditions. The report continued:

"The great majority of companies surveyed were therefore extremely cautious in taking on labour and we were left in no doubt that this adversely affected investment decisions, including in some cases, the choice between the United Kingdom and some overseas countries."

As one company finance director put it:

"Labour used to be a variable cost, it is now becoming a fixed overhead and so I need to be much more sure of an investment proposal's viability before I will sanction it."

That is an important point, but no Labour Member has said a word about the effect on employers of the bureaucratic legislation that the Labour Government introduced.

The survey took the opinion of those who employ the people to whom Opposition Members refer. It tickles me to death to listen to the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East because he merely continually puts the case for trade unions and trade unionists, as if jobs are manufactured from thin air. Who employs those people? The hon. Gentleman will have to face facts. If he continues to preach the propaganda that we have heard today — that he will repeal every part of the legislation that we have introduced since 1979 — it may please his hon. Friends, but it will frighten to death the employers whom we are trying to encourage to increase their work forces.

When we decided to remove the bureaucracy mentioned by my hon. Friends the Members for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Forth) and Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham), we set out as one of our main tasks the repeal of the Employment Protection Act 1975 to loosen the straitjacket of regulation. We took several steps to relieve that burden, the most important of which was the qualifying period for unfair dismissal. It was increased from six months to one year generally, and later to two years in firms of 20 or fewer employees. But because we and the Wilson committee had listened to what employers wanted to establish a fairer balance, although we wished to protect the rights of individuals, we wished to introduce a balance so that employers would be encouraged to employ people.

That point was absent from the speech of the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent. When he was Secretary of State for Employment I have no doubt that he approached the problems of trade unions and industrial relations in as responsible a way as he could. He passionately believed that he was doing the right thing, but the legislation for which he and his right hon. Friends were responsible encouraged employers not only to shed labour but, in many cases, to be terrified of taking on just one more person.

Mr. Foot: The Minister must consult the document published by the Department of Employment. After all the effects that he described, more people were employed, not fewer.

Mr. Trippier: I understand that the right hon. Gentleman referred to that document. However, my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Worcestershire talked about the increase in employment, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North-East. It is significant that since 1983—it takes some time for a new Government to deregulate legislation that was wrongly put on the statute book—until the present day, there was an increase in employment far greater than that in any other member state of the EC. The right hon. Gentleman cannot deny that.

All that I am saying is that we need a fairer balance—a balance which the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East did not try to strike in his speech.

Mr. Leighton: What about Wapping?

Mr. Trippier: I shall deal with Wapping, for the second time this week, and I shall return to the remarks made by the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent.

The Government are trying to strike a balance. The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East must accept that if he continues between now and the election to peddle the story that he peddled today, many people will be so frightened that they will look abroad, as they did during the life of the previous Labour Government. He must start thinking carefully about obtaining the right balance between trade union rights and employers' rights. Employers will provide jobs in the future. He cannot expect the Government, national or local, to provide all our employment. The vast bulk of jobs are in the private sector, and the hon. Gentleman forgets that 96 per cent. of firms in the private sector are small—employing between one and 200 people.

Mr. Prescott: With record bankruptcies.

Mr. Trippier: And the highest number of start-ups. The hon. Gentleman will have to get up a bit earlier to catch me out on this. The net increase in small firms is the highest in recorded history and the number of self-employed is the highest in 60 years, as my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) pointed out.

We want to free those employers from red tape. I shall endeavour to explain to the Opposition how we have preserved the basic rights of employees. I make no apology for the Government's reform of the wages councils, of which the hon. Members for Kingston upon Hull, East and for St. Helens, North made such great play. Contrary to the claim of the hon. Member for St. Helens, North, we are not discriminating against young people. We are discriminating in their favour by removing the wages council constraints so as to give people under the age of 21 the most important thing that we can give them—a foot on the first rung of the employment ladder.

Mr. Prescott: By sacking their mothers.

Mr. Trippier: As for employees' rights, the hon. Gentleman gives the impression that we have scrapped the lot, but as he well knows, in the Wages Bill—now in Standing Committee—we are increasing the rights of the workers. We are abolishing the Truck Acts, which date from 1896 and are completely outdated and archaic, but we are building in new protections to limit the deductions made from employees and to ensure that they are told about their new rights in terms of the employer's ability to make deductions if necessary.

Mr. Prescott: We did that.

Mr. Trippier: It was in the Bill from the outset. We were not persuaded into it by the Opposition in any shape or form. It is absurd for the hon. Member for St. Helens, North to suggest that we have dismantled the system of employment rights that we inherited. We are modernising it to bring it up to date and into tune with the spirit of enterprise that we are endeavouring to foster.

The word "enterprise" was absent from every Opposition speech. The Opposition do not understand the meaning of the word. They do not understand small firms. They think that they understand co-operatives and are suprised to find a Minister who also favours co-opertives, but they do not understand small firms. Yet 96 per cent. of firms are small. They are the employers who will increase employment in this country. The very large firms are scarcely likely to increase their share of the employment market, as my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon made clear. As a result of advanced technology and improved productivity per man, they are more likely to shed employees than to take on more. We must therefore look to the 96 per cent. of small firms who have to consider the balance of choice in deciding whether to take on another employee.

Of course we are prepared to go some way to meet the points made by the Opposition by introducing new rights such as those being dealt with in the Standing Committee on the Wages Bill—and so we should. That is fair enough, but in introducing this new legislation we must constantly remember that we must strike a balance. The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East never mentions the word "balance". He talks about co-operation but he never in any speech refers to the burdens which may be on the shoulders of business men and employers. *[Interruption.]* We shall be fascinated to hear exactly what the Opposition intend to do in the unlikely event of their ever returning to power. We have heard about every dot and comma of what the Leader of the Opposition has said. The Opposition do not know what they are saying and what the effect will be, but I am happy to let them go on saying it—indeed, I encourage it.

The past seven years have seen major changes in the British industrial relations scene. We have come so far that it might be difficult for the Opposition to remember how things were before our step-by-step legislation began. The time before was the age of the shop steward. It was an age when the moderate majority were manipulated by the militant few. The so-called heroes of that age were men like Red Robbo and Jack Dash, who were notorious for spending more time outside the gates than at work.

What has happened since? The names that make folk history now are Declan Hughes, the farmworker, who wanted to know why the Transport and General Workers union would not publish its election results by branch, and Medlock Bibby, who walked through a dockers' picket line in protest at an unconstitutional strike. We must not forget Silver Birch, who, with those other working miners, simply asked Arthur Scargill to keep to the union rules. There is not a shop steward among them. They are ordinary working men. The fact is that 99 per cent. of shop stewards today have never led a strike.

I went to some lengths to avoid mentioning personalities in the Wapping dispute during our debate on Monday. That did not please the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent or his hon. Friends, but I do not want to say anything to exacerbate the dispute. I take on board one comment by the right hon. Gentleman in relation to that

dispute. He said that ACAS could have a significant role. I understand what he says and am sympathetic. ACAS is following the dispute closely. The right hon. Gentleman will welcome that. It is willing to make itself available at any time. The right hon. Gentleman and his colleagues must not keep asking to become involved. They tried that, with the beer and sandwiches at No. 10, when they were in power.

Mr. O'Neill: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Trippier: I am sorry, but I am running out of time. I must sit down so that other hon. Members can make their contribution. I have allowed several interventions.

Mr. O'Neill: Give way.

Mr. Trippier: No. I am desperately anxious to reply to other hon. Members.

I have a considerable amount of time and some respect for the hon. Member for St. Helens, North. I must say to him, in the nicest possible way, and without embarrassing him—no doubt this will be struck from the record in his local paper so that it will not do him any harm—that before he thinks too much about turning the clock back, he should recognise that to go back to the 1970s and the flying pickets, the car park democracy and the worst strike record in Europe, would be disastrous. This Government's sights are set on the 1990s and beyond. We are fortunate to have a good starting point in that this is a period of the greatest industrial peace since the last war.

1.54 pm

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): One of the problems that Tory Ministers have had in the last two or three years is trying to be credible about their 1979 policies. My guess is that many people in the post-1979 period had the impression that it just might be possible, after that so-called winter of discontent—I describe it as something else—that the Tories had an answer. For about two or three years a lot of people bought that idea. The trouble is that after seven years people have come to the conclusion that the policies are not working. The Tories have had seven years to get the so-called new entrepreneurial society off the ground, to reduce the dole queues and to stop the bankruptcies, but none of it is coming right. That is the problem that they have to face between now and the next election.

In view of statements made in the past few weeks by MacGregor and other notable people, especially Murdoch, more and more people are concluding that the Government are hand in glove with the bosses and will do everything possible to hammer the trade unions, put more people out of work, have a dole queue of 3 million to 4 million as a reservoir of labour and depress the wages of those in work.

Reference has been made to the so-called winter of discontent. I cannot remember any NUPE flying pickets then. I remember flying pickets during the miners' strikes in 1972 and 1974, because I took part in them, but there were none anywhere in 1978. The Minister ought to get his facts right before he makes such nonsensical remarks.

I say to my hon. Friends who may have jobs in the next Labour Government that the real problem in 1978 was that the then Labour Government got enmeshed in an incomes policy. The result was that a lot of low-paid people said, "What's going off here—5 per cent. for us and 5 per cent. for those on £20,000 and £30,000 a year, with a few perks for them on the side? We are not buying that." I say to my hon. Friends that next time they should not talk about workers' rights if they are prepared to have an incomes policy for people on low pay.

There will never be an incomes policy for chartered accountants or solicitors; they never have an incomes policy round their necks. Members of Parliament never have an incomes policy; they have catching-up exercises. All the top salaried people who got 46 per cent. rises under this Tory Government last year never have incomes policies. The posh papers say, "They have not had a rise for the three years." But who wants a rise for three years when they know that they will get a 50 per cent. rise at the end of those three years and will be carted about in a free car and have all the rest of the perks?

I hope that we will not have any more nonsense about an incomes policy, and I hope that the motion has no hidden references when it talks about co-operation. I hope that it is not suggested that trade unionists should have to co-operate with the Government in a 5, 6, 7 or 8 per cent. pay policy.

I wanted to get that on record before anybody accused me of giving in to a new co-operative Utopia. I do not believe that we can build that sort of co-operation in a capitalist society. We might get it when we have Socialists running the economy and when Socialists are running the banks and all the companies that are currently being sold to America. When we have companies in charge of the economy that are accountable to the state and the people, we can talk about doing something else, but not until then.

The march last Sunday was about justice. The 10,000 people who marched in London were in some ways protesting about many of the things that have been said in this debate. People from Wapping joined the miners because they knew that they had had their rights ripped from them by Murdoch, in collaboration with the Government.

I do not think that there is any doubt that the conspiracy that has been revealed between MacGregor and the Government has been repeated at Wapping. Indeed, I am prepared to go on record. The enterprise zone in docklands was meant to provide new jobs. The Government said, "Let's set up an enterprise zone. We will put Bob Mellish, or someone like him, in charge and create jobs for the Wapping people." That was the idea, but Murdoch went down there and, instead of taking 5,000 jobs and adding a few more, which should be done in an enterprise zone, he reduced the 5,000 to 500 and brought the workers not from Wapping, but from Southampton and Bristol.

My guess is that when the enterprise zone was set up, this Tory Government were in collaboration with Murdoch. We may have to wait for a few years, but when Murdoch has fallen out with the Prime Minister, when she has had a diplomatic illness and left the scene and is making up the blue curtains at the £500,000 house in Dulwich, Murdoch may follow MacGregor's example and spill the beans.

On the march last Sunday I saw people who were casualties of the Tory Government. I saw people from GCHQ who were marching and who are still saying to the British nation, "We were deprived of the simple civil liberty of being able to belong to a trade union." This Government have rabbited on for years and years about the right to belong to a trade union, but, in the case of GCHQ, the Government say that there is no such right. Members of the Health and Safety Executive were also on that march. They said what many Opposition Members have

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repeatedly said in the House: that one of the ways in which this Government are attacking the rights of workers is by cutting back on the Health and Safety Executive so that private employers do not have to pay their whack if, through negligence, people are killed in factories. Since this Government set up the youth training scheme, 14 kids have been killed.

There were other people on the march as well. There were miners from Scotland, like Bob Young who has been deprived of getting his job back, even though he did nothing wrong during the strike. There were others from Polmaise who went down that pit during the strike because the National Coal Board said that it was being flooded. Two or three Scots miners went down to protect the pit and to act as safety men. Because they did that they were sacked by this vicious NCB which is in league with the Government. People from every coalfield in Britain were on that march. They all tell the same story. They are among the 550 who have been sacked and victimised by the National Coal Board and the Government. They want the next Labour Government to ensure that their rights will be protected, even when there is an unofficial dispute.

The people on that march were joined by one of the newest recruits, Paul Whetton, the branch secretary of Bevercotes colliery in the Nottinghamshire coalfield. There are now NUM branches in every single village and pit in Nottinghamshire. Paul Whetton pinned up a notice on the colliery's notice board. That was always done in the past, but, because this is primarily the territory of the Union of Democratic Mineworkers, he got the sack for pinning up that notice. Paul Whetton's treatment has to be compared with that of Mr. Foulstone, who took the miners to court. He has not been victimised. He, dollar thief, went to gaol, came out, and, unlike the 500 or so miners in Durham, Scotland, the north-east and the Midlands, got his job back. He is working for the National Coal Board.

The Minister, with his silly grin, does not care tuppence because he is not interested in justice. He never has been. He showed his true colours when he was mouthing against the Silentnight workers. Every hon. Member who was in the House that night and heard his vicious tones will remember what he said about the owner of the Silentnight factory, Mr. Tom Clarke, a friend of the Prime Minister —just like Mr. Abdul Shamji and all the rest of the crooks that this Tory Government have lined up ever since they got into power. They are not on the side of the workers. They are on the side of all those poeple in the City, and they always have been.

When Johnson Matthey went under, because it was an uneconomic unit of production, someone got on the phone to the Prime Minister and said, "It's uneconomic. Shut it." But the Chancellor of the Exchequer was there, and he said, "No, it's not a pit; it's a bank." So the right hon. Lady said, "Save it, then. It's one of us." That is why this Government do not care tuppence about hounding Peter Cameron Webb and Peter Dixon, who got away with £39 million from Lloyd's. They have not bothered to send the fraud squad across to America where they are living the life of Riley. No, they are more concerned about hammering the workers—miners, print workers, and the rest.

That is why at the next general election — starting with Fulham, which is not long away—this Government will be shown to have reached the end of their tether. People are fed up with hearing all this noise about cutting taxes and creating an entrepreneurial society. When taxes have gone up by 5 per cent. and when all these liberties have been stripped away from working class people, the result of the next general election will show that people have seen through the injustice that permeates every single pore of every single member of the Cabinet.

I am pleased that we have had this debate. It has given us a chance to put on record what we feel about this Government's attack on working class people. I am confident that when the Government face the challenge of the next election, they will be defeated because of the way that they have treated ordinary working class people. The Government have treated them with contempt. At the same time, they have looked after their own class — the bosses, the bankers, the people at Lloyd's. Those people have got five or six different jobs, but there are 5 million people out of work who are desperate to find enough money to maintain their families. They will provide the verdict in the next election.

2.5 pm

Mr. Lewis Stevens (Nuneaton): I congratulate the hon. Member for St. Helens, North (Mr. Evans) on bringing to the House the many issues contained under the heading of his motion "Employment Rights". In many respects I do not agree with the motion but there are one or two important words. One such word is co-operation and the other is conciliation. If one goes round the country today, one will see co-operation between the trade unions and management in many factories. One can also see conciliation. There is direct involvement which could not have been foreseen a few years ago. It is there and it is working. It is wanted by the workers. Companies are flexible and are investing more and we are thus seeing the growth of change. It is this change and enterprise that the country was lacking for many years.

I do not wish to place the blame on the restrictive practices of the trade unions or on the management—it is a combined national disaster. We were too slow to realise how our competitors were changing. It is only recently, especially with Industry Year, that there is a recognition of the change which was needed in the industrial community. This was especially true of the trade unions. They had developed powers for all sorts of reasons which were too great to be harnessed properly. Therefore, although the majority of companies and trade unions worked well together there were some areas of difficulty. The major catastrophies which occurred in some of our major industries were due to the lack of control of some unions.

The right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot), when discussing the Wapping dispute, uttered the words "under duress". He said that the workers were under duress. My goodness! One need only look back to industry of the 1960s to realise how many negotiations with unions were under duress. The only economic thing for managements to do was to concede. We now have a different balance. My example may not be good but, for goodness sake, we must encourage what we are witnessing in our trade union movement and in industry.

Many ordinary trade union members—not just those who have long experience of organising their unions— are relieved that legislation has come in. They now know where they stand and, if they take action, how far it is likely to spread. There will be no return to 1974 and the

presence of flying pickets at certain disputes. One of the great fears of trade unions involved in disputes is how far the dispute will spread and what damage it will do. Past disputes often got totally out of hand. The legislation we have brought in will give trade union members a choice. They may decide what action should be taken.

It is no surprise that the political levy was not wanted by many trade unions, but the option is there and has been chosen by some trade unionists. Members of unions will have a choice. They will not be controlled by those remote from them. They can control the union themselves. We are witnessing a great improvement—a direct involvement and participation. Such participation has been achieved by Government measures such as privatisation and employers buying in as well as the co-operation between management and employees. Surely, Opposition Members should be looking to develop further that process of integration between employer and employee. We talk of Japan getting it right because the work force is involved, but the same is happening in other countries. We have been a bit slow.

The greatest danger to industrial relations is not the trade union movement or legislation but the rhetoric of Opposition Members. They are the greatest proponents of the supposedly easy way out. They argue that if people have all manner of rights thrown at them they can dictate what they want. Many other factors dictate what they can get. People realise that we need change and appreciate that the Government have provided training facilities and encouraged investment in new technologies, and increased budgets accordingly. People will also recognise the false promises of Opposition Members for what they are. Giving rights does not create jobs. The jobs are created by working together.

Mr. Frank Cook: That does not happen now.

Mr. Stevens: It is happening, and more than some Opposition Members like to realise.

Mr. Cook: Where?

Mr. Stevens: I congratulate some parts of the trade union movement, which have taken it upon themselves to get involved with retraining. They are encouraging members, whether in or out of work, to increase their skills in new technologies, for example, or just to broaden their skills. The unions are doing that in co-operation with and backed by employers and the Government. I am sure that we shall use those skills, but Opposition Members merely attack such participation. They believe in restoring power to groups of people who are isolated from the day-to-day work. That policy failed before, and it will fail again. The balance is better now than it has been for years.

2.12 pm

Mr. Don Dixon (Jarrow): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for St. Helens, North (Mr. Evans) on his success in the ballot and on his choice of wording in the motion. He and I know the sharp end of trade unionism as we were both shop stewards in the shipbuilding industry. For a long time we were chairman and vice-chairman of a shop stewards' committee, so we know a little about what we are talking about in regard to workers' rights and trade union rights.

Listening to the Minister, one wonders what is happening. When we consider what he said the Government have done to create jobs since 1979, we must wonder what the 4 million unemployed think. People in my area believe that he will have to stop giving help as it seems to be getting them nowhere.

The motion speaks of anti-trade union policies. In that regard we have to go back to 1978, not 1979, when a committee under the chairmanship of the present Secretary of State for Transport, comprising top Tories, sat to decide how to deal with trade unions when a Conservative Government were elected. The report suggested hitting strikers financially, a national police force and getting non-union lorry drivers to get supplies across picket lines. Every part of that report was put into operation during the miners' strike.

Under section 6 of the Social Security Act 1980, for the first time since 1896, the dependants of strikers can be penalised if the breadwinner in the family decides to go on strike. Under that Tory legislation I would advise anyone who is working that, if they want to look after their families and get the full benefits under social security they should not go to work and ballot for a strike. They would be better off going to work and shooting the manager because by doing so, they would be sent to gaol and the state would look after a worker's dependants. However, if a worker goes to work, votes in a ballot and goes on strike, he will suffer a £16 deduction.

Apart from Tory legislation, the way in which public authorities have dealt with strikers has also caused problems. During the miners' strike the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food returned from Europe after discussing milk quotas. The National Farmers Union was not happy with the Government's position. At the same time there was a milk race at Aberystwyth. The farmers barricaded the roads with their Land Rovers and tractors but the policemen helped the cyclists to cross the barricades. Not one farmer was arrested and yet, just down the road, miners on picket lines were arrested for stepping off the pavement and on to the road.

The Prime Minister went to Swansea to address a Tory conference. Again there was a protest and demonstration about the milk quotas outside the venue and the Prime Minister was hit by an egg. No one was arrested for that, yet miners and miners' wives were arrested on the picket lines simply for shouting "scab". The Oppostion are, therefore, not solely concerned with Tory legislation. We are also concerned with the way that the public authorities deal with one set of workers as against another set.

My hon. Friends have mentioned the Employment Act 1982. As you will recall, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you and I served on the Committee on that Bill. Clauses 1 and 2 of that Bill were introduced by the former Secretary of State for Employment, the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit). The right hon. Member spoke about neutering the trade unions through that legislation and the Prime Minister at that time spoke about the trade unions as the enemy within. That is why Government policy has motivated the present employment and trade union legislation.

Sections 1 and 2 of the Trade Union Act 1984 allocate £2 million for the free-riders, scabs and blacklegs and those who would not join a closed shop union. The then Secretary of State set that sum aside for those free-riders.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) referred to the miners' strike. During that strike the Minister came to the Dispatch Box and asked why the miners would not accept the findings of the independent review board. The Minister believed that all the miners'

[Mr. Don Dixon]

problems would disappear if they would accept the recommendations. However, since the board was set up a situation has arisen in Northumberland where a recommendation that Bates colliery should be kept open has been overturned by the National Coal Board which has decided to close it. So much for the Minister suggesting that the mineworkers should accept the suggestions of the independent review board.

My hon. Friends have referred to the Wages Bill. We have heard a peculiar explanation from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State about that Bill and the waiving of the Truck Acts, for example, that defend workers' rights to have payments in cash or cheque. That right is to be denied. People under the age of 21 are being removed from the care of the wages council. Britain is the first of the 94 nations that are signatories to ILO convention 26 to deratify on that proposal. When the Wages Bill received the Royal Assent, youngsters will start work and be sacked when they are 21. They will be paid a pittance from the time they start work until they are paid off.

The Wages Bill also deals with redundancy payments. Certain firms are already fetching redundancies forward before the Bill reaches the statute book. In future any employer who employs more than 10 men will claim nothing from the central redundancy fund. They want to be able to claim from the central redundancy fund and so they are bringing forward redundancies.

The motion is about trade union rights and members of unions having the right to work and to be treated like human beings. Trade unionists do not want any special treatment. They do not want to be mollycoddled by employers. They want the right to work and to negotiate and they do not want those rights to be taken away from them by means of Government legislation.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for St. Helens, North on introducing the motion and I congratulate also all my right hon. and hon. Friends who have participated in the debate, who have spoken with knowledge of working people.

2.20 pm

Mr. Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): As someone who has had the privilege of listening to every minute of this albeit short debate, I am grateful for being called to participate in it, especially as the chance of the second motion on the Order Paper being reached this afternoon has now been extinguished.

I join hon. Members on both sides of the House in congratulating the hon. Member for St. Helens, North (Mr. Evans) on his good luck in the ballot, on introducing the motion and on raising a most important issue that is concerned centrally with employment rights. The House cannot accept that employment rights should be seen in isolation, and the full terms of the motion underline that.

I wish to talk about employment responsibilities. I accept that the Government have such responsibilities, but so, too, do employers, trade unions and employees. The central and principal responsibility of the Government is to try to promote a framework which is conducive to encouraging maximum employment. It is also their duty to hold the ring between the rights and responsibilities of employers and those of employees. There is no doubt that the Government have a duty as well to hold the ring and ensure that there is a fair balance between the rights of trade unions and employees and members of individual unions.

I contend that recent employment legislation has redressed the balance and set it where it should be. Before that happened, far too much overweening power was held by trade unions. It is not an exaggeration to talk about the Tamanny hall trade unionism of some union leaders.

Mr. Frank Cook: Name them.

Mr. Chapman: I have heard nothing from Opposition Members about the rights of the public in a trade union dispute. I do not deny that there should be a legislative framework of employees' rights, but the House must deal carefully with any legislation in that area, from whatever Government it comes. We have the rights of our constituents to uphold, and we have the rights of the public to uphold as well. When there is an industrial dispute on the railway line that passes through my constituency, for example, surely the consumer, the person using the public transport, has his rights. It is our responsibility to defend those rights. That is part of a wider process of consideration, and the issue should not be confined to the narrow employment rights of employees.

When I hear what I might have to accept is the knee-jerk reaction of Mr. Rupert Murdoch and what he has done at Wapping, I take account of what has been said on both sides of the House in justification and opprobrium of Mr. Murdoch. Against that background, I ask: what about the anarchic blackmailing practices of sections of the trade unions throughout the 1960s, the 1970s and the first part of the 1980s, which destroyed vast parts of the organ of the fourth estate of our realm? What about the rights of the readership? What about the rights of free speech and free information? That is at least a part of the discussion in which we should be involved.

There is no doubt that in recent years industrialised countries have gone through one of those cyclical changes in employment that come about rarely. The industrialised world has gone through the worst recession in 50 years. If I had to name one incident that triggered off that recession, it would be the tripling of oil prices in 1979 and 1980. The right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot), to whom I listened with great care and attention, who has great experience in employment policy pointed out that in 1979 and 1980 the number of people employed was the highest ever. The right hon. Gentleman might therefore accept that reduced employment is directly attributable to the world recession.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) said that Britain was an exporting nation. That was not a platitude. As he pointed out, 30 per cent. of our output is exported. We cannot divorce ourselves from what is happening in the world. We have to fight for our section of the world market. We must be competitive. If we are not, our people will lose their jobs.

With all the traumas, dramas and difficulties we have experienced in the first six years of this decade, I believe that our best prospect in the remaining part of the decade and beyond depends upon the enviable trio we have at present — steady growth, low inflation and improved output.

The problem is fundamentally caused by the high level of unemployment, but there are also record numbers of people seeking employment. As my hon. Friend the

Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) pointed out, in the past three years the number of people in employment has increased by 700,000. The reason is not only the baby boom in the 1960s, which has meant that more and more people are entering the job market, but social trends. An increasing number of women are not prepared, rightly, to stay working full-time at home. They are seeking jobs and making a great contribution to the economy. Many women are seeking part-time jobs.

It is all very well for parliamentarians to comment on what is right or wrong about Government policy, but we owe it to the people to be constructive and to make suggestions that will point the way ahead and encourage employment. The construction industry is still our greatest industry, whether measured in terms of manpower or of output. I dare to mention that industry because, generally speaking, it provides employment on a large scale and is labour intensive.

We know the amount of money that needs to be spent on the fabric of our nation. Hardly a speech goes by in any debate without mention of the need to spend more on our infrastructure. There is not the remotest possibility of all that necessary work being provided by public funds. If the Government increased the amount of public funds for capital investment in the nation's fabric, they would set off the old, dreary well worn path of increased inflation, which would ultimately lead to more and more having to be spent to achieve less and less. The key to success in the construction industry must be to attract more and more private investment.

It being half past Two o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

RENEWABLE ENERGY SOURCES (PROMOTION) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 21 March.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That, at the sitting on Monday 10th March, the Motion in the name of Mr. John Biffen relating to Privileges may be proceeded with, though opposed, until half-past Eleven o'clock or for one and a half hours after it has been entered upon, whichever is the later; and if proceedings thereon have not been disposed of by that hour Mr. Speaker shall put the Question on any Amendment which may have been moved, and shall then put forthwith the Question on any other Amendments selected by him which may then be moved, and on the Main Question or the Main Question, as amended.—*[Mr. Biffen.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That, at the sitting on Tuesday 11th March,—

(1) The provisions of paragraph (1)(*b*) of Standing Order No. 3 (Exempted business) shall not apply to the Motion in the name of the Prime Minister relating to European Community Shipping Policy or to the Motion relating to the Local Government (Temporary Provisions) (Northern Ireland) Order 1986; and

(2) Mr. Speaker shall put any Questions necessary to dispose of the first Motion not later than three hours after it has been entered upon, and shall put the Question on the second Motion not later than one and a half hours after it has been entered upon.—*[Mr. Biffen.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

Bates Colliery

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Archie Hamilton.]*

2.30 pm

Mr. John Ryman (Blyth Valley): I wish to raise the decision of the National Coal Board to close Bates colliery in Blyth. I am astonished that the Secretary of State for Energy is not on the Treasury Bench to answer on behalf of the Government. He had ample notice—more than a week ago—that this debate was to take place. He has been personally involved in many negotiations with the members of the local authority and members of the coal mining unions in relation to this matter. He knows the important principle involved in this subject, because it is the first occasion upon which the recommendation of an independent colliery review tribunal has been specifically rejected by the National Coal Board. In those circumstances I am astonished that the Secretary of State is not here, because he, not the Parliamentary Under-Secretary, was present during some of the negotiations. The only natural inference to draw from that is that the Government do not consider a pit closure of this proportion to be important enough to bring the Secretary of State to the House on a Friday afternoon. No doubt he has other more frivolous pursuits to follow.

The facts of the case surrounding the proposed closure of the colliery are well known. This colliery, in Northumberland, used to employ 2,000 men. That number was later reduced to 1,700 and then to 1,400, and, by agreement with the NCB, it now employs about 880 men. There are 29 million tonnes of high-quality workable reserves. Production at the mine is better than it has ever been. The agreed evidence of the technical expert before the tribunal was that there are no insuperable technical problems to be overcome in the further working of the pit.

The recommendation of the chairman of the tribunal was that the plan of Mr. Bulmer, one of the engineers, should be accepted, that the pit should be kept open for at least another two years and that, within those two years, it would become a viable proposition mining high-quality coal and producing it in larger and larger quantities. That is the background to the case.

One has to look further back to see what has happened. The starting point is the autumn of 1984 when the National Association of Colliery Overmen, Deputies and Shotfirers made an agreement with the NCB about the setting up of the tribunal.

The Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Energy answered questions in the House in February 1985. In answer to my right hon. Friend the Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock), both specifically said that the agreement between NACODS and the NCB was "sacrosanct". It is interesting to note that although the Government, as long ago as late 1984 and early 1985, were saying that the agreement was "sacrosanct", now that the recommendation has been made to keep the pit open, their view has changed.

To complete the picture, in June 1985 the Secretary of State for Energy personally met me, representatives of the coal-mining unions and the constituency, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy and representatives from the local authority. At that time negotiations were going on between the NUM and the NCB about whether the colliery review procedure could

[Mr. John Ryman]

be established between the other unions in the coal-mining industry and the NCB. The meeting was held in the room of the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine), who was then a member of the Government, because the room of the Secretary of State was not large enough. We spent an hour and a half, having seen Mr. MacGregor the chairman of the NCB, earlier that day, and, on the whole, discussion ranged round the new colliery review procedure. The clear recollection of everybody in that room representing the coal-mining unions and local authorities was that the Secretary of State for Energy repeated that once the tribunal had been set up and the review procedure conducted, a decision by means the review procedure would be binding on the Government and the NCB.

In October 1985 a long meeting was held at the Department of Energy in the room of the Secretary of State. That meeting was attended by some Labour Members from the northern group, the president of the Northumberland area NUM, my right hon. Friend the Member for Salford, East (Mr. Orme) and me. The Secretary of State was obviously in a hurry because he was on his way to the Conservative party conference, but he had the courtesy to see us. I remember it clearly, as it was the week after the Labour party conference.

We have the minutes of that meeting, which took place on a Friday, in our possession, and the undisputed evidence was that negotiations for the new colliery review procedure were progressing well. At one stage the Secretary of State left the room to make a telephone call to Hobart house and he expected that agreement would be drawn up soon. He was right. The new agreement was drawn up within a couple of weeks. On that occasion, the clear impression given by the Secretary of State was, once again, that the Government and the NCB would respect the decision and recommendation of the independent colliery review tribunal.

What happened? The members of the tribunal were appointed, headed by an eminent judge, a law lord, and six eminent members of the Bar—all senior silks with great experience. Early in January 1986 the hearings began. Before they began, the preliminary hearing took place to decide the procedure and documentation. The hearing on Bates colliery took several days. Documents had been submitted in advance, and each side was permitted to call oral evidence, to make submissions and to cross-examine witnesses called by the other side. The evidence was heard by Mr. Peter Bowsher, QC, and it lasted for more than two days. Every opportunity was given to the NCB to adduce any evidence that it wanted. A similar concession was made to the coal-mining unions and to Blyth Valley council.

A mass of evidence was produced. The documentary evidence was examined and the oral evidence was cross-examined. Lengthy legal submissions were made, and Mr. Peter Bowsher, having analysed the evidence, carefully made a report which ran to many pages. It was a careful analysis of the evidence. Paragraph 7 of his final conclusions makes it clear that he accepted the case put forward by the unions and by Blyth Valley council, and that he rejected the evidence of the National Coal Board. His strong recommendation, made in detail, was that the colliery should remain open for at least two years. He thought that if it remained open for two years on the Bulmer plan, it would prosper even more. That recommendation was issued on 4 February and considered by the NCB that week. On 20 February, the NCB said that it did not accept the recommendation of the tribunal and would close the colliery.

Those are the undisputed facts. The first thing that emerges from that—one wishes to be entirely accurate about the matter — is that the Government have completely broken faith with the coal-mining unions in Northumberland and with the local authority and that the Secretary of State for Energy has completely broken faith with me. In June 1985, he made the remarks to me which I have described, which were entirely inconsistent with his conduct in February 1986. The only inference to be drawn from that is that he was not being frank with me in June 1985, or that a more sinister reason influenced his actions in February 1986. There is no other logical explanation.

The next matter that emerges is that Mr. MacGregor and Mr. Archibald, who is the director of the north-east region, are on record as having said many times, orally and in writing, that, once the recommendation was made, the NCB would give full weight to it. What does the phrase "full weight" mean? It cannot mean ignoring the recommendation. When the board rejected the recommendation, it gave no full reasons for doing so. Mr. MacGregor made off-the-cuff comments to a few Conservative students in Nottingham, saying that the board was rejecting the suggestions of the independent colliery review procedure. They were not suggestions; they were recommendations. The coal board had said previously that the recommendations would be fully considered and that full weight would be given to them.

It is no wonder that the Secretary of State for Energy does not have the guts to be here this afternoon. He has flunked it completely. When I asked him many times during Energy Question Time what the Government's attitude was, he shrugged his shoulders and, with his usual nonchalant incompetence, said, "It is nothing to do with the Government. I am the Secretary of State for Energy. These matters are entirely for the National Coal Board."

Yesterday, and on Tuesday, the Prime Minister said that the decisions were entirely a matter for the National Coal Board. As long ago as February 1985, the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister were saying that the decisions would be binding and sacrosanct, but now they shrug their shoulders and say that it has nothing to do with the Government, but is entirely a matter for the NCB. the deputy chairman of the NCB was a permanent secretary at the Department of Energy, while the present Secretary of State was in office—an unhappy coincidence.

The present position requires robust thinking and careful analysis. Unless the Government change their mind and accept that they are responsible for our coal mining industry, and unless the NCB changes its mind, the colliery will die. With it will die the jobs of 880 men, the economy of Blyth and the coalmining community. The National Coal Board smugly and arrogantly says that there will be no compulsory redundancies, but that is a lie because there are not enough jobs in Northumberland to transfer 880 men and the pits at Ellington and Ashington cannot possibly absorb that manpower.

One is slow to make allegations unless they can be proved, because wild and unfounded allegations are too often made in the House. Having considered the matter very carefully and examined all the documents, however, and having studied the transcripts of all the broadcasts by

Mr. MacGregor and Mr. Archibald, there is no other way to describe their conduct except to say that they were thoroughly dishonest. They were dishonest with the coalmining community, they were dishonest with the people of Northumberland and they were probably dishonest with the Government.

I still have friends at Hobart house and at Team Valley and of course I respect the confidence of my sources, but in my respectful submission there is great unease both at Hobart house and at Team Valley about the conduct of the directors of the NCB. The unease is not confined to the coalmining community but spreads to headquarters staff who have seen the dishonest conduct of directors determined to crush a coalmining community in the north-east of England in a vengeful and spiteful vendetta which arose in the aftermath of the miners' strike. That accusation is justified by the evidence. In the financial year before the miners' strike £2 million was invested in Bates colliery. What was the point of investing that amount if it was intended to close the colliery so soon afterwards?

Those are the facts. Let us now see what can be done because we must work together to achieve a prosperous coal mining industry.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) *rose*——

Mr. Ryman: I will give way in a moment. We should work together to increase productivity, which has already increased enormously at Bates colliery, which is an efficient, well-conducted mine producing more and more high-quality coal each week. The productivity figures are excellent. Why do the Government wish to bury a mine with 29 million tonnes of coal under the sea when, according to the colliery review, it will be in profit within two years? What a waste of investment, of skill, of coal and of humanity.

Mr. Skinner: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for allowing me a couple of minutes in the debate.

I believe that the Government and the National Coal Board connived to delude the miners, and especially the deputies in their ballot in 1984. The whole British coalfield could have been brought to a standstill, so a way round the problem had to be found. One way round it was the colliery review procedure. That procedure was adopted little knowing that well-intentioned people like my hon. Friend the Member for Blyth Valley (Mr. Ryman), who has constantly raised the matter in the House, would be able to convince the tribunal that the pit was a decent pit and should be kept open. The Government and the National Coal Board never expected to have to face the music in an instance such as this. My hon. Friend has explained that the colliery is worth keeping open, that it is viable and that it has reserves. He has explaned how it was subject to a con at the time. Much spleen and vindictiveness is poured on the miners at Bates and the north-east area because MacGregor wants to prove to the Prime Minister and to the Secretary of State for Energy that he is running the show, whatever decent people think. My hon. Friend has an outstanding case. He is to be congratulated on continuing to inform the House. I hope that he succeeds. I hope that NACODS, the deputies' union, will achieve a majority in the ballot and instead of running away from a decision, as it did last time, that it will act so that its members are able to repair the damage done in 1984.

Mr. Ryman: I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner). NACODS must get on with the job quickly. The matter is urgent. The preparation of salvage and the heightening of seams is going on now, so it is important that NACODS, which has much influence, makes it decision. It is no use behaving like Gebhard Blucher and arriving after the battle when the fight is over. The fight will continue in the House of Commons, in the coalmining industry and in the courts.

The Government have shirked their responsibility and broken their promises. They have lied to the people.

It does not matter how long the fight continues, we shall fight for the pit and its community. If we have to fight alone, so be it. But we shall not have to fight alone, because we shall be joined by all the coalmining unions, the TUC and other organisations. We are not fighting for Bates alone. We are fighting the Government on their pit closure policy.

At one time there were 200,000 miners in Britain. The Government want to get rid of 50,000 of them. We are fighting for the coalfields throughout the country—for the collieries in the north, south Wales and Kent. We are fighting for the survival of coalmining communities throughout England, Scotland and Wales.

We are convinced that, as the oil runs out, coal reserves will be the prime source of energy. What a panic there was about the drop in oil prices recently. It is essential to have an efficient and viable coalmining industry.

If the Government had the strength they could tell Mr. MacGregor "Keep that pit open, as the recommendation advises." The Government and their Ministers do not have the courage, the integrity or the will to exercise their responsibilities. I do not want to be personally abusive about Mr. MacGregor. I do not have to be, because his conduct describes itself. Mr. MacGregor did not even read the recommendation in full. He acted against it without considering it in detail.

The Secretary of State for Energy is answerable to Parliament for the administration of the industry, although he is not responsible for day-to-day management because of constitutional convention. Why does he lack the courage to say to Mr. MacGregor, "Reconsider. You might come to the same conclusion, but reconsider the report and the recommendations. Reconsider the deputations; reconsider what Members of Parliament and the experts say." The National Coal Board's own experts, the technical engineers, say that the pit is technically all right, that it contains good quality coal and that it would be viable within two years.

Surely nobody is so arrogant or conceited that he does not have the humility and understanding to say, "Perhaps I was wrong. Perhaps I made a hasty decision. Let us look at the matter again." I am asking the Government to look at the matter again. After the many representations made to them, the Government may know things that they did not know before.

The Under-Secretary came to the north-east coalfield many months ago and met miners from Bates colliery and gave them an assurance, which was not honoured. They gave him a plan for making the pit viable and he said that the closure would be reconsidered, but it never was. If the Minister has time to reply to the debate——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. The Minister will not have time if the hon. Gentleman keeps on.

Mr. Ryman: There it is. It is a long story and it has taken a long time to tell, but I am so familiar with the nauseating, pompous platitudes that emanate from the ministerial Bench about this matter that perhaps it is just as well that the Minister has not got long to reply.

The north-east of England has no confidence in the integrity of the Secretary of State for Energy and his Department. We do not believe what he says, we do not trust him and we do not consider that his words are worth anything. I have to say that frankly to the Under-Secretary. I am sorry that he is having to carry the can for his incompetent senior colleague.

In this disgraceful state of affairs I speak for the coal industry in the north-east and throughout the country. It has suffered from the ferocious policies of the Thatcher Government — the Walker incompetence, the Joseph indifference and the cruelty towards the coal mining community and in all other spheres of Government.

2.56 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. David Hunt): I congratulate the hon. Member for Blyth Valley (Mr. Ryman) on securing an opportunity to debate the future of Bates colliery, but I repudiate completely his ungenerous, incorrect and uncharacteristically discourteous remarks about my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and myself.

I know that the hon. Gentleman has been diligent on behalf of his constituents in relation to the future of the colliery. He mentioned a number of meetings that have taken place, but I recall clearly that my right hon. Friend made it clear that decisions on individual closures were entirely a matter for the NCB.

The hon. Gentleman said that wild allegations were often made in the House, and this debate has been an extreme example of that. The hon. Gentleman made some outrageous and absurd allegations about dishonesty by the chairman, the area directot and others. I also repudiate allegations made by the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner).

Surely the hon. Member for Blyth Valley knows that even now the procedures used in reaching the decision to close Bates colliery are the subject of an application for judicial review in the High Court.

Mr. Ryman: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The junior Minister has committed a grave error of judgment in mentioning a subject that is obviously sub judice. The High Court is sitting at this minute hearing matters about which the Minister knows full well.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I sought guidance on this matter before the debate started and I understand that Mr. Speaker's considered judgment is that in the circumstances the sub judice rule would not inhibit the debate.

Mr. Hunt: I was saying——

Mr. Ryman: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have already ruled.

Mr. Ryman: It is a fresh point.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have already ruled.

Mr. Ryman: It is a fresh point.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We draw stumps in three minutes.

Mr. Ryman: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The debate is clearly inhibited. Proceedings are going on at this minute, but there is a discretion——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That is the precise point on which I have ruled.

Mr. David Hunt: The hon. Member for Blyth Valley appeared to be implying that it is not for the NCB to take decisions about the future of collieries. It clearly is. The board has carefully considered this case. The hon. Member mentioned the recommendations of Mr. Bowsher and said that the pit would make a profit in two years. But conclusion No. 1 from Mr. Bowsher's report said:

> "There is no evidence that Bates colliery will ever make a profit."

It would be far better if he were to turn his attention to trying to secure new jobs in the area and to join National Coal Board (Enterprise) Ltd. in trying to create new industry and new jobs. There is a great future for the coal industry in the long-life, productive pits of the north-east, but the National Coal Board has decided that Bates colliery cannot form part of that future.

I hope that the hon. Member for Blyth Valley will put this episode behind him and instead turn his considerable energies and abilities towards bringing, perhaps in conjunction with National Coal Board (Enterprise) Ltd., alternative employment to his constituency. That company has already accomplished a great deal in the north-east. There is much more to be done. Nearly 5,000 job opportunities have already been created, over 480 of them in the north-east. That is the way forward for the Bates colliery community.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at Three o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 10 March 1986

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

ENERGY

Consumers (Complaints)

1. **Mr. Nicholas Baker** asked the Secretary of State for Energy what representations he has received about the way in which consumers' complaints will be dealt with following implementation of the provisions of the Gas Bill.

The Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. Peter Walker): I have received a number of representations on the subject of gas consumer interests after the privatisation of British Gas, including those from the national and regional gas consumers councils.

Mr. Baker: Following the implementation of the Gas Bill, will the Gas Users Council be sufficiently independent? Will there be enough voluntary helpers to enable consumers to be seen in their own homes, and will the Gas Users Council have the power to pursue complaints as far as they should be pursued in the interests of consumers?

Mr. Walker: Yes, Sir. In preparing the legislation for privatisation, I was determined to ensure that the good work done previously by the National Gas Consumers Council should be enhanced in future and should in no way deteriorate. We shall have set up an organisation with the power to create regional and local activities and local efforts, which will be far more efficient and effective in future than anything we have seen in the past.

Mr. O'Brien: I note the Secretary of State's point about the setting up of the consultative gas councils, but what provisions are being made in the event that neither side can resolve a matter, perhaps concerning prices or supply, which has nothing to do with an ombudsman? Who will settle such a problem when there is deadlock on important issues between the British Gas Corporation and the consultative councils?

Mr. Walker: In the regulated, domestic sector, the director will have the power to fix the price. On other issues, the director will also act as an arbitrator, as specified before. There is a range of complicated issues, all of which are effectively dealt with.

Energy Efficiency

2. **Mr. Tony Lloyd** asked the Secretary of State for Energy what specific action he is taking in the winter to promote energy efficiency measures in the homes of poor households and to secure the necessary investment.

Mr. Peter Walker: My energy efficiency campaign provides advice for all households on how to improve the energy efficiency of their homes. In addition, the Government-funded voluntary sector insulation projects continue to expand very rapidly, and the 90 per cent. grants under the homes insulation scheme are specifically targeted on low-income households.

Mr. Lloyd: Is the Secretary of State aware of how many of my constituents have approached me this winter because they cannot afford to heat their homes or have had to do without other things in order to heat them? As home insulation is not specifically targeted in Energy Efficiency Year, will the right hon. Gentleman approach the Department of the Environment and urge it to put back the money that has been cut from the home insulation grant scheme and, in fact, to go further and make sure that we have an adequate scheme to prevent people from dying in other severe winters?

Mr. Walker: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will inform his constituents how much better the position is now than it was a few years ago when the Labour Government were in power. This Government introduced the 90 per cent. grant and massively expanded the voluntary movement. The Government's record in this sphere is so much better than that of any previous Government that we are rather proud of it.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels: Will my right hon. Friend congratulate all the officials who last week came to the Upper Waiting Hall to promote Energy Efficiency Year? Does he agree that if all the local authorities took up the relevant packages that have been prepared, all council houses, not just the poor ones, could benefit from energy efficiency? Surely that is the way to be fair to those who, as the hon. Member for Stretford (Mr. Lloyd) said, are suffering a little.

Mr. Walker: Yes, Sir. There are currently 200 projects in the voluntary system on which a whole range of Government Departments are collaborating as never before to achieve real action, and 130,000 homes have benefited from that already. We are likely to be doubling that number in the near future.

Mr. Freeson: The Secretary of State may well give us some grand and eloquent rhetoric on this matter, but is he aware that the Government have cut sharply the budget for the home insulation scheme? Whatever the 90 per cent. grants may be, if the total budget is cut grants are not available to people anyway. Is he further aware that there has been a massive cut not only in the number but in the standards of properties rehabilitated by housing associations? Plug-in fires are now having to be put in instead of decent central heating and insulation.

Mr. Walker: The rhetoric comes from the right hon. Gentleman, while the action comes from the Government. As a Minister in a previous Administration, he should be ashamed of that Government's record. The £26 million worth of improvement grant this year dwarfs anything that come from the Labour Government.

Mr. Baldry: Is there not still scope to expand the community programme to carry out loft insulation and draught proofing schemes, particularly for the elderly?

Mr. Walker: Yes, that is a good sphere of activity. It is labour-intensive and provides jobs for young people and help for old people.

Mr. Carter-Jones: Is not turning off the heat in cold weather the least efficient method of preserving energy? Will the Secretary of State have a word with the Secretary of State for Social Services to make sure that the heat is not turned off?

Mr. Walker: I am glad to say that, as a result of consultation with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services, we are spending £140 million more in real terms than when we took office.

Mr. Rowlands: After the bluster, will the Secretary of State take note of the fact that the DHSS is considering the abolition of single payments for draught improvements for the elderly and for the poorest households? Would it not make a mockery of Energy Efficiency Year if that were to happen this year? Will he make sure that the Secretary of State for Social Services does not do that?

Mr. Walker: I wish that the hon. Gentleman would take careful note of what has happened. As he knows, it has been announced that the present single payments will continue for a further two years. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services has also made it perfectly clear that whatever changes eventually take place, it is his intention to see that the remarkable momentum that we have achieved continues.

North Sea Oil

3. **Mr. Greg Knight** asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the extent to which offshore oil recovery technology is being achieved in the United Kingdom as a result of the ninth offshore licensing round.

The Minister of State, Department of Energy (Mr. Alick Buchanan-Smith): Following the ninth round of licensing, there has been a significant advance in the contribution of United Kingdom companies and institutions in areas of high technology offshore.

Mr. Knight: How much research and development is taking place in the offshore industry? Is that not very much on the increase, and is that not good news for Britain?

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: I am glad to say that the results of the initiative that we took in the ninth round on new technology identified £140 million of ongoing work on research and development in the offshore industry. Further inquiries since that time show that that figure could be as high as £170 million. I am delighted at the way in which the oil companies and the supply industry have responded to the initiative.

Mr. Kennedy: Since the ninth offshore licensing round, there has been a fall in oil prices. Can the Minister assess the impact of those falling prices on offshore technology and research and the big contracts that come with it? He will appreciate that that is a matter of considerable concern to the highlands and islands of Scotland.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: There is every sign that work is continuing following the ninth round, and, as the hon. Gentleman knows, the main work is exploration. It is significant that in the first six weeks of this year more exploration wells were drilled offshore than in either of the two previous years, including 1984, which was a record year. The oil industry is maintaining its activity.

Mrs. McCurley: Will the new offshore licensing round improve the state of the order books for some of our construction companies involved in such work?

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: I am delighted to say that already this year I have approved five new gas and oil fields and two major developments, and there will be a considerable amount of work coming from both those development approvals. Who gets the work will depend on how competitive they are, their price, delivery and reliability; and our British yards have a good record.

Mr. Rogers: Apart from technological investment, will the Government invest in a gas-gathering scheme to prevent the enormous waste of scarce resources in the North sea? When will the Government put some money into this?

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: I hope that the hon. Gentleman recognises that the amount of gas flared offshore since 1979 has been reduced by half. At the same time, oil production has increased by 50 per cent. There has been a considerable improvement in that area. It is significant that many independent schemes have already been initiated by the oil industry, using the industry's own money.

Mr. Orme: The Minister has not answered the question asked by the hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye (Mr. Kennedy) about oil recovery technology and the fall in oil prices. What effect has that had to date on oil recovery technology?

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: There has been no effect at all. The longer-term effect is that more work will be encouraged in those areas. The more that can be done to lower costs and improve efficiency, the more will profitability increase in the face of a lower world oil price. I therefore believe that oil recovery technology will be encouraged.

Energy Efficiency

4. **Mr. Sackville** asked the Secretary of State for Energy what steps his Department has taken since 17 February to promote energy saving by industrial firms.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. David Hunt): The Energy Efficiency Year campaign has continued to gather momentum. In the last three weeks my Department has contributed to a wide range of seminars and exhibitions, including major events in Manchester, Birmingham, Stoke-on-Trent, Wakefield, Cambridge, Sheffield and Cardiff. In addition, demand for the services offered by the Energy Efficiency Office has continued to increase. Overall, the action stimulated by the office so far is leading to savings of at least half a billion pounds a year in industry and commerce.

Mr. Sackville: I congratulate my hon. Friend on his Department's efforts towards achieving energy efficiency, but is he aware that manufacturing companies which invest

in anti-pollutant thermal oxydisers, which recover energy from solvents and other fumes emitted from their processes, are forced to pay a tax on all the energy recovered? As that represents a disincentive to the installation of energy-saving equipment, does that not contradict the Department's campaign, and will he make the necessary representations to his right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer?

Mr. Hunt: I appreciate my hon. Friend's concern, but I stress that the duty on recycled solvents is very low—0·77p a litre. That figure has been unchanged now for five years. The duty has only a slight effect on the economics of installing thermal oxydisers, and to exempt users of recycled solvents would be unfair to the users of competing fuels. I shall, of course, mention his points to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor.

Mr. Speller: Will my hon. Friend give the House something more concrete than round billions of pounds? Can he give us any idea of what the savings will be for the first full year in terms of percentage of use or actual direct money rather than a nebulous round figure?

Mr. Hunt: My Department has been delighted at the tremendous upsurge in applications for energy surveys. From survey reports received to date, measures have been identified that will save £160 million a year. That is equivalent to the total energy bill for industry and commerce in Devon and Cornwall.

Industrial Fatalities

5. **Mr. Kenneth Carlisle** asked the Secretary of State for Energy how many deaths from accidents have occurred in coal mining, in the oil industry in the United Kingdom sector of the North sea, and in the nuclear electricity industry since 1970; and whether he will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. Alastair Goodlad): Between 1970 and 1984 the National Coal Board recorded 746 deaths in its coal mining operations, while there were 116 deaths in the United Kingdom offshore oil and gas industry and 10 in the civil nuclear industry. I shall publish fuller details in the *Official Report*.

Mr. Carlisle: In the argument over the nuclear industry, does my hon. Friend agree that one should look at fact rather than at theory? Does he accept that his answer shows that the nuclear industry has the best safety record of the industries to which he referred? Will he confirm that none of the deaths was due to radiation? Does my hon. Friend also agree that the nuclear industry has two further advantages: first, that it does not create acid rain, like the coal and oil industries; and, secondly, that it produces cheaper electricity, which is good for industry and for jobs and is greatly welcomed by those who have to heat their homes by electricity?

Mr. Goodlad: I agree entirely with what my hon. Friend said about acid rain and cheap electricity. I confirm that none of the deaths in the nuclear industry was related to radiological hazards.

Mr. Ryman: With respect to deaths in the coal mining industry, is the Minister able to give the number of deaths at Bates colliery during the last three years? Is he aware that there have been frequent breaches of the mining and quarries legislation at that colliery and that that was drawn to the attention of the regional director, who said that he would look into it but that it did not matter very much because the pit was due to be closed soon, in any event, by the National Coal Board?

Mr. Goodlad: I cannot give the hon. Gentleman the figure for which he asks, but I shall look into the matter and write to him.

Mr. Patrick McNair-Wilson: I congratulate the nuclear industry on its safety record. However, is my hon. Friend aware of the fact that there is public concern about future developments? In view of that concern, is he able to deny that his Department is bringing undue pressure to bear on Sir Frank Layfield to hurry forward his report on the pressurised water reactor inquiry at Sizewell, and is he able to say when the report might be published?

Mr. Goodlad: I can certainly give that denial to my hon. Friend. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy has repeatedly made it clear to the inspector that he is anxious to have his report on the Sizewell inquiry as quickly as possible so that timely decisions can be taken about the future of our nuclear programme. He has made available the considerable resources that the inspector thought were necessary, and he remains ready to ensure that any further resources that are required are made available so that an early conclusion can be reached on this inquiry, which is of great importance to the nation. The inspector had earlier said that he hoped to let my right hon. Friend have his main conclusions in the spring. I now expect his report to be somewhat delayed, but my right hon. Friend is currently seeking more precise guidance from him.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Does my hon. Friend agree that nuclear energy is safe, clean and cheap, whereas to burn coal is dirty, dangerous and expensive? Does he also agree that the inspector's announcement that the Sizewell report is to be delayed is a great disappointment to this House? Is he able to say when Britain might get a nuclear reactor, which is required on economic and social grounds?

Mr. Goodlad: As I have just said, I cannot give that date to my hon. Friend. I agree that nuclear power is safe, clean and cheap. The National Coal Board also constantly aims to improve safety standards both above and below ground.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Are not the efforts that we are all making to destroy the myths surrounding the nuclear industry being grossly undermined by the British Nuclear Fuels Ltd. management, which took the deliberate decision to release 402 kg of uranium into the Irish sea? That was a deliberate decision; it was not even an accident. Does the Minister accept that if the BNFL management insists upon going down the route of ignoring public concern, it is the management, and only the management, that threatens the future of this industry and the 22,500 jobs in west Cumbria that are at stake? Will he tell the BNFL management to raise its standards and to take into account the high level of public concern? We want to protect this industry.

Mr. Goodlad: I agree with the hon. Gentleman about the necessity for the nuclear industry to present the facts —which it does—in a simplified way. I cannot agree with him about the release of uranium into the Irish sea.

It was well within the limits authorised by the Department of the Environment. It was assessed by the Department's radiochemicals inspectorate as radiologically minute. The incident is being investigated by the radiochemicals inspectorate in the usual way to ascertain that the discharges were kept as low as could reasonably be achieved and that they presented no hazard to the work force or to the public on either side of the Irish sea. The discharge was no larger than two days' regular discharges of uranium from a phosphoric acid plant, of which there are a number in the United Kingdom.

Sir Trevor Skeet: Is my hon. Friend aware that it is a total disgrace that the Sizewell inquiry report has again been deferred? Does he recollect that the inquiry has lasted for over two years and that the report has been constantly deferred? My hon. Friend has told us today that only 10 people have died at nuclear power stations. They probably died through construction accidents. Will he now tell the House when he expects Sizewell to be authorised?

Mr. Goodlad: The timing of the report is a matter for the inspector. I note what my hon. Friend said. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is currently seeking more precise guidance from Sir Frank Layfield.

Mr. Allen McKay: There is public concern about deaths in any industry, but, in addition, there is great apprehension about what could happen if an incident occurred within the nuclear industry. Does the Minister accept that the industry has not been forthright on that issue and that the same can be said of its position on the disposal of nuclear waste? These are matters of public concern, and questions and answers on them in this place should not constitute red herrings. Is the Minister aware of the need for all concerned to be more forthright?

Mr. Goodlad: I cannot accept what the hon. Gentleman has said. The nuclear industry publishes a large amount of information, as do the agencies that are responsible for its regulation. I wish that some of those who criticise the industry would read the information that it produces.

Dr. Michael Clark: I am pleased that my hon. Friend agrees that the nuclear industry and the nuclear generation of electricity is safe, clean and cheap. Does he also agree that nuclear generation is a means of providing electricity from assured fuel supplies, especially if we opt for the fast breeder reactor? Will he assure us that positive steps are being taken to secure a commercial fast breeder reactor?

Mr. Goodlad: My hon. Friend will know that the Atomic Energy Authority has a research programme under way into the fast breeder reactor. That programme continues at a high level.

Mr. Eadie: I am sure the Minister will agree that the question is directed to the safety records of the energy industries. Does he agree that on the basis of the statistics which he has presented to the House it would be monstrous to suggest that there should be deregulation of the mining industry by erosion of the mines and quarries legislation? Does he also agree that, with the Gas Bill passing through the House, the House must be assured that privatisation will mean safety in the gas industry?

Mr. Goodlad: The hon. Gentleman will know that the measures contained in the Gas Bill will enhance safety in the gas industry. As for the first part of his supplementary question, the safety records of all three industries are creditable.

Between 1970 and 1984 the National Coal Board has recorded 746 deaths in its coal mining operations while there were 116 deaths in the United Kingdom offshore oil and gas industry and 10 in the civil nuclear industry. Detailed figures are in the table.

The figure for coalmining is for the period 1 April 1970 to 31 March 1985 and includes surface as well as underground workers.

The figure for the United Kingdom offshore oil and gas industry is for the period 1 January 1970 to 31 December 1984 and includes deaths during construction of installations and on helicopters and ships in the vicinity of installations. There were a further eight deaths in 1985.

The figure for the civil nuclear industry is for the period 1 January 1970 to 31 December 1984. They relate to operators' employees at all nuclear sites operated by the CEGB, SSEB, BNFL and establishments of the UKAEA concerned with nuclear research and development. None of the deaths related to radiological hazards.

Fatalities in the coal, offshore oil and gas and nuclear electricity industries 1970 to 1984

Coal		*Civil Nuclear Industry*		*Offshore Oil and Gas*	
1970-71	92	1970	0	1970	1
1971-72	58	1971	0	1971	4
1972-73	81	1972	0	1972	3
1973-74	60	1973	1	1973	3
1974-75	56	1974	0	1974	12
1975-76	59	1975	1	1975	10
1976-77	38	1976	1	1976	17
1977-78	48	1977	1	1977	11
1978-79	72	1978	1	1978	4
1979-80	31	1979	0	1979	10
1980-81	39	1980	1	1980	4
1981-82	34	1981	1	1981	6
1982-83	44	1982	1	1982	12
1983-84	22	1983	2	1983	9
1984-85	12	1984	0	1984	10
Totals	746		10		116

Notes

Figures for the coal industry are on a financial year basis, the figures for the other industries are on a calendar year basis.

Gas Prices

6. **Mr. Dubs** asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the level of gas prices in the light of the fall in oil prices.

Mr. Alick Buchanan-Smith: Gas prices are a matter for the British Gas Corporation, which takes account of relevant factors, including costs and the price of competing fuels.

Mr. Dubs: Is the Minister aware that many people are puzzled that, with significant cuts in oil prices, there has been no corresponding reduction in the price of gas? The charge that is being made against the Government is that they are seeking deliberately to keep gas prices high to pave the way for privatisation, which shows scant regard for consumer interests.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: The hon. Gentleman should pay attention to two factors. First, British Gas, not the Government, fixes the price of gas. Secondly, it has made no announcement yet about prices in 1986. The hon. Gentleman may have noticed that in the interruptible gas sector, which is in direct competition with oil, prices have been reduced in recent weeks.

Mr. Portillo: May I express the hope to my right hon. Friend that concern for neither gas prices nor oil prices will lead him to instruct a cut in oil production? Will he confirm that such a cut would be damaging to Britain, and will he therefore reject calls which have come from the Opposition Benches for a cut to be made?

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: My hon. Friend is right. It would make commercial and technical nonsense of North sea oil production, given conditions in the North sea, if the companies concerned were not left to take their own decisions in the light of their experience. I find it extraordinary that there are calls for a depletion policy, which we hear many times, especially from Liberal Members—[HON. MEMBERS: "Where are they?".] These calls for a depletion policy show extraordinary ignorance of the British offshore industry.

Mr. Mason: In the light of the fall in oil prices, will the Minister give us his initial assessment of the effects on the coal industry?

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: It takes some time for such factors to work their way through. As the right hon. Gentleman knows, oil has to be produced, transported and refined. It is far too early in the new state of prices to come to any conclusion on what the position may be.

Mr. Watts: Is my hon. Friend satisfied that there are sufficient supplies of gas not already contractually committed to British Gas for producers to have an opportunity to supply the contract market directly, using the enhanced powers under the Gas Bill?

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: On our assessment, we are still blessed with gas reserves. Looking forward into the 1990s —in relation to the Sleipner gas deal—I believe that it is for the benefit of Britain that we should be able to meet our needs almost wholly from our own resources and that if there is any gap between supply and demand it will be far smaller than that on offer from overseas.

Mr. Orme: What information has the Minister had from the gas industry about prices to domestic consumers, following the reduction of prices to industrial consumers as a result of the oil price reduction? When will the domestic consumer benefit?

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: As the right hon. Gentleman knows, there is a completely different marketing and pricing system for interruptible gas supplies. The price to domestic consumers is up to British Gas, which has not yet announced what it is doing. Under the Gas Bill currently before the House, there will for the first time be a regulator and a maximum price will be fixed which British Gas cannot exceed. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman and the Labour party will welcome that.

Non-Nuclear Research and Development

7. **Mr. Speller** asked the Secretary of State for Energy what is the allocation of funds within the 17 per cent. of total expenditure spent on all non-nuclear research and development; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: My Department's expenditure on non-nuclear research and development in 1984-85 was as follows:

	£ million
Offshore hydrocarbons	19·5
Renewable sources of energy	14·0
Energy efficiency	*6·6
Coal technology	0·7
Total:	40·8

*Including £5 million on the energy efficiency demonstration scheme.

Mr. Speller: I thank my hon. Friend for those detailed figures, but I find the accounting somewhat "constructive" when energy efficiency is included in research and development. In future years, will he seek rather more than £700,000 for use in the coal industry where there are so many opportunities for the clean use of coal, to avoid, for example, the acid rain to which he referred earlier?

Mr. Hunt: On the first point, the figure that I gave related to research and development in energy efficiency. Total expenditure on promoting energy efficiency was £17·5 million in 1984-85. On the second point, the research and development spend by the nationalised energy industries and the Department on topics relating to the clean use of coal is running at about £40 million per year. My hon. Friend is right to emphasise the importance of that work.

Mr. Barron: If the nuclear industry, which is currently going through a traumatic period in relation to nuclear waste, fails to provide for needs into the next century, should not the liquefaction and fluidised bed combustion services, which have had money taken from them in the past five years, have more than £700,000 per year pumped into them?

Mr. Hunt: I think that the hon. Gentleman has misunderstood the nature of the figures that I gave. I stressed that the research and development spend on the clean use of coal is now running at £40 million per year, and that work is very important.

Mr. Hayes: Does my hon. Friend regard with dismay the decision taken this weekend, when the Scottish Labour party conference decided by an overwhelming majority to close nuclear installations and take to coal instead? Does he agree that Mr. Scargill's writ seems to be running north of the border if not to the south?

Mr. Hunt: My hon. Friend is right to stress that the Labour party should not play politics with an industry responsible for 100,000 jobs.

Mr. Wrigglesworth: Will the Minister look again at the budget for renewable energy sources? Will he confirm that we spend on these resources only one third of the amount spent by West Germany and one quarter of the amount spent by Japan, and will he see whether that part of the budget can be expanded?

Mr. Hunt: I stress that international comparisons do not take account of our favourable position in conventional energy. However, total expenditure to date on renewables is £90 million—nearly 80 per cent. of which has been spent during the term of the present Government.

Energy Efficiency

8. **Mr. Pike** asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will meet the chairman of the British Gas Corporation to discuss the efficient use of energy.

Mr. Peter Walker: I regularly meet the chairman of the British Gas Corporation.

Mr. Pike: What positive steps do the Government propose to take to force British Gas to promote energy efficiency? Will the Government consider the possibility of making British Gas use some of its profits to promote energy efficiency?

Mr. Walker: I can only say that I am delighted with the enormous collaboration that I have had from the British gas industry in this sphere. It is organising a whole range of events up and down the country, quite a few of which I have had the privilege of attending.

Mr. Michael Morris: Does the efficient use of energy include the export of gas, and presumably, in the medium term, the import of gas? Can my right hon. Friend comment on that?

Mr. Walker: A statement was made last week on the policy for the export and import of gas. I shall send my hon. Friend a copy.

Energy Efficiency

9. **Mr. Fatchett** asked the Secretary of State for Energy when he intends to place in the Library a copy of the report into the energy efficiency needs of poor households, as requested by the Energy Committee.

Mr. Peter Walker: It is not Government practice to publish working papers used only as a basis for advice to Ministers.

Mr. Fatchett: Will the Secretary of State admit that it would be useful to publish those documents, given that any study of energy efficiency among poor households would show that defective building and design are often the cause of much energy loss and large energy bills? Would not the publication of those documents be useful as a prerequisite to interdepartmental action, which is absolutely necessary, and which would go a long way to alleviate the fuel policy that so bedevils our society?

Mr. Walker: There is no publication of documents. The hon. Gentleman is referring to working papers prepared by certain officials of my Department. No Government—Labour or Conservative—have decided, for a whole range of reasons, to publish those papers. My Department has published a whole range of papers on these issues arising from those working documents.

Renewable Sources of Energy

11. **Mr. Hayes** asked the Secretary of State for Energy what progress has been made so far in co-ordinating research and development into renewable sources of energy between the United Kingdom and the United States of America.

Mr. David Hunt: The Government attach great importance to developing collaborative programmes in this area. Following the signing of the United Kingdom-United States bilateral exchange agreement on energy R and D on 24 October, expert workshops have taken place, and the scope for collaborative programmes in biofuels and passive solar design of buildings is being explored in detail.

Mr. Hayes: Does my hon. Friend agree that passive solar design can make a considerable contribution towards the heating and cooling of various designs of home and industrial plant? Will he ensure that his Department does everything it possibly can to encourage passive solar design?

Mr. Hunt: I totally agree with my hon. Friend, and I am happy to give him the assurance that he seeks.

NCB (Enterprise) Ltd. (Sunderland)

12. **Mr. Boyes** asked the Secretary of State for Energy how much money has been invested in the borough of Sunderland by NCB (Enterprise) Ltd.; if he will name the projects; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Walker: At the end of February 1986, NCB (Enterprise) Ltd. had invested £227,000 in nine projects in the borough of Sunderland to assist in the creation of 93 new job opportunities. Details of the projects concerned are a commercial matter for the company.

Mr. Boyes: That is really unsatisfactory: just over £200,000 for a borough with unemployment—even on the Government's figures—of 27 per cent. There are some areas, such as the area of my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, North (Mr. Clay), where unemployment is approaching 60 per cent. Is the Minister aware that between 1981 and 1985 the number of those unemployed for more than a year has increased from 36 to 60 per cent. in this area, and that the number of unemployed women has increased from 22 to 37 per cent.? When will he do something serious for the borough of Sunderland, and when will he give a few billion pounds to cope with that level of unemployment?

Mr. Walker: Well, well, well. The hon. Gentleman seemingly regrets that, in the few months in which NCB (Enterprise) Ltd. has been in being, nine new projects have already begun in the borough. Secondly, I trust that he will do a little bit more to promote activity in the borough to make applications.

Mr. Fallon: Is not the best investment by the board in the Sunderland area the provision of guaranteed places at pits for all the workers made redundant at Bates and Hordern collieries? Will my right hon. Friend refute the allegation by NACODS at the weekend that those places are not guaranteed?

Mr. Walker: The allegations made at the weekend are totally wrong. The statement by NACODS that NACODS members at Bates were not being offered an equivalent job at another nearby pit is totally untrue. Almost half the NACODS members at the pit expressed a preference for redundancy and the National Coal Board will have no difficulty in placing the 48 who prefer to be transferred to equivalent jobs.

Refinery Capacity

14. **Mr. Rowlands** asked the Secretary of State for Energy whether he will make a statement about his Department's estimate of refinery capacity in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: Refinery capacity in the United Kingdom at the end of 1985 was 92·8 million tonnes per annum.

Mr. Rowlands: Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that 6,600 jobs have been lost in the refining industry and that

there is a strong instinctive feeling that the British refining capacity is taking the brunt of any European restructuring? Is the restructuring period now over? Will he take a strong line on the possibility of another flood of projects from the middle east, which may further jeopardise jobs in our refining industry?

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: I understand the hon. Gentleman's concern in relation to jobs and indeed in any other area of the United Kingdom where reorganisation of refineries has taken place. It is not true that the United Kingdom has taken the brunt of reorganisation. Over the past five years our capacity has gone down by some 28 per cent., but by contrast it has gone down by 44 per cent. in Germany, and in France by 36 per cent. What we are witnessing in Britain is not isolated. I take his point regarding middle east products. I have discussed this issue and shall continue to discuss it with colleagues in the International Energy Agency.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Anglo-Irish Parliamentary Tier

42. **Mr. Dubs** asked the Lord Privy Seal what recent representations he has received about the establishment of an Anglo-Irish parliamentary tier.

The Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Biffen): A number of right hon. and hon. Members have made known to me their interest in the establishment of such a body.

Mr. Dubs: Is the Leader of the House aware that many people are puzzled at the lack of progress on setting up this Anglo-Irish parliamentary tier, given that it was part of the recent agreement between London and Dublin. I put it bluntly to the Leader of the House — when will the House have an opportunity of debating this?

Mr. Biffen: There is no immediate prospect of any such debate, as I told the hon. Gentleman when he last raised this matter. It is being proceeded with through the usual channels and that is how it stands.

Mr. Latham: Is my right hon. Friend aware that those of us who support this agreement and regret the absence of most of the Unionist Members from this Chamber, nevertheless hope that he will show his customary wisdom and proceed with this matter extremely deliberately?

Mr. Biffen: I thank my hon. Friend.

Mr. Freeson: Why has this matter taken so long, whether or not through the usual channels? It is not months, but several years, that Members of this House, including myself, have been asking the right hon. Gentleman and others for action in this direction. If it is now an agreed policy, why is something not being done about it shortly?

Mr. Biffen: As the right hon. Gentleman will have heard, the matter is being considered through the usual channels.

Departmental Staff

43. **Mr. Greenway** asked the Lord Privy Seal what increases there have been in staff employed by each Department of the House since 1975, including the Refreshment Department; what change there has been in the number of meals served each year and in the financial turnover of that Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Biffen: With permission, I will arrange for the detailed information requested to be set out in the *Official Report*.

Mr. Greenway: Can my right hon. Friend confirm that I have correctly understood the *Official Report*, which said that hundreds more meals are being served per year but that the Refreshment Department has only one extra member of staff? Is this not a matter of great congratulation to Mr. Smillie and his staff? Who is eating all these extra meals? Can my right hon. Friend also thank the staff for the much higher standard of rice puddings since I last raised the matter?

Mr. Biffen: I think that this is a classic case of where an hon. Member knows the answer before he puts down the question. I must confirm that my hon. Friend is quite right in saying that there has been a substantial increase in the number of meals that are served by the same number of staff.

Following is the information:

Staff in post as at 1 October each year (including part-time employees)

Year	*Speaker's Office*	*Clerk's Department*	*Serjeant at Arms Department*	*Library Department*	*Administration Department*	*Department of Official Report*	*Refreshment Department**
1975	10	113	205	109	47	57	—
1976	10	109	208	112	47	61	—
1977	10	111	197	110	50	58	—
1978	10	114	214	121	50	58	—
1979	10	119	211	125	61	60	—
1980	10	136	212	133	71	71	235
1981	10	144	210	138	71	71	237
1982	12	142	214	138	74	69	244
1983	14	139	216	152	80	71	246
1984	15	139	213	148	86	71	245
1985	16	137	215	163	90	72	241
1986†	12	142	213	158	86	75	245

* Prior to 1980 the Refreshment Department was not a Department of the House and records of the numbers of staff employed in this period are incomplete.

† At 1 March 1986.

Refreshment Department: Financial Turnover

Financial Year	Financial Turnover £	Annual increase £
*1974-75	452,053	
1975-76	610,248	+158,195
1976-77	735,572	+125,324
1977-78	745,330	+9,758
1978-79	915,564	+170,234
*1979-80	1,041,061	+125,497
1980-81	1,356,906	+315,845
1981-82	1,387,195	+30,289
1982-83	1,628,345	+241,150
*1983-84	1,651,930	+23,585
1984-85	2,091,313	+439,383
Total increase over period		+1,639,260

* General Election Years.

The estimated number of main meals served in the banqueting rooms, dining rooms and cafeterias for the last three complete financial years are as follows:

	Number
1982-83	223,436
1983-84	216,859
1984-85	251,049

Information relating to earlier years is no longer available.

Members Salaries (Deductions)

44. **Mr. Soley** asked the Lord Privy Seal how many hon. Members have deductions made from their salary by the Fees Office and transferred to their secretarial allowance.

Mr. Biffen: Twenty, as at 28 February.

Mr. Soley: Is the Leader of the House very surprised by that high figure? Does he not think that there is a strong case, given the fact that many people have been encouraged here, quite rightly, to use the high technology that is now available, that the research allowances do not allow them to cover for that? When will the right hon. Gentleman do something to put that right?

Mr. Biffen: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on an ingenious way of putting to me more or less the same question as he tabled to me on this matter some months ago. I have to tell him that the answer, although the question was charmingly different, is depressingly the same. Provision will be made for a review of the secretarial and officers research allowance this summer. The outcome of that review will be a matter for the consideration of the House.

Mr. Michael Morris: Does not my right hon. Friend's answer not show that just under 4 per cent. of hon. Members cannot cope?

Mr. Biffen: On the whole, it is my job to be generous rather than ungenerous in my interpretation of such information.

Running Costs

45. **Mr. Peter Bruinvels** asked the Lord Privy Seal what was the cost of running the House of Commons in 1985; how it compares with the previous five years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Biffen: The estimated cost of running the House of Commons in the financial year 1985-86 is £63·2 million.

With permission, I will arrange for comparable figures for the previous five years to be set out in the *Official Report*.

Mr. Bruinvels: I thank my right hon. Friend for that informative answer. Does he agree that it is a matter of great concern that the House is costing more and more to run?

Mrs. Kellett-Bowman: How does my hon Friend know?

Mr. Bruinvels: In 1984-85 the House sat for 1,566 hours—an average of nine hours and six minutes a day. Does my right hon. Friend think that we should finish earlier in the evening — perhaps going back to 10 o'clock? [Hon. Members: "No."] Does he agree that the cost of providing all these taxis—*[Interruption.]* —for all except those who ask the questions and take part in debates—us, the parliamentarians—is too high and that the only way to reduce it is to finish earlier?

Mr. Biffen: The average daily hours of sitting have changed very little during the past five years. If my hon. Friend studies class XIII, vote 2, he will discover that easily the largest single component is Members' expenses.

Mr. Stokes: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, much as we enjoy hearing frequently from my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Bruinvels), it would save money if he asked rather fewer questions?

Mr. Biffen: As both of my hon. Friends are members of the Synod, I can say, "How these Christians love each other."

Following are the figures:

Estimated cost of running the House of Commons

	£ million
1980-81	34·2
1981-82	41·8
1982-83	45·0
1983-84	50·8
1984-85	56·8

[These figures include expenditure on Members' pay and allowances, stationery and printing supplies, computer services and costs borne on the House of Commons Administration Vote. They do not include the parliamentary works programme of the Property Services Agency, details of which are only available for the Palace of Westminster as a whole.]

Accommodation

46. **Mr. Willie W. Hamilton** asked the Lord Privy Seal if he will initiate an inquiry into the use of all accommodation within the Palace of Westminster, and related matters.

Mr. Biffen: I have no proposals to initiate such an inquiry.

Mr. Hamilton: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that there is a disproportionate allocation of space between the House of Lords and the House of Commons, bearing in mind the respective workloads? Would he care to visit the Terrace level after 7 pm each night and see how the Dining Rooms are swarming with outsiders? Each of those rooms is booked until the end of 1987, I believe, and a letter has gone out to all hon. Members from the Chairman

of the appropriate Committee saying that, because of the possible abuse, all bookings have been cancelled and that, in future, deposits will be much increased. Will the right hon. Gentleman examine this great and continuing abuse of facilities in the House?

Mr. Biffen: As the hon. Gentleman developed his supplementary question, he strayed somewhat wide of the original point. The House might like to know that approximately two thirds of the space available in the Palace of Westminster is available to the House of Commons and that any alteration in the balance between the Commons and the Lords can come about only as a result of joint discussions.

Mr. Ryman: Is the Leader of the House aware that there are some very strange people—*[Laughter.]*

Mr. Willie W. Hamilton: He is right.

Mr. Ryman: —using the House of Commons Car Park and that it is extremely difficult to park a car because, apart from Conservative Members of Parliament, there is an abundance of research assistants, secretaries and other peculiar people there who are usurping places that are normally reserved for us? Can the right hon. Gentleman ensure that there is sufficient parking space for hon. Members, and not for the various sycophants who hang on?

Mr. Biffen: Before I answer that point, I wish to tell the hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. Hamilton) that I shall look into the second point which he raised and be in touch with him. I shall see that the matter of the proper use of car parking facilities is referred to the relevant section of the Services Committee.

Mr. Williams: We are grateful to the Leader of the House for the information that he gave about the proportion of resource usage between the Lords and the Commons. Is that allocation kept under constant and active review? If not, might it not be time to initiate a review of the balance of the resources between the two Houses?

Mr. Biffen: I shall bear that point in mind, but I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman realises that one cannot undertake that unilaterally. Although he might wish to have the House of Lords sent to Milton Keynes or somewhere suitably distant — occasionally, those sentiments are not confined to him—there is a long historic balance in these matters, and we must consider them carefully. However, I take full account of what the right hon. Gentleman said.

CIVIL SERVICE

Dispersal Policy

47. **Mr. Chapman** asked the Minister for the Civil Service if he will make a statement about the Government's current policy with regard to the geographic dispersal of the places of work of the home Civil Service.

The Minister of State, Privy Council Office and Minister for the Arts (Mr. Richard Luce): The Government's current policy is to complete the dispersal programme announced on 26 July 1979. It is also the Government's policy that, whenever location of new Government work or relocation of existing work is being considered, full account is taken of regional needs.

Mr. Chapman: With the new technologies in communication and better communication networks, as instanced by the pending completion of the M25, does my hon. Friend agree that today there is a better case and increased prospects for agreement on moving more civil servants out of the congestion and expense of central London? Will he bear that in mind in framing future policies, recognising that today only about 13 per cent. of home civil servants have their place of work in inner London?

Mr. Luce: I shall bear in mind my hon. Friend's comments. As he implied, four out of five civil servants already work outside London. There is already a disperal programme, which the Government have still to complete. However, the cost of dispersal is substantial, and it sometimes takes up to 10 years to reap the benefits of it. That must also be considered.

Mr. Wrigglesworth: Is the Minister aware that his undertaking to keep in mind the needs of the regions when new allocations of Civil Service Departments are being made will be welcomed in Cleveland? Is he aware that the Government's decision not to move the Property Services Agency to Middlesbrough devastated the prospects for the centre of that town, where a site had been prepared for it? Is he further aware that, as Cleveland has the highest level of unemployment of any county in Great Britain, it should come high on the list of areas being given consideration for new Government Departments?

Mr. Luce: As I have already said, when the Government are considering the relocation of existing work or location of new Government work regional factors are taken into account. Recent evidence of that is that we have decided to move the Data Protection Registrar's office to Wilmslow near Manchester. Indeed, plans are in hand to move the Land Registry office to a region. Therefore, regional factors are definitely taken into account.

Mr. Hickmet: In looking at regional factors, has my hon. Friend directed the attention of his officials to south Humberside? Is he aware that if unemployment in regions such as south Humberside in my constituency, where we have lost many jobs in the slim-down of the steel industry, is not taken into account, it will be many years before the unemployment problems can be resolved?

Mr. Luce: I appreciate my hon. Friend's concern to see more jobs on south Humberside. Each Government Department is instructed to take regional factors into account when deciding on the relocation of existing work or the allocation of new work, so regional factors are considered.

Mr. Fallon: Will my hon. Friend confirm that some Departments in London and the south-east have difficulty in recruiting administrative, clerical and secretarial staff? Would it not be cheaper to employ and easier to recruit such staff if more secretarial work was transferred to the regions?

Mr. Luce: I appreciate that each region has its own factors to take into account in regard to recruitment. It is true that costs are very high in London and that there is a special weighting allowance, but, as I have said, four out of five—80 per cent.—of the Civil Service work outside London.

Trade Unions

48. **Mr. Soley** asked the Minister for the Civil Service when he next plans to meet the Civil Service unions to discuss pay, conditions of employment and trade union rights.

Mr. Luce: Pay and industrial relations are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. However, I maintain informal contacts with the trade unions on Civil Service matters within my area of responsibility.

Mr. Soley: When the Minister next meets the unions, will he discuss with them the extensive nature of the Official Secrets Act 1911 and the way it affects them? For example, I understand that, unless clause 47(1) of the Building Societies Bill, which is going through the House, is changed, they could face prosecution under the Official Secrets Act. Will the Minister consider that clause and the draconian effect that the Official Secrets Act has on the Civil Service?

Mr. Luce: The specific point which the hon. Gentleman has raised seems to apply to one of the Ministers who are dealing with the Bill. Of course, I shall draw his attention to it. On the broader question, the Government are anxious to impart as much information as is helpful to the pursuit of Government policies.

Sir John Biggs-Davison: Would it not be contrary to the traditions and interests of the public service if a Civil Service union were to set up a political fund in support of one political party?

Mr. Luce: I agree with my hon. Friend that, in the view of the Government, political funds are needed only if a union proposes to participate in party political activities or to campaign for or against political parties. Therefore, that point has to be considered carefully when unions are considering the future of political funds.

Mr. Winnick: Will the Minister take the opportunity to congratulate the Inland Revenue Staff Federation on its overwhelming majority in favour of a political fund? When it was decided to have such ballots, can the Minister tell us whether the Cabinet and those like him who are responsible for the Civil Service believed that such a decision would be reached in due course?

Mr. Luce: I believe that the vast majority of civil servants wish to maintain a neutral Civil Service. It is very important to make that point. Let me make absolutely plain the Government's view that we continue to believe that trade unions need political funds only if they propose to participate in party political activities or to campaign for or against political parties or candidates. At the end of the day, the decision must be for the unions.

Mr. Latham: Will my hon. Friend discuss with the Institution of Professional Civil Servants the concern of scientists who work for the British Geological Survey, and who are my constituents, about the operation of the British Nationality Act 1981 on their service overseas? That is a serious matter which has not been satisfactorily resolved.

Mr. Luce: I should be happy to pursue the matter if my hon. Friend would give me more details.

Mr. Haynes: The Minister is fully aware that the Government favour ballots. Why do they not keep their noses out when the Civil Service wants to have a ballot on a political levy? It is time the Minister told the Cabinet to to keep its nose out.

Mr. Luce: As I have already said in answer to an earlier question, at the end of the day the decision must be for the unions. That was the decision that was taken by the IRSF.

Mr. Bruinvels: When my hon. Friend meets representatives of the Civil and Public Services Association, will he express to them the feeling of people in Leicester attending Department of Health and Social Security offices, which are CPSA-run, that the staff are more concerned about improving their own conditions and getting more pay rises than about delivering the goods — in other words, paying out to my constituents unemployment and other social security benefits?

Mr. Luce: I note what my hon. Friend has said. My experience as I travel round the country visiting various Civil Service offices is that the Civil Service is trying to do its utmost to provide a good service to the public. I think the evidence is in that direction. Where there are particular strains—for example, in the social services—my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services has just announced that he will be prepared to increase staffs marginally to cope with the problems.

Dr. McDonald: Is the Minister aware that the Inland Revenue Staff Federation achieved a 90 per cent. response to its ballot, despite all the difficulties that the Government tried to place in the way of its conduct? Is he also aware that the 82 per cent. vote in favour of setting up a political fund accords with the legislation and should be welcomed by him? Will he give such a welcome to a clear demonstration of the democratic feelings of the members of that trade union? Is he further aware that there must be a message in the result for the Government? Will he tell us from the Dispatch Box what he thinks that message is?

Mr. Luce: I have already made it plain that the decision on political funds is for the unions. That is what we said before the ballot was conducted. Of course I noted the decision and the fact that 82 per cent. voted in favour. The point that I and my hon. Friends have stressed is that political funds are needed only in unions that plan to indulge in party political activities. They are not needed for the ordinary activities of trade unions. That point must be stressed again.

Rail Accident (Derbyshire)

3.31 pm

Mr. Peter Snape (West Bromwich, East) *(by private notice)* asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the head-on rail crash of the 18.33 Sheffield to Manchester train at Chinley in Derbyshire on Sunday 9 March?

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Nicholas Ridley): The accident happened at 19.20 yesterday. The 18.33 passenger train from Sheffield to Manchester, consisting of a diesel locomotive and four coaches, was brought to a stand at a red signal at Chinley East junction. Its driver was authorised to pass the signal at danger and did so. The train then crossed over on to the other line, where it collided head-on with two stationary diesel locomotives. I regret to have to tell the House that the driver of the passenger train was killed in the collision. In addition, the driver of the diesel locomotives was injured, together with about 25 passengers. Of the injured, four are still in hospital and I understand that one passenger is in a critical condition. I am sure that the House will join me in sending condolences to the family of the driver and to the injured, with our wishes for their full and speedy recovery.

I have ordered a formal inquiry into the accident. It will be conducted by an inspecting officer of railways. Evidence will be heard in public and the inquiry will open in about two or three weeks' time. There will be a published report. Until the inquiry opens, it would be wrong to speculate further on the cause of the accident.

Mr. Snape: The Opposition join the right hon. Gentleman in expressing their condolences to the family of the driver who was killed in this tragic accident. Without wishing to prejudge the result of the inquiry, may I press the Secretary of State on the fact that the train passed a signal at danger? Did that happen because of signal failure? Are he and the board satisfied with the adequacy of signal maintenance in that area and with the availability of those charged with carrying out signal maintenance, especially at weekends?

Mr. Ridley: It would be better to await the results of the formal inquiry before we discuss whether maintenance was carried out properly and the other matters which the hon. Gentleman raised. However, I can properly tell him that the line was recently equipped with modern colour signalling. What happened will be revealed by the inquiry.

Mr. Robert Adley (Christchurch): Although I sympathise with the driver's family and the four people who are still seriously injured, and although I do not wish to criticise the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) or you, Mr. Speaker, for this private notice question, is it not a strangely inverted tribute to British Rail that we should have a private notice question when one person has been killed? Will my right hon. Friend never fail to remind the British people and the House that 14 people are killed and 196 people seriously injured on the roads every day? That seems to be a matter of no comment or interest to anyone.

Mr. Ridley: It is not for me to comment, Mr. Speaker, on your selection of this private notice question. However, I can confirm that British Rail's safety record has steadily improved over the years. At the end of last year I was able to write to the chairman and congratulate him on the best safety record of, I believe, all time.

Mr. Michael Meadowcroft (Leeds, West): Will the Secretary of State note that I and my colleagues on this Bench wish to be associated with the sympathy that has been extended to the relatives of the deceased driver, and to the severely injured? Will the right hon. Gentleman ask the inquiry to consider the present reduction in the duplication of tracks? Some of us are concerned about the continuing reduction in the number of tracks that are duplicated, which causes problems up and down the country. I do not know whether that was the problem in this instance, but the general position should be considered.

Mr. Ridley: The causes of the accident should be investigated by the inquiry, and we should not try to prejudge its conclusions. However, I can say that this was a double track line.

Coal Industry

3.35 pm

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Does it arise from Question Time?

Mr. Hardy: Yes, Sir.

During Question Time there was, quite coincidentally, no proper opportunity to refer to the recent publicity surrounding the NACODS agreement, from which the colliery review procedure stems. As it was reported at the weekend, that quite deliberate deception seems to have been employed in securing that agreement, will you permit, or encourage, the Minister to give the Department's point of view, and to comment on what steps can be taken to secure the restoration of trust in the mining industry?

Mr. Speaker: We did not reach the hon. Gentleman's question on the Order Paper, but I think that if he had been ingenious enough he might have found an opportunity to get it in during Question Time.

Family Practitioner Services

3.36 pm

The Minister for Health (Mr. Barney Hayhoe): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement on charges in the NHS family practitioner services from 1 April 1986.

The 1985 public expenditure White Paper included plans to increase spending on the NHS overall by £1 billion in England during 1986-87. Family practitioner services' expenditure continues to increase to meet service pressures, demographic and social changes, and advances in treatment of all kinds, including drugs. The Government have provided for an increase of £250 million in England in 1986-87. All but a small part of this will be met from taxation and national insurance. The remainder will come from increased revenue from charges to patients. The proportion of the cost of the NHS met through charges is expected to fall slightly in 1986-87 to 3·02 per cent.

There will be no change in dental and optical charges. The prescription charge will rise from £2·00 to £2·20. The four-monthly and annual season ticket fees will increase in the same proportion, to £12 and £33·50 respectively.

The existing range of exemptions from charges will continue, including the present exemptions from the prescription charge for those suffering from certain specified conditions.

I am today laying the necessary regulations before the House so that these changes will come into effect at the beginning of April. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland will be taking the equivalent steps. A note providing full details of the changes is available in the Vote Office.

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): That appears to be the shortest statement ever made on prescription charges. I can assume only that the principle of least said soonest mended has been applied.

Will the Minister confirm that the increase in prescription charges is more than twice the rate of inflation, and that it is an increase of 1,000 per cent—in other words, an elevenfold increase—since 1979, when the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) told the country, via the front page of the *Daily Mail*, under the heading, "Twelve Labour Lies":

"We have no intention of increasing or introducing prescription charges."

Can the Minister tell us of any other commodity or service that has witnessed such an increase during that period? If not, why have the Government singled out health for the lowest possible priority? Does the right hon. Gentleman accept the BMA's view that the present level of prescription charges deters poorer people who are not exempt from them? When does he intend to announce the outcome of the review of exemptions from prescription charges for those suffering from certain specified conditions, which he has been promising for some time?

We welcome the decision not to increase dental charges again, but does the Minister accept that the dental charges introduced last year are doing severe damage to the dental care of poorer people? Does he accept the British Dental Association's survey, which showed that, not unexpectedly, poorer people are put off most by last year's increase? Does he accept the evidence quoted by the British Dental Association that the new charges introduced last year have increased the cost of routine treatment payable by the patient by no less than 39 per cent.—eight times the rate of inflation?

Does the Minister accept that the Government have abolished the supply of NHS glasses, introduced prohibitive charges for dental treatment and are now deterring many people from getting prescriptions? Will he remind himself that there have been distinguished people in his office of Minister for Health who have made their reputations by caring more about the health of the nation than about being popular with the Treasury?

Mr. Hayhoe: The hon. Gentleman's description of what has happened is a travesty of the reality. The 10 per cent. increase is exactly in line with the rise in costs of medicines. It is more than the rise in the retail price index because better and often more expensive medicines are being prescribed and patients are benefiting accordingly. I should remind the hon. Gentleman that 75 per cent. of prescriptions are exempt from charges anyway and that 5 per cent. are met by season tickets.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has made it perfectly clear that no responsible Government could ever promise not to increase prescription charges. The important matter—although I recognise that importance and reality are not matters which concern the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends—is that the exemptions remain.

On the question of certain specified conditions, the hon. Gentleman clearly did not listen to the statement or read the advance copy which was sent to him. The hon. Gentleman seems to be unable to criticise dental charges this year and has had to refer to what happened last year, which perhaps shows the depth and strength of his criticisms.

Mr. Robert McCrindle (Brentwood and Ongar): Is it not a fact that year after year the same people are subject to exemption? While for the most part that is correct, has the time not arrived when some review of those exemptions might well be undertaken to see whether, for example, the better-off retired who are capable of paying prescription charges should not be exempted, which might lead to a lower increase for the rest of us?

Mr. Hayhoe: As I made clear in my statement, I have no plans to change the existing range of exemptions, which will continue, nor to change the present exemptions from the prescription charge for those suffering from certain specified conditions, but I have noted what my hon. Friend said.

Mr. Gregor MacKenzie (Glasgow, Rutherglen): Is the Minister aware that while we heard him specifically relate his monetary charges to England, he made no reference to charges and increases in Scotland? Are we to expect a specific statement about that from the Secretary of State for Scotland on another occasion? I assure the right hon. Gentleman that Scottish Members of Parliament take exception, first, to his acting in this way, and, secondly, to the increases.

Mr. Hayhoe: We are following the precedents which have been established on many occasions for the announcement of such increases. As I said in my statement, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland will make arrangements for the necessary regulations to be laid before the House.

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): Will my right hon. Friend give thought to the manner in which exemptions and season tickets are publicised? Will he spend a little money on a good graphic designer, because many people are not aware that they are entitled to a season ticket or exemption?

Mr. Hayhoe: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's constructive comments. I reiterate that pensioners, children under 16, expectant and nursing mothers, those in receipt of supplementary benefit or family income supplement, and those on low incomes are entitled to exemptions, and, as I have said, these account for three out of four of prescriptions.

Mr. Michael Meadowcroft (Leeds, West): Is the Minister aware that his reason for putting up prescription charges by more than double the rate of inflation runs wholly counter to his expressed policy in introducing the restricted list and shows the failure of that policy? Could we not expect to have increases that are lower than the rate of inflation when the Government are supposed to be saving through the restricted list? Does not the Government's method of trying to limit access to much-needed medicines through the size of one's purse, which method they have presumably rejected for dental charges because they have not put them up, show that they accept that increased costs have a deterrent effect on people seeking treatment? Why will the Government not accept the same conclusion on prescriptions?

Mr. Hayhoe: There is no evidence to suggest that there is a deterrent effect. The hon. Gentleman has it wrong about the limited list. It was introduced by my predecessor, who said that he hoped it would bring a saving of £75 million in a full year. I am advised that it is on target to achieve that saving. The increase that I have announced today will bring in about £7 million, about one tenth of the amount that is being saved as a result of the restricted list. When I say saved, I mean saved on the drugs bill, thus making the funds available for patient care in other sectors. Of that there is no doubt.

Mr. David Sumberg (Bury, South): Will my right hon. Friend remind the House that nearly three quarters of all prescriptions are issued free, will he confirm that that will continue, and will he also remind the House that, as a result of the exemptions, the poorest in our community continue to pay no charge for the products that they use?

Mr. Hayhoe: My hon. Friend is right. It is worth underlining that in view of the rather specious opposition that we are getting from Labour and Alliance Members. Three quarters of the population pay no prescription charges, and that means that the poorest within our community are wholly and fully protected by these arrangements.

Mr. Willie W. Hamilton (Fife, Central): Will the Minister re-emphasise that it is £2·20 per item, not per prescription, which means that the great majority of people who are not exempt will pay £6·60 for three items on a prescription, and that that will be a considerable hardship for people on low incomes who are above supplementary benefit level? Does he not recognise the danger of that situation, in that people will tend to go to the chemist and prescribe their own medicines, or get them prescribed for them by the chemist?

Mr. Hayhoe: The hon. Gentleman is wrong in saying that the majority of people who go to a chemist with more than one item on a prescription will pay in the way that he specified. The majority of people, as I have said on three or four occasions, are exempt—75 per cent. are exempt. I confirm that what he said about the number of items on a prescription is correct.

Mr. Robin Maxwell-Hyslop (Tiverton): My right hon. Friend has referred to people on what he has termed low incomes who are entitled to reimbursement—not to free prescriptions. How do people in this category who are not in receipt of a specific pension recognise themselves as being entitled to reimbursement?

Mr. Hayhoe: There is an NHS leaflet available which gives that information. I shall gladly send a copy to the hon. Gentleman. It is freely available, and I am surprised that he has not seen it.

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): In answering my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) the Minister said that parts of my hon. Friend's speech were a travesty of the truth. Does the Minister agree that it was a travesty for the then Leader of the official Opposition to make promises to the nation that there would be no increase in prescription charges and then, within seven years, to increase those charges by 1,000 per cent.?

Mr. Hayhoe: The tragedy at the moment is that the Opposition have pledged to remove all the charges, which would amount to about £500 million a year, but they do not say, in this area or in any other, where the extra money is to come from. The Opposition are very quick to say that they will spend money, but they will not say where the resources will come from.

Dr. Michael Clark (Rochford): Will my right hon. Friend say whether the expected revenue from these higher charges in 1986-87 will be a greater or smaller percentage of the total NHS drug charges than the present charges in the current financial year?

Mr. Hayhoe: There will be a slight reduction, and overall, taking NHS spending as a whole, there is a small reduction in the percentage of the total NHS costs now being met by charges.

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): Is it not a disgraceful use of figures for the Minister to justify a 10 per cent. increase in prescription charges by saying that the cost of drugs and medicines has risen by 10 per cent., bearing in mind that when the Opposition argue for increased spending on the NHS, the Government use the Treasury inflationary figure of 5 per cent.? The figures put forward by the Minister are not only disgraceful but are an additional tax burden on sickness, for which the people will not readily forgive the Tory Prime Minister and her Government.

Mr. Hayhoe: I reject the hon. Gentleman's emotive comments. I made the comment about the relationship with the rising costs of medicines because that is factually correct. As the hon. Gentleman knows, I regularly supply figures to the House, and particularly to the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), based both on the retail price index and on NHS prices and pay.

Mr. Tony Baldry (Banbury): Did my right hon. Friend see a report last week from the British Medical

[Mr. Tony Baldry]

Association, which said that doctors felt that many of the shortfalls in the NHS could be met by cutting out waste in the NHS? Will my right hon. Friend have discussions with the BMA on how essential savings can be made in the durgs bill, not least by cutting out over-prescribing?

Mr. Hayhoe: I am glad to say that one of the first, if not the first, official engagement that I had as Minister for Health was to attend a conference with leading representatives of the medical profession and the pharmaceutical industry about prescribing. My information is that, following the introduction of the limited list last year and the great publicity that was given to these matters, more responsible prescribing is now taking place more widely in the NHS.

Dr. Roger Thomas (Carmarthen): Is the Minister not using a twin-headed coin? He blames today's rise on the fact that doctors are prescribing more expensive medications, yet the Minister's predecessor made sure that many cheap but effective remedies are not available. For example, simple antacids are now replaced by acid blocking drugs costing ten times as much as the antacids.

Mr. Hayhoe: If the hon. Gentleman is seeking to re-run the arguments about the selective list, he must recognise that the changes were made as a result of decisions taken by a distinguished and authoritative group of medical and pharmaceutical experts. These changes, as I said a moment ago, are achieving a £75 million a year saving in the drugs bill, and these extra resources are being used for patient care in other areas.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Cromarty and Skye): Does the Minister accept that, although the exclusion of dental and optical charges is much needed and very welcome, his defence of increasing prescription charges by twice the rate of the retail price index needs to be further explained? On previous occasions the Minister has refuted my argument by saying at the Dispatch Box that the accurate measure of inflation in the National Health Service is the retail price index, rather than the internal National Health Service rate. However, he has defended this statement by using the internal National Health Service rate of increased drugs charges to justify this increase. Does that indicate a change in Department of Health and Social Security or Treasury policy, and if not, why not?

Mr. Hayhoe: It indicates that either the hon. Gentleman is seeking to misrepresent what I have said, or that he has misunderstood it.

Mr. Richard Hickmet (Glanford and Scunthorpe): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Opposition's reaction of outrage is synthetic and bogus, that it is motivated, as usual, by political objectives, that the Government are committed to providing free drugs for pensioners, children, and pregnant women and nursing mothers and that in those circumstances the Government's policy is entirely to be applauded?

Mr. Hayhoe: I think that my hon. Friend has put it in a nutshell.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Is the Minister for Health aware that there is nothing phoney in the Opposition's condemnation of the 1,000 per cent. increase in prescription charges since this Government took office? The Minister always refers to the number of exemptions from prescription charges, but will he confirm that a large number of families, by no means high income earners, are not exempt? Therefore, this further increase in prescription charges is a tax on the sick. The Minister should therefore be thoroughly ashamed of himself for having come to the House to justify yet another increase.

Mr. Hayhoe: I do not accept that argument for one moment. The reality is that the percentage of the total cost of the National Health Service that is being met by charges is within tenths of a percentage point of what it was during the last full year of the previous Labour Government.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels (Leicester, East): Although I regret these increases, which will affect 25 per cent. of sick people, will my right hon. Friend confirm that only 5 per cent. of sick people claim a season ticket? Should not my right hon. Friend encourage all surgeries to make leaflets available to patients informing them of their entitlement? Perhaps Saatchi and Saatchi ought to be used to publicise this fact. If one fell ill, one would be able to apply there and then for a season ticket. That is the way to keep down prices.

Mr. Hayhoe: Of course I am glad to recommend the wider use of season tickets by those who need a steady supply of medicine. However, that does not apply, happily, to a substantial number of our fellow citizens. The increase from £2 to £2·20 that I have announced, together with the widespread exemptions, will not place a heavy additional burden upon those in the community who will have to pay the increased charge.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I shall call the three hon. Members who have been rising, but may I ask them to put brief questions. I call the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours).

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Why should 15 million people have to pay an increase that is twice the rate of inflation? Is there not an irony in the fact that the Minister stood at the Dispatch Box as a Treasury Minister only a year or two years ago and asked for the indexation of capital gains tax and capital transfer tax at a rate that was equal to the rate of inflation? Is it not obvious that, although the Minister wants to secure justice, in his view, for those who are paying taxation on very large incomes and very large tranches of wealth, he does not want equally to protect those who are not in such a privileged position?

Mr. Hayhoe: If I were to take the hon. Gentleman's figure of 15 million people who are to pay, in total, over the year an additional £7 million, it would mean that in fact those people were paying 1p a week more.

Mr. John Ryman (Blyth Valley): The Minister said, quite wrongly, that there is no evidence that increased prescription charges deter patients from asking for prescriptions. There is an abundance of evidence in north-east England about that. Will the Minister have a word with the chairman of the northern regional health authority? He would show the Minister his annual report, which cites specific examples. Will the Minister also have a look at the enormous profits that are made by pharmaceutical firms from supplying drugs to the National Health Service?

Mr. Hayhoe: I am prepared to consider any evidence on the first issue which the hon. Gentleman gives to me. Secondly, I am glad to have his implicit support for the measures taken by my predecesser, which much reduced the moneys flowing to the pharmaceutical companies. As I think is well known, discussions and negotiations between the Government and the pharmaceutical companies are continuing. I hope that a satisfactory agreement to all concerned will result.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): The Minister is claiming much credit for the exempted patients, but will he say a little more about the consequences of the exempted drugs being taken out of the NHS? What does he say to those of my constituents who are still complaining to me that they cannot obtain on the NHS the drugs that they need? I have made representations on this issue to the Minister at the Scottish Office with responsibility for the Health Service, and the results have not been satisfactory.

Mr. Hayhoe: These matters are considered by a highly authoritative specialist and expert committee. It is right and proper that my right hon. Friend and I take the advice of that important and distinguished committee and not seek to double guess it on matters on which its competence is widely understood and recognised.

Mr. Dobson: The Minister sought to justify the 20p increase in prescription charges on the ground that it was in line with the increase in the cost of drugs. Will he confirm that in 1979 patients used to meet 10 per cent. of the drugs bill and that the implementation of the proposition that is before us will mean that they will meet about half of it?

To return to something which I raised earlier and which the Minister appears to have misunderstood, when does he expect to be able to announce the result of the review of the categories of person who suffer from certain specific conditions which are currently exempted? When does he expect that review to be completed?

Finally, when the *Daily Mail* reported the Prime Minister as having said in 1979,

"We have no intention of increasing prescription charges,"

was the *Daily Mail* lying, or was the right hon. Lady lying?

Mr. Hayhoe: The hon. Gentleman referred to certain specified conditions. As I made clear in my statement, this follows a review of all these matters. I would not be making such a statement without having reviewed carefully every item in it. I have no plans to change the present exemptions from the prescription charge for those suffering from certain specified conditions. As I have said, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has made it abundantly clear that no responsible Government could ever promise not to increase prescription charges. The important feature is that the exemptions remain. However the hon. Gentleman seeks to obscure the realities of the present condition, the mere existence of that wide range of exemptions will make his efforts null and void.

Mr. Speaker: I hope that the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) was not accusing the Prime Minister of lying.

Mr. Dobson: I would not wish to do so, Mr. Speaker, but the right hon. Lady was reported in the *Daily Mail* as having said——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I ask the hon. Gentleman to withdraw that allegation.

Mr. Dobson: I shall have to say, Mr. Speaker, that the *Daily Mail* was lying.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Ordered,

That the draft Child Resistant Packaging (Safety) Regulations 1986 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the Local Government Reorganisation (Property etc.) Order 1986 (S.I., 1986, No. 148) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Ports (Finance) Act 1985 (Increase of Grants Limit) Order 1986 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Lennox-Boyd.]*

WELSH AFFAIRS

Ordered,

That the matter of the Roads Programme and the Transport Infra-structure in Wales, being a matter relating exclusively to Wales, be referred to the Welsh Grand Committee for its consideration.—*[Mr. Lennox-Boyd.]*

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at this day's sitting, the Motion in the name of Mr. John Biffen relating to Privileges may be proceeded with, though opposed, until half-past Eleven o'clock or for one and a half hours after it has been entered upon, whichever is the later, and if proceedings thereon have not been disposed of by that hour Mr. Speaker shall put the Question on any Amendment which may have been moved, and shall then put forthwith the Question on any other Amendments selected by him which may then be moved, and on the Main Question or the Main Question, as amended.—*[Mr. Lennox-Boyd]*

Common Agricultural Policy

4.6 pm

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Michael Jopling): I beg to move,

That this House takes note of European Community Documents Nos. 4963/86 including Addenda 1 to 5, 10174/85, 4075/86, 8480/85, 5098/86, 10492/85, 4130/86 and 4150/86; and supports the Government's intention to seek an agreement on 1986-87 farm support prices and related measures, including a Community Milk Outgoers Scheme, which maintains the process of reform, and, in particular, which tackles the problems of surpluses and costs in the Common Agricultural Policy, which makes the policy more market-orientated and which does not unfairly disadvantage the United Kingdom, taking account of the interests of British agriculture and its associated industries, of consumers and of taxpayers.

I am pleased that this year we are able to have a full day's debate on the farm price proposals. They are important proposals and it is useful to have this debate early in the negotiations so that we can take full account of the views of the House.

I know that there is the disadvantage that the proposals have been available for only a short time, but I hope that this will not cause excessive problems of difficulties.

The background to the Commission's price proposals for 1986-87 is important and I shall remind the House of it. Last year the Commission set in hand a wide-ranging review of the common agricultural policy by issuing a green paper called "Perspectives for the CAP". This looked at the policy in the context of production and markets for commodities and examined wider issues, including some environmental and related matters.

Fundamental to the green paper was the need to get markets into better balance and the wider implications that such a policy would have. During the autumn the Commission issued two memoranda on beef and cereals and finally in December a document setting out its conclusions on this debate. It identified a number of priorities, in particular: first, the need to reduce production of surplus commodities and so alleviate the budgetary burden; secondly, the need to diversify, and to improve quality; thirdly, the need to sustain rural structure and to safeguard the environment; fourthly, the need to contribute to the development of agriculturally based industries and to enable agriculture to advance technically. These are broadly the priorities which we support, but they also included as a priority the need to deal with the income problems of small and family farms, an issue to which I shall be returning later.

At present, the Commission has not made proposals on the structural or environmental issues. These will be important and the Agriculture Commissioner has said that a socio-structural package is being urgently prepared. It is likely to include proposals for early retirement, for taking land out of production, for forestry and for compensating farmers who use environmentally sensitive methods. The Commission sees this as forming an important counterpart to the tough measures proposed on farm prices. The House will wish to note their relevance and I am sure will want to consider them as soon as they are available.

The Commission's farm price proposals issued last month provide the specific measures to implement some of the major ideas emerging from the perspectives exercise. The main features of the proposals are a price freeze for the major commodities and substantial measures affecting intervention and other aspects of support. Although the overall effect of the proposals is tough, against the background of massive surpluses and growing budgetary costs they are not a fully appropriate response to the problems we face. In its green paper the Commission stressed the importance of a long-term price policy rigorous enough to have a real effect on production. The proposal for a price freeze falls well short of the needs of the situation. While we strongly support the Commission's determination to have a process of reform, there are important aspects where they have fallen short.

The sector which demands major action urgently is cereals. For this, as in other sectors, price policy needs to be central to the Community's strategy. The simplest way is through the level of the support price itself. This is the way that appeals to me: it gives the clearest signals to farmers and traders—especially if maintained over a number of years; it reduces the cost of support and costs to consumers and it avoids discrimination. But last year Germany refused to agree price cuts and the Commission has chosen to follow another approach this year.

The Commission's proposal is a complex package of measures, some of which fall within its own competence through management committee procedure. The effect is that, while intervention prices for the main grains would be frozen at this season's levels, the overall value of support would be substantially reduced for many producers.

There are three key elements. First, in order to qualify for intervention at the full price, grain would have to meet a tighter quality specification, and tougher discounts would be applied to grain not meeting specification. Secondly, intervention would be available only between December and April rather than throughout the year. Thirdly, a co-responsibility levy would be charged on all grain sold off farms, subject to a rebate on up to 25 tonnes.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith (Wealden): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the co-responsibility levy, apart from its impracticability, puts in jeopardy any serious introduction or consideration of a set-aside scheme, which is surely a far better, fairer and more practical way to ensure correct production levels?

Mr. Jopling: I agree with a good deal of what my hon. Friend says, although I do not think that it would be impossible for a co-responsibility levy to run side by side with a set-aside scheme, but perhaps I could come to that later in my speech.

The combined effect of the package could be to cut by 10 or 11 per cent. the price paid on delivery into intervention for the lowest quality wheat or barley which is still acceptable.

Mr. Brynmor John (Pontypridd): The Commission certainly does not agree with the Minister, as it says in paragraph 18 of document 8480/85:

"set-aside or land diversion is judged to be expensive and difficult to administer."

That shows that the Commission does not favour such a scheme.

Mr. Jopling: We are told that the Commission is currently working on the possibility of a set-aside element in the cereals package for the future.

I am under no illusions about the effect that a series of measures of this kind would have on the arable sector in this country, following all the problems of the 1985

harvest, but the Council has ignored the problems of the cereals sector for too long and strong measures are called for.

Some of the particular measures proposed by the Commission are, in my view, misconceived. First, any co-responsibility levy is objectionable because of the administrative problems that it raises, because it reduces returns to producers without doing anything to reduce prices to consumers or exporters, and because it weakens the incentive for policy to respond to financial pressure.

In addition, the current proposal is illogical and discriminates fiercely against the United Kingdom. All grain contributes to the surplus, so it is illogical to charge a levy only on sales. Discrimination arises because the proportion of grain sold off our farms is much higher than the Community average, and because our farms are on average much larger. Taken together, those factors mean that about three-quarters of our cereal production would bear the levy, compared with about half for the Community as a whole. We could not accept a co-responsibility levy with those features. Instead of a 3 per cent. co-responsibility levy I shall be arguing that a price cut of 3 per cent. would make better sense. It would avoid the administrative and discriminatory objections to the Commission's proposal, and it would reduce prices to consumers, including the livestock sector.

There is much to commend in other parts of the cereals proposals. The approach on quality standards — that lower quality grain should be supported at a lower price — is right, and I support the proposal to make intervention play a less crucial role in the market by limiting its operation to any part of the marketing year. I also welcome the proposed elimination of a number of costly elements in the regime, such as the high support level for durum wheat.

Mr. John Carlisle (Luton, North): Is my right hon. Friend satisfied that, with a fiercer and better quality intervention scheme, other member states would play the same rules as we do? Is he not worried that intervention grain that would not be passed here would be passed in other countries because of their lower standards of quality examination?

Mr. Jopling: I have a good deal of sympathy with that comment. Perhaps I could return to it at a later stage in my speech.

We shall be seeking changes in those elements of quality standards which would artificially distort support levels because they use criteria which have no place in the real market for grain within or outside the Community. That is important, in view of what my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, North (Mr. Carlisle) has said.

The Commission has reiterated its opposition to cereal quotas and I support it in that. It cannot make sense for the United Kingdom to advocate quotas, which would tend to ossify production patterns, when our industry has achieved so much through dynamic change. Quotas are not the soft option that many seem to believe them to be. To be effective, they would need to involve immediate very marked cuts in production or acreage. These would need to be intensified progressively as yields continued to increase. They would be no less painful for many British farmers than action on the level of prices and would reduce their scope to exploit their competitive advantages.

I am open to examining new measures in the cereals sector, but these must be designed to assist the implementation of the restrictive price policy that we are seeking. I have taken the initiative in calling for an examination of a Community set-aside system for cereals. Together with price cuts and sensible quality and intervention measures that could provide a worthwhile package enabling the Community to make real progress in tackling the cereals sector.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Grantham): I am glad to hear of the package that my right hon. Friend intends to bring forward, but will he clarify whether the set-aside aspect will be effectively a voluntary buy-out scheme or whether it will be compulsory?

Mr. Jopling: I said at the annual meeting of the National Farmers Union a few weeks ago—perhaps I should have said it again today—that I am thinking in terms of a voluntary scheme which might operate on a Community basis for people to divert to land uses other than cereal production.

Mr. Ralph Howell (Norfolk, North): Will my right hon. Friend keep an open mind on the set-aside question and consider the advantages of a compulsory scheme which would do away with all the problems, tribunals, and so on that we have experienced in relation to milk?

Does my right hon. Friend accept that there is a contradiction between calling for a reduction in price as well as for a set-aside system? Surely a reduction in price will lead producers to try to increase production so as to maintain their income?

Mr. Jopling: My hon. Friend invites me to keep an open mind. In the face of his continual constructive and helpful thoughts about quotas, set-asides, price arrangements, and so on, one has no option but to have an open mind. In dealing with all my hon. Friend's good ideas, I certainly have an open mind, although I do not see the contradiction to which my hon. Friend refers. But perhaps we could discuss that on a future occasion.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): Does my right hon. Friend agree that a compulsory set-aside system would be nonsense and would discriminate against the fertile east midlands because it is much easier to set aside 30 acres in the west country than it is in the east midlands?

Mr. Jopling: I have been around far too long to put my head in that noose. I think that my hon. Friends the Members for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) and for Norfolk, North (Mr. Howell) should get together and sort their act out.

There is a need for a major reappraisal of support policy for beef. That is clearly a part of the Commission's proposals. We must take account of the fact that beef is a cyclical commodity. The regime must support producers through the worst of the cycle, especially when much of the difficulty in the sector has resulted from measures taken to control the milk surplus.

The Commission proposes to freeze the support price. More important, intervention would be increasingly limited between now and December 1987. After that it would be held in reserve, for use only at times of serious market disturbance.

Intevention is not an ideal form of support for beef. Beef loses much of its value once frozen, and costs of storage are high. We support the case for a shift away from intervention, but we need to be clearer what the

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Commission is planning, including the circumstances in which intervention could be reintroduced after December 1987.

On premiums, the Commission proposes immediate replacement of the existing premium schemes, including the beef variable premium scheme, by a single premium. This would comprise two elements: first a basic cattle premium payable on animals over six months of age excluding those on dairy farms; and second, a suckler cow premium, broadly continuing the present arrangements at a slightly enhanced rate of aid.

I am glad to see the continued provision for assistance to the suckler herd. The proposal for the basic premium has, however, a number of unattractive features; in particular, payment would be limited to 50 head in any one herd. Such a restriction would bear heavily on this country, where average head size is greater than elsewhere in the Community. I have already made clear our objections to this in the strongest terms. The basic premium is also open to the criticism that it is payable at a flat rate, irrespective of market circumstances.

Mr. Tony Baldry (Banbury): Will my right hon. Friend make it clear to the Commission that, whether one is dealing with the headage of beef herds or taking cereal tonnage off farms, no proposals will work unless they are seen to be fair? They must be fair between Community countries. If they are not seen to be fair they will not work.

Mr. Jopling: I am glad that my hon. Friend has made that point. It is a point I shall come back to because it is one of our most important approaches at this difficult time.

With regard to beef, no provision has been made for continuing the variable premium. I believe that the variable premium has served producers and consumers well by providing support to the beef market while helping to encourage consumption of the product by keeping prices down. We have always faced fierce opposition to the scheme in Brussels. Doubtless we shall again this year. But I want the House to know that I shall be pressing, during negotiations, for its continuation.

Mr. Robin Maxwell-Hyslop (Tiverton): Will my right hon. Friend ensure that he gets what he pays for? My right hon. Friend agreed to the increase in milk quota granted to Eire specifically on the condition that the meat variable premium continued. If the beef variable premium does not continue, then the extra production of milk quota must be removed from Eire.

Mr. Jopling: If my hon. Friend looks up the record——

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: He did.

Mr. Jopling: —he will know that I made it clear at the time that, regardless of anything in the 1984 price settlement concerning the beef variable premium, if the opportunity had arisen—it did not—I would have voted against the special arrangements given to the Republic of Ireland, with regard to its extra milk allowance. I made that clear at the time and I can remember explaining to the House and to many audiences around the country, that it was only because the Netherlands Government were alone in supporting our opposition that we did not have the opportunity to block what I have always regarded as a very unfair allowance in the milk sector.

In the sheepmeat sector, the Commission has proposed a price freeze for 1987 with no changes to the present seasonal scale of guide prices. However, payment of annual premium would be limited to a maximum of 500 ewes per flock, 1,000 in less favoured areas; and Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland regions would be merged into a single region for the purposes of the regime. We agree to a price freeze for 1987 and the unchanged seasonal scale. However, the limit on annual premium would discriminate unfairly against British producers, because we generally have larger flocks than producers in other member states. We are also opposed to the merger of the Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland regions since it would work to the disadvantage of Northern Irish producers. Their higher productivity could not be fully reflected in the key economic data which determine annual ewe premiums.

On the basis of discrimination, I come back to the comment made by my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry) a few moments ago. A common theme in the cereals, beef and sheepmeat proposals is the inclusion of elements that discriminate against the United Kingdom. This is the result of the Commission's declared policy of tackling the income problems of small or family farms, often by measures that penalise the larger farmer. This would particularly disadvantage our own industry which has a generally larger-scale structure; our farms, we should remember, are about five times the size of the Community average. The Commission's approach would penalise our industry simply because it has developed a more efficient structure and a larger scale of operation.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North) *rose*——

Mr. Jopling: The Government cannot accept that it is right to develop the CAP in a direction designed to stifle efficiency and which involves the introduction of a concept which is quite contrary to the philosophy of a common market. We shall be pressing in the negotiations for measures that are fair in agricultural terms between farmers and between member states.

Mr. John Carlisle: Can my right hon. Friend comment on the remarks made this morning by the new president of the National Farmers Union? The president said that the NFU would favour a devaluation of the green pound. Does my right hon. Friend think that that would help the situation?

Mr. Jopling: I will come to that point in a while, if I am allowed to continue.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich) *rose*——

Mr. Marlow *rose*——

Mr. Jopling: Milk quotas have been with us for two years now. They have cut production, but there is still a gap between supply and demand of about 14 million tonnes, or about 14 per cent. of production. The Community cannot afford such a large imbalance, which last year cost the budget almost £3,500 million. Reduction of the quota level is necessary and the proposed Community milk outgoers scheme offers the chance of a reduction of 3 million tonnes. This will make only a modest dent in the surplus. Price restraint is also needed, and I believe that it will be needed for some considerable time to come.

The Commission has proposed to freeze the target price for milk; I do not consider that this goes far enough. We need a substantial price cut and I shall argue for a 3 per cent. cut. I regret that the Commission has not proposed any reduction in the co-responsibility levy on milk. I would like the Council to commit itself to abolition of the levy, although for budgetary reasons I recognise that this would have to be over several years.

Mrs. Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Will my right hon. Friend go into any greater detail concerning the milk outgoers scheme and the division between the landlord and tenant? I know that this is left unclear in the Commission's documents. We are all aware that there are some good landlords who do everything and some good tenants who do everything. But there is a large lump in the middle. Could there not be a system of arbitration to decide what is fair?

Mr. Jopling: I regret to tell my hon. Friend, as I have told some of my other hon. Friends who have interrupted, that I shall come to this point in a few minutes.

The Commission has proposed that supplementary levy payments should be made at six-monthly intervals rather than annually, as at present. This could help to ensure that producers throughout the Community remain within quota, but there are practical difficulties. We shall need to seek satisfactory arrangements to cover producers whose seasonal production patterns have changed since 1983. I was pleased to see that the Commission had proposed maintaining the Community quota reserve at its existing level for Northern Ireland.

On the Community outgoers scheme, although there is general agreement that output must be reduced, some member states argue that they should be either wholly or partially exempted from the scheme. I would prefer a scheme which as far as possible depends upon the voluntary surrender of quota by producers, but it is important that there should be a compulsory element in it so that all member states reach the target cut, and none suffers disproportionately. I hope that, in the context of the scheme, we may be able to get flexibility to deal with the differing regional structures in the United Kingdom.

The Commission proposal provides that tenants may take part in the scheme without their landlord's consent. This does not take sufficient account of the landlord's interest in quota. The proposal needs to be amended to allow greater flexibility, so that member states may adopt provisions which reflect their own individual land tenure systems.

Mr. David Maclean (Penrith and The Border): I am obliged to my right hon. Friend for giving way to another hon. Member who represents an upland area. With regard to the apportionment of quota between landlord and tenant, does my right hon. Friend agree that, even if it was decided that it was fair that the landlord should get 70 per cent. and the tenant only 30 per cent. in a good lowland area, that would be very unfair on a tenant in an upland area who was probably not getting any super-quota whatsoever?

Mr. Jopling: I had better not be tempted down that path because I am negotiating with the Country Landowners Association and the National Farmers Union. It is a delicate matter and I have noted what my hon. Friend said.

Mrs. Dunwoody: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way because this matter is important in my area. Some tenants may have put all their savings into existing holdings and may lose a great deal of money on their capital costs. Can the Minister guarantee that there will be some arbritation to protect their interests?

Mr. Jopling: I assure the hon. Lady that the possible entitlements of the landlord and the tenant have been fully taken into account in our discussions.

For sugar, the Commission has proposed a freeze on prices. Production of sugar within quotas exceeds consumption by 1·4 million tonnes. The cost of providing export refunds is high, and there is an upward trend in yields. I agree with the need for continued price restraint in this sector.

The Commission rightly regards oilseeds as alternatives to cereals. It is important that the relativities in price of cereals and oilseeds should not inhibit the production of oilseeds as an alternative crop. I am concerned about the operational problems of the Commission's proposal for modifying the guarantee threshold system and will give that special attention in the negotiations.

For other commodities, the Commission is proposing a generally stringent policy. There is scope in some instances for tougher measures and I shall press for them where appropriate, and seek a fair balance between commodities.

The Commission has not yet made any proposal to adjust the United Kingdom green pound and monetary compensatory amounts. Given the movement of sterling, it is too early to take a view on whether any changes might later be appropriate.

In presenting its proposals, the Commission estimated that expenditure in 1986 will be 961 million ecu higher than forecast in the budget. Within this, the fall in the United States dollar against the ecu is estimated to increase Community expenditure by about 750 million ecu. The price-fixing proposals themselves are estimated to reduce expenditure by about 400 million ecu in 1986.

The Commission also says that a start should be made on special disposals of intervention stocks on a substantial scale. To help offset this cost, the Commission proposes to make economies and to reduce payments to member states for the financing of intervention operations.

When all the changes are taken into account, the Commission estimates that an extra 790 million ecu would still be required in 1986, and it intends to propose a supplementary budget for this amount. The expenditure provision would then be above the level indicated by the financial guideline.

The Council will have to examine critically the Commission's suggestion that expenditure above the guideline can be justified because of the exceptional circumstances. This is not an issue only for the Agriculture Council—the Finance Council, as the House may know, is considering it today. Furthermore, any proposal for a supplementary budget for agricultural expenditure would have to be considered by the Budget Council.

We shall insist that the scope for economies is fully and rigorously examined. It is certainly too early to conclude that the guidelines will inevitably be breached or that there will have to be a supplementary budget this year.

Mr. John: Does the costing that the right hon. Gentleman is giving take account of the destocking measures to sell off meat, cereals and the rest?

Mr. Jopling: The hon. Gentleman knows that that is a separate matter which the Commission has talked about in its approaches to dealing with the huge stocks.

The serious problems facing European agriculture cannot be escaped, but they are not simply European problems. There has been a worldwide expansion of agricultural production, and traditional importers such as China and India have been reaching self-sufficiency. Traditional exporters, notably the United States, are also having to adjust to the changes. There are major readjustments to be made, and they will place heavy and unwelcome burdens on the farming industry. The Government are determined that the burdens are shared fairly. The European Community must play its full part, always insisting that third countries, not least the United States of America, play theirs. Within the Community there must be a fair balance between member states and between farmers. We shall insist on that in our approach to the price negotiations.

Mr. Nicholas Baker (Dorset, North): Every time that we discuss price fixing, my right hon. Friend makes the same sort of remarks about reform and changes in the common agricultural policy, but I begin to get the impression that there is not the same commitment to change among our European friends. Would it be possible for my right hon. Friend to instigate discussions with his European allies about reform of the CAP in the long term, quite separate from discussions of yearly price fixing and premiums?

Mr. Jopling: I referred to that earlier when I mentioned the perspectives exercise and the fact that, in the latter part of 1985, we considered where the Community and the CAP are going. I hope that, as we get more plans for set-aside, for example, we shall progress.

We must not allow agriculture to become entangled in a web of bureaucratic controls. A successful farming industry—and a worthwhile rural economy—depend on the scope for initiative and enterprise being rewarded. Whatever measures are adopted, we shall press for them to leave scope for efficient, hard-working and progressive farmers to develop their businesses and so contribute to a healthy agriculture which is better related to the needs of the market. We shall try to ensure that proper account is taken of the interests of food manufacturers and processors, other associated industries, consumers and taxpayers.

I commend the motion to the House.

4.39 pm

Mr. Brynmor John (Pontypridd): As the bundle of documents that we are considering is about 4 or 5 in high, many hon. Members will have smiled wrily when the Minister ended by saying that the Government were determined not to get bogged down in bureaucratic controls.

The right hon. Gentleman was right when he began by saying that the debate has great merit in that we are considering proposals rather than settled terms, so we can state the views of the House. Like the hon. Member for Dorset, North (Mr. Baker) I am beginning to suspect that although there are differences between the parties—and I shall outline some of them—the ends sought by the United Kingdom are broadly agreed. I am, however, worried by the fact that although we all solemnly state the United Kingdom's position on these occasions, that has absolutely no impact on the other members of the European Economic Community.

Sir Peter Mills (Torridge and Devon, West): That is not true.

Mr. John: The strength of the debate is also our weakness. Our weakness is that we are debating many months in advance of agreements. From previous experience we have learnt that today's debate may either never proceed further, or, if it proceeds further, will bear no relationship to the final decision, either in figures or philosophy. I suspect that that will be the case for both the price proposals and the common agricultural policy. Many months of debate must still be undertaken and, as we know from last year's experience, decisions will be taken after the most irrational horse-trading. We can only try to set the framework in which the discussions should be approached.

We should not make the mistake, which I detect in the Commission document, of believing that frequent use of strong words will itself remove the weaknesses of which the Commission complains. One cannot huff and puff the CAP away. Every month the desperate necessity for a thorough overhaul of the system, before it collapses under its insatiable demand for more and more money, is becoming clearer.

At present, surplus products cost the CAP 10·5 million ecu, which is an increase of 25 per cent. during the past year. In 1985 we have twice as many cereals in surplus as we had in 1984. The accumulative carry-over to 1992 is stated by the Commission to be 18 million tonnes, but that was controverted by the Home Grown Cereals Authority in its evidence to a House of Lords' Select Committee, which said that it would be about 130 million tonnes.

During the past year the butter surplus has increased by more that 1 million tonnes, and the beef surplus is 742,000 tonnes, plus a further 450,000 tonnes in private stores. That does not include the 400,000 tonnes of beef which were sold under what is called a preference scheme, but which is, in reality, a knock-down sale. The skimmed milk surplus is the only item which has decreased a little. Therefore, surpluses are increasing. The rest of the Community needs to appreciate that the increasing surpluses, which are apparently out of control, are intolerable to the British people, and should be intolerable to the electorates of all EEC countries, even newly joined members.

With regard to the milk outgoers scheme, as the Minister said, despite the imposition of a quota we are undoubtedly still running at about 14 per cent. above consumption. Without any other measures to check that, the figure will rise in 1992 to about 16 per cent., or just over. It is not always appreciated, not least in the House, because we tend to talk about the gigantic cereals sector, that the dairy sector is the most costly of all. For the 1986 budget that item will cost the Community £4·3 billion, which is about 31 per cent. of all guarantee expenditure, compared with 14·5 per cent. for cereals. Export refunds will cost £1·8 billion, and intervention will cost £2·5 billion. The guarantee expenditure on skimmed milk equals that on beef and veal, which shows the size of the problem and the urgent necessity to deal with it.

The Commission hopes to reduce the milk output by 3 million tonnes, or a further 3 per cent., in the next two

years. Even if it succeeds, it will cut total expenditure in this sector by only one eighth, which is a fairly modest reduction over two years. We must consider the scheme carefully, not least because, as the Minister discovered in his session in the chair at the Agriculture Ministers meeting recently, there is little agreement about what to do, apart from the milk outgoers scheme, which was tepidly received. If we are to follow that road, it is important to secure equality of treatment. Five or six countries claimed special treatment at that meeting.

Mr. Jopling: Six.

Mr. John: The figure is six, if Luxembourg is included. That would be unfair to the United Kingdom and impractical, and would lead to further import penetration of our markets by other EEC countries. It is simply unacceptable for anybody to be unfairly treated or to have special concessions.

There must be a fairer deal for tenants than was secured under the original scheme. I heard what the Minister said, and many of us will have sympathy with him in not wanting deliberately to jump on a mine in the minefield in which he finds himself. The National Farmers Union and the Country Landowners Association have been negotiating for a considerable time, and appear to be set to negotiate for a further considerable time. It is rumoured that they are sending representatives to Panmunjon to see how the peace talks are going, because the likelihood of agreement is greater there than in the United Kingdom.

I must press the Government to tell the House what their attitude is. It is not good enough to sit back and say, "Others are discussing the matter, which is all too delicate, difficult and painful," because their attitude is the key to the attitude to the milk outgoers scheme as a whole.

Before we can wholeheartedly commend the outgoers scheme, we need to know the consequences of the successful implementation of the policy. The Dairy Trade Federation has calculated that a 3 per cent. cut in price would involve the disappearance of 1,500 dairy farms and dairy farmers, who will be specially compensated under the outgoers scheme, together with 1,500 farm workers and 500 dairy employees who will not be specially compensated for the effect on them. We already know from the experience in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Carmarthen (Dr. Thomas), where 400 people recently lost their jobs because of the decision to close the Johnstown creamery, that it will not be acceptable for a future agreement to ignore the legitimate demands of those equally deserving refugees from the dairy disaster.

The price proposals, too, must be judged on two criteria. The first is the effect upon the rampant over-production in various sectors. In cereals, the broad neutrality of the proposals is accompanied by the co-responsibility levy. Since 1978 cereal production has increased in this country at an annual rate of 2 to 3 per cent. At Question Time last Thursday the Minister of State got into one of his choleric states about the effect that the weather could have on the crop. The retort is that the period since 1978 has covered good and bad years. The wretched 1985 summer yielded the second highest cereal harvest of all time; the quality of that harvest was not good, but scientific advances have insured the volume against bad weather now and in the future. Therefore we cannot rely, as the Minister of State tried to do at Question Time on Thursday, upon the weather to help cure the problem from time to time.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: On the question of the allocation of milk quota between landlord and tenant, I listened carefully to the hon. Gentleman saying that the Government should decide, but he failed to give us his view. Does he agree that in the allocation of quota between landlord and tenant weight should be given to the amount of investment by each?

Mr. John: The prima facie case from which we start is the proposal of the Commission that no landlord consent should be necessary and that there should be no compensation for the landlord unless it is proved that he has contributed to the build-up of the dairy enterprise. The person who was hardest done by in the last milk outgoers scheme was the tenant. I am determined that the balance should be redressed. I apologise for having omitted that. It was not through unwillingness to state my position, but merely because I overlooked it. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising it.

To go back to cereals, I was saying that we cannot rely upon the weather to level the fluctations. Because of scientific advances, cereal harvests will increase in volume year in year out. Is price to be the answer? Clearly the right hon. Gentleman and the Minister of State think so. The size of price cut which various people estimate will lead to a cut in production differs. The Commission believes that a 20 per cent. price reduction will reduce output. A special paper commissioned for *Agra Europe* by a Commission researcher suggested that a 33 per cent. cut in cereal prices is correct. Some people suggest a cut of up to 50 per cent. I think the right hon. Gentleman would not dissent from the view that even if prices were to stand still that would not dissuade people from producing cereals.

Going back to the central point, I fear that we are getting into shorthand when people shout, "Set aside the land," at every opportunity. Certainly land must be taken out of cereal production. That is the only way to control it. Over-production will not be controlled by price alone. Equally, if the farming industry is to have a reasonable future, it is not enough to say, "Set aside the land." The Government must indicate another purpose for which the land can be used. That is why I referred to farm woodlands and protein crops in a recent debate on rural areas.

The Government and the Opposition should indicate to farmers what they should move into. It would be easy for farmers to go out of cereal production and into another regime where over-production was repeated, with the build-up of more surpluses. We must tell farmers what they should turn their efforts to for the best agricultural advantage of themselves and the country.

The second test of the price proposals is that they should be non-discriminatory. The co-responsibility levy is not so much wrong as a pointless food tax. That is its real purpose. If it were to fulfil its original purpose it would have to be 6 per cent. to make the regime self-financing. We now have a halfway house with it being a tax on food without contributing towards any strategic decision by the Commission. With the first 25-tonne exemption, it seems to be targeted directly against the United Kingdom with its differing farm sizes. Because of farm size, we, who are growing 16 per cent. of EEC cereals, will pay 26 per cent.

[Mr. John]

of the levy, according to the NFU estimate. On the other hand, West Germany, which is growing 18 per cent. of the cereals, will pay only 11 per cent. of the levy. That is directly discriminatory. It is to be abhorred and must be opposed.

Nor is discrimination against the United Kingdom a feature only of the cereal sector. The single premium system for beef is highly discriminatory against the United kingdom, as will be the new premium proposals. I shall return to the point, but it seems to me and to some other hon. Members, not least I think the hon. Member for Dorset, North, that United Kingdom farm structures are becoming increasingly difficult to combine with the small, often part-time, homesteads of the rest of Europe.

I am disappointed that the right hon. Gentleman did not refer to the stock disposal scheme, because I understand that it is covered in the documents. It cannot be taken as a serious contribution to the surplus problem. Mr. Peter Pooley, addressing the Oxford conference, said that it was a temporary and modest contribution only. Even if the new scheme is more sophisticated than the brainless Gadaffi butter scheme that we heard about recently, there is no guarantee that surpluses will not continue to pile up. After all, 400,000 tonnes of beef were disposed of by special measures last year, yet public stocks still rose by 70,000 tonnes. With private stocks that took the surplus to well over 1 million tonnes of beef. Despite all the measures that we have taken to get rid of butter on the most favourable and ludicrous terms, the surplus has still increased by 150,000 tonnes.

Some people feel that the only thing wrong with the common agricultural policy is the lack of proper marketing, but the encouragement of unlimited production is creating surpluses which neither consumption nor marketing can remove. It is worth reminding ourselves just how great is our over-production. We produce 361 per cent. of our needs of whole milk powder, 169 per cent. of concentrated milk and 142 per cent. of skimmed milk powder. I have a long list of products where we produce about 100 per cent. of our needs. The number of items in which we are still deficient in production is small. To summarise, the system is out of control, and this fact is crucial in this year's negotiations.

The Minister quoted some figures. In the *Financial Times* last week he will have seen that the extra cost of this year's budget over the draft budget will be £1 billion, or 1·5 billion ecu. Even if all the price proposals are realised this year, they will yield savings of just more than one quarter of that extra sum. In 1987, the savings, which are put at 786 million ecu, will be cut to just more than 250 million ecu because of the beef and veal measures.

Those savings will not induce any volume cuts. They are merely tinkering with the problem, while an attack on its root cause is deferred for another couple of years, which will mean the proliferation of other problems.

Mr. John Carlisle: The hon. Gentleman talks about cereal over-production and surpluses, and he also mentioned a surplus in skimmed milk powder. Will he reflect on the fact that we buy some commodities, such as cereal substitutes, from Third world countries? If we were to cut those imports, we could produce more in Britain. What would be the Labour party's attitude to a substantial cut in the imports of cereal substitutes from the Third world? Would the Labour party support a reduction in those supplies?

Mr. John: We have a duty to deal properly with the agricultural production of the Third world, and I do not believe that we could effect substantial savings on some of the commodities that we import from the Third world —*[Interruption.]* I said that we could not save on some of them. I wish that hon. Members would listen. Listening and talking at the same time is difficult, but they must make the effort. We have a moral and economic duty to help to support economies in the Third world, and I make no apology for saying that. We could equally cut the importation of protein crop substitutes from the United States. As the Minister will know from his recent trip to Washington, there are not the friendliest of relations between the agricultural regime of the United States Government and that of the European Community. The United States concedes that it does not owe us any favours, so we do not owe it any favours. I would prefer such an import-saving measure in a set-aside policy.

Sir John Farr (Harborough): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. John: I must complete this point first. I cannot answer another intervention before I have answered the first.

I was talking about the imperative necessity to remove the surpluses that are being created by the common agricultural policy.

Sir John Farr: What is the Labour party's attitude to the importation of New Zealand dairy and sheepmeat products? Does it favour continuing the arrangements?

Mr. John: The arrangements with New Zealand have been negotiated properly, and their amendment is not desirable, necessary or justified. I hope that even the hon. Gentleman will understand that clearly. If some Conservative Members believe that imports from New Zealand should be reduced, it is time that they said so. For a long time they have got away with their snide anti-New Zealand lobby, which never reaches the point of saying, "We do not want your products in Britain." It is time that the Government and the Conservative party said whether they favour the exclusion of products imported from New Zealand.

The present price proposals will do nothing to cut production to an acceptable level and will do little to save the runaway EEC budget. But even that remark may be too generous, because it assumes that the Commission's proposals will be adopted in full. However, we know from our experience last year that there will be a substantial difference between the present proposals and what is finally agreed by the Agriculture Ministers. Last year, Herr Kiechle was the villain. This year, Mr. Austin Deasy has been set up by *Agra Europe* as the villain of the piece. But we know that even those modest proposals will be savaged by the Council of Ministers in the following months of negotiations. Anyone who reads *Agra Europe* for 28 February will see that not one proposal from Ministers does not attract objections from one or more countries. Therefore, we must ask, especially when alluding to the document on the reform of the CAP, what policy we are discussing and what common agriculture there is in the Community.

Within the Ten, the percentage of the labour force employed in agriculture varies from 2·6 per cent. in the United Kingdom, which is the smallest, to 30 per cent. in Greece, which is the highest. Average farm sizes reverse the position. In Greece the average farm size is 4·3 hectares; in the United Kingdom it is 68·7 hectares. German farms are a quarter the size of those in Britain, and no other country in the Twelve has an average farm size that is even half that in Britain. That is the essential difference between the rest of the EEC and the United Kingdom.

From time to time we should set aside percentages and mechanics and examine how much we have in common in this common agricultural policy. In the Ten, part-time farming accounts for about 60 per cent. of the input, whereas Britain looks much more towards full-time employment. Paragraph 9 of the explanatory memorandum to document 8480/85 says that there is,

"enormous regional variety in the agricultural sector",

with Spain and Portugal bringing in larger sectors and lower efficiency. Despite that, the CAP insists upon a maximalist system of intervention and a maximalist policy in which target prices are adopted for every commodity ranging from soya to silk worms.

The House must consider whether so integrated a system can work or will work in the Community of Twelve. I believe that it cannot work. Even though agreement to take account of the self-evident surpluses in pricing is nearly impossible now, with the enlargement to 12 it will become completely impossible. Yet the EEC clings to this detailed regime.

It is interesting to ask why the EEC does so. First, as the right hon. Gentleman said, it is honestly confused, in that it believes that laudable social objectives, such as the maintenance of rural areas and the environment, are properly a charge on the agriculture budget. Paragraph 8 of the explanatory memorandum shows that our subsidies amount to about 20 per cent. of the value of total production. It states that the expenditure is justified on social grounds and

"because of the positive role agriculture can play in protecting the environment."

But social interests are not being protected by commodity subsidies. Nor do they protect rural areas. Since we pay separately for things such as environmentally sensitive areas to maintain the environment, by paying extra through the farming budget and surpluses, we are accounting twice for the same commodity. We believe that there should be separate payment for the environmentally sensitive areas and for all other environmental needs. But that means that there is no justification for the present detailed CAP.

The second reason given is the real reason why quotas are rejected. Stripped of all the EEC verbiage, it is clear that so detailed a regime exists, that quotas are ruled out and that we are having to undertake the labour of Sisyphus, in trying to limit production through prices, even though we know that the chances of success are so small as to be negligible, because of the spectre, as perceived in paragraph 13, of the renationalisation of agriculture.

We should at least be considering whether we should reorganise the CAP, so that it concerns itself with the major elements, while leaving their detailed implementation more in the hands of member states. I believe that the West German Government are challenging the EEC over national aids. We, too, should be considering the change in attitude that is now apparent. The time has come for the EEC to consider setting overall production targets, which I believe should be set at the level of consumption or with just a small margin. It should consider dividing them into national quotas. That would be difficult, but it should then be left to the countries themselves to carry out detailed implementation in the light of circumstances.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: What the hon. Gentleman says has much attraction, but in setting national quotas is the EEC to have regard to historical production or to the country in which the most efficient production of any quantity can be arrived at?

Mr. John: That is an interesting point. I concede that quotas have the disadvantage of appearing to ossify the problem. However, when mention was made of the fertile east midlands there was an immediate reaction about the west country. Consequently, we will never be able to say that we will strip everything in favour of the most efficient areas. National considerations will have to play a part.

Although some sort of compromise is always inherent in national quotas, we would at least then be free to implement the detailed policy that would best suit our farming sector. We could each choose how much to spend on the social factors necessary for the support of rural areas and how the money is spent. At present we seem to fall between all stools. That is a minimalist position compared to the present.

We live in an era in which there will be international retaliation, but the threat of an international trade war only heightens the need for the EEC to put its CAP in order once and for all. If we put off doing that from year to year, saying that we should leave it to the next price review, or that such interesting ideas cannot be followed up this year, it will serve only to further speculation and to fuel our debates.

We live in a part of the world in which the taxpayer can no longer bear the burden of this oppressive agricultural regime. We live in an era of surpluses. Most of us were reared in an era of shortages. I pay tribute to the farming community for transforming the situation, but both we and the farming community must live with the reality. That is why I believe that a much more radical look at how the CAP is geared is necessary—and necessary now.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. Many hon. Members wish to take part in the debate. I am sure that brief speeches will be appreciated. Sir Peter Mills.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

5.15 pm

Sir Peter Mills (Torridge and Devon, West): I thank hon. Members. I feel very much like making my maiden speech again, but I certainly shall not do so.

In pondering these proposals we should all realise that these are crucial times for British agriculture and for all those who service that great industry. Dramatic changes are taking place. Food consumption patterns are changing and certainly do not help our current difficulties. There has been a 50 per cent. drop in butter consumption over 10 years, a 24·6 per cent. drop in beef production and a 22 per cent. drop in the consumption of eggs.

Food production is still increasing. Every year there is a natural increase of 2 to 3 per cent. New varieties, new

[Sir Peter Mills]

strains and new techniques are to be found, together with farmers who are prepared to use them to obtain better results. We also have the growing problem of food surpluses. Surpluses are increasing all the time, and, as has been said, every country, other than in the drought areas, is producing surpluses. Consequently, dramatic changes have taken place in the past few years. That all adds up to enormous difficulties for the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and for his colleagues in Europe.

Without being rude to the hon. Member for Pontypridd (Mr. John), hon. Members, members of the NFU and those, such as the press, who are listening to the debate will not have gleaned much from his speech. His speech was pretty barren. We need to know exactly what the Opposition intend to do so that we can judge their plans, but his was a pretty barren effort.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Nonsense. It was marvellous.

Mr. John: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the worst fate would be a draw between what Conservative Members know of the Opposition's views and what they know of the Government's views? After all, for the past year they have been screaming about that very point, as the hon. Gentleman—if he has ears as well as a tongue—would have heard.

Sir Peter Mills: That does not alter the position. Many hon. Members came to the House to find out exactly what contribution the Opposition would make to solving this difficult problem. The answer is, not very much. Incidentally I notice that the anti-marketeers are not here in force today. They seem to have run away. They always seek to cut and curb the cost of agriculture and its support. I agree with that, but they never put forward any policies designed to alleviate the situation. I hope that the hon. Member for Pontypridd is listening, just as he wanted me to listen to him.

Mr. John: I am.

Sir Peter Mills: If British agriculture continues to decline, the knock-on effect could be serious in our rural areas, not only for farmers, but for merchants, engineers, accountants and so on. In its excellent brief to us, the NFU rightly says:

"The Commission's farm price proposals for 1986-87 present a very serious threat to British agriculture and rural areas."

The same goes for those who are anti the Community, in that they never give us a clue as to how we can stop that knock-on effect.

Mrs. Dunwoody: I shall be brief. Does the hon. Gentleman accept that for many years the Labour party has made it clear that if it is to support farm incomes, there must be clear evidence that things are done far more directly than can possibly be achieved under the CAP? Even the Conservative party must accept that we now see only a decline in farm incomes, without any benefit to the consumer. We have the worst of all worlds, after years of Conservative Ministers.

Sir Peter Mills: I regret that the hon. Lady has got it wrong. One of the best things that has happened to the consumer has been the small rise in the price of food over many years. That is a fact.

One of the problems with British agriculture is simply that it has been too successful. If other industries had even attempted to get anywhere near the success of British agriculture we would not be in the mess that we are in in some areas today. The Community's proposals discriminate against British agriculture. I applaud and support my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's stand in Brussels. The Commission must be told that the proposals are just not good enough and we are not prepared to accept them.

I have real doubts about the outgoers scheme, unless it is fairly administered throughout the Community. I have a feeling that we are the ones who will carry it out while others will not. I am not prepared to put up with that. The result would be extremely serious for the manufacturing side. A 3 per cent. cut would be a 6 per cent. loss of manufacturing milk, more unemployed workers in our dairy factories, and more imports sucked in from the Community. Unless the outgoers scheme is watertight it cannot go forward.

An important point arises on the Irish situation. We cannot weaken one little bit on that. The Irish are already getting away with it. They have enjoyed the variable beef premium since the days of a previous Socialist Prime Minister. For every tonne of beef that comes into Britain, the Irish receive the variable premium. They have got away with it on milk and we should take a tough stand on this matter.

New Zealand should be assisted, but it should stick by the agreement. All sorts of disturbing things are going on. Irish butter is being added to New Zealand butter, packed in Britain and then supplied. That gets around the system and it should stop.

I am glad that there is a freeze on the sugar beet proposals, but I must tell my right hon. Friend—at least I know that he listens to me—that British Sugar must not be kicked around like a football. I am not a bit interested in the Italians buying the company. British Sugar should remain a British company, with all that it does for the factory workers and British agriculture.

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: Does my hon. Friend see any more reason why New Zealand dairy imports should count against Britain's assumed production than that France should bear the whole burden of wine imports from Algeria and Tunisia?

Sir Peter Mills: My hon. Friend, and my Member of Parliament, is right. Indeed, I would go a stage further. If there is to be a 3 per cent. or 6 per cent. cut in manufacturing milk in Britain, the New Zealanders should bear the same cut.

We should congratulate the Milk Marketing Board on the way in which it has administered the quota system despite all the difficulties. I hope that we shall have no more nonsense from Europe about disbanding the Milk Marketing Board.

Much could be done on beef and beef surpluses. Our meat plants are in extreme difficulty. The margins are small. Exports are extremely difficult to carry out. The clawback and the various other measures which prevent Britain exporting surplus meat are unfair. Something should be done. Devaluation of the green pound would help.

The Commission's proposals for lamb breach the principle of the EEC meat regime.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: Is my hon. Friend aware that the new beef premium restricts the premium to the first

50 beasts? It is discriminatory not only against the United Kingdom's beef producers but against dairy producers. Why should they not be allowed the premium?

Sir Peter Mills: Absolutely. I do not wish to criticise my right hon. Friend, but the hon. Member for Pontyridd did not pick that up. That is one of the most damaging things that could happen. Small farmers who produce milk and, as they have been encouraged to do, produce some beef to augment their incomes would be stopped from doing so by the proposals, so my hon. Friend is right.

We do not want lamb quotas and we want the clawback abolished. That is wrong. I support the NFU 100 per cent. in its desire to get that put right through the courts.

British agriculture needs time to adjust and to adapt to the new situation. Time and encouragement must be given rather than the constant criticism that we hear. My right hon. Friend has a tough assignment in Europe this time —probably the most difficult of all the assignments that Ministers have had. I wish him every support in what he is trying to do.

5.26 pm

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): Today's debate takes place against an extremely sombre background for British farming. In a debate on 26 January, initiated by my hon. Friends in the Liberal and Social Democratic parties, we spelt out in some detail the appalling decline in agricultural incomes: the heavy indebtedness to the banks; and the collapse of almost 24 per cent. in fixed capital investment over the past year according to the Government's White Paper. Therefore, it will not be necessary in this debate for me to go into those matters at quite such length. The background has been well set out already.

It is exceedingly disappointing that the Minister of Agriculture did not address himself to the predicament of British farming in what is, I think by consent, the most important agricultural debate of the year. He devoted a great deal of attention to the black cloud hanging over the deliberations of the Finance Ministers today; the additional burden on the European budget flowing in part from the decline in the value of the dollar; the additional 1·5 million ecu to be found; and the prospect of the Community's budget ceiling being breached and even possibly knocking against the Community's VAT limit.

All those matters are vital, and it will be possible to judge the effectiveness of the Commission's proposal's and the Government's response to them by determining the extent to which their response deals with those macro-economic problems. The debate will have failed if it does not bring home to the Minister, as apparently has not happened so far, the deep concern of British farmers about the absence of a strategy for British farming these many years after we have entered the EC.

The Minister's response to the Commission's proposals suggests that he has failed to recognise just how serious is that drop in incomes, not only for farmers directly but for those who supply them — the contractors the distributors and the rural economy in general. It will have been noted throughout the industry that he said that he considered that the European Commission's proposals were not fully appropriate to the problem that we face, because the price freeze falls well short of what is required. It would be interesting to know by how much he would have liked institutional prices to be cut to meet what he considers is required. Others chided the hon. Member for Pontypridd (Mr. John) for not being precise in these matters, but the higher duty rests on the Government, as they are responsible not only for the budgetary concerns of the Chancellor of the Exchequer but for the farming industry as a whole.

Mr. Baldry *rose*—

Mr. Maclennan: I shall not give way because Mr. Deputy Speaker has invited hon. Members to be brief. I should like to give way, but time is pressing. If I do not deal with all the issues that have to be covered by the alliance parties, I shall be accused of having left out something of great importance. However, I shall give way on this one occasion.

Mr. Baldry: Does the hon. Gentleman recognise that, to protect British farming, there must be a credible common agricultural policy, which means that we have to tackle circumstances? That is why it is important to deal with issues, such as overspending in the budget, which are at the core of the future of the British farmer?

Mr. Maclennan: It was not necessary to give way to agree entirely with what the hon. Gentleman has said. However, I do not believe that what the Minister has outlined as the Commission's proposals, or the Government's response to them, would deal adequately with those problems.

In the earlier debate, I spelt out the view of the two alliance parties — that the proper approach to the particular problem of cereal surpluses is to limit the eligibility for support in quantitative terms to those in the industry. This system, if linked to the efficient family farm, could ensure equity and proper incomes for those in agriculture. That, not a straightforward set-aside scheme, to which the Minister appears to be increasingly attracted, is the proper proposal in principle.

Another issue of importance — on which again the Minister did not touch adequately—is the green pound and the growing spread of monetary compensatory amounts within the Community. The time has come for this country to enter the exchange rate mechanism of the European monetary system to ensure a fair relationship between the prices obtained by our farmers and those in other countries. That is a subordinate argument to the wider argument in favour of Britain's full entry into the EMS, but the Minister must recognise, even in his narrow, departmental job, that the time has come to advocate entry into the EMS.

I now turn to the particular price proposals and the Government's reply to them. It is proposed that there should be a price freeze on cereals, which represents a cut of 5 per cent. in real terms. The Minister has called for a further cut of 3 per cent. That is grossly unfair to our cereal producers, when one bears in mind the other proposed measures, including tighter quality standards, which might have the effect of reducing price support by between 2 and 10 per cent., the proposal to reduce monthly increments and the undoubted effect on prices of reduced access to intervention.

The Minister supported the curtailment of the period of intervention from 1 December to 30 April. I understand that there are good reasons for limiting intervention costs and for seeking to induce farmers to bear a heavier part of the storage costs, but all these factors add up to a rather

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savage attack on support price levels. It amounts to a cut of about 15 per cent. in producer prices for cereals. I do not know whether that will stick, but it is an objective that is too great to be desirable in one marketing year. I agree with the objective of reducing cereal prices, but this should be spread over several years. This change is unrealistically large, and will not be obtained in the price fixing. I would approach it not in this global fashion, but by means of introducing limits to the right to support which would be geared to the efficient family producer but not to the large producer.

Mr. Jim Spicer (Dorset, West) *rose*——

Mr. Maclennan: I shall not give way.

The second point about the unfairness of the Commission's proposals and the Government's response is that the 1986 cereal crop has largely been planted already, and it is wrong to seek a change in quality standards at such a late stage of the growing year.

My third point is that if we accept a substantial reduction in the price of cereals—I have acknowledged that we must do so over a period of time — it is reasonable to look for help in diversifying into other crops. There is nothing of that in the Commission's proposals. However, there is a case for some action on controlling cereal imports and substitutes, and in particular manioc. There is a case for extending this to Third-world countries. There is no question about that. It requires to be done, because it does not assist the Third world to have the budget of the Community knocked sideways, as it has been, by the institutional arrangements operating to help the cereals regime.

The mooted proposals for the co-responsibility levy are extremely retrograde and ill-advised. The Minister was right to emphasise the discriminatory nature of those proposals, and I am glad that he has at least latched on to that. However, we should have learnt from history. The introduction of the co-responsibility levy for milk has done nothing to deal with the problem of surplus milk disposal, which went on for about seven years before the Government were dragged, kicking and screaming, into the quota scheme. The Minister should be ahead of the game, not running along on the coat tails of other countries in this matter. He should resist the introduction of the co-responsibility levy, not only because it discriminates against this country but because it is an ineffective method to deal with the problem of cereal surpluses.

There is a severe income problem for beef producers. The proposed modification of the support regime over the next two years, which will substitute for market price support a system of compensatory headage payments, is not acceptable as it stands. The amount proposed for the single premium payment of 20 ecu per head is far too low, and it will not offset the loss in income from the removal of market support.

The Minister rightly emphasised the discriminatory nature of the proposals — that the premium should be restricted to the first 50 cattle on non-dairy holdings. It will be a failure, which could be serious for the industry, if he does not manage to eliminate that proposal at least from the final settlement. Beef producers are certain to be under considerable additional pressure if the Community's milk outgoers scheme is introduced. Now is the wrong time to be exerting downward pressure on beef producers' income in that way.

I draw to the Minister's attention the fact that at the Committee of Agricultural Organisations in the European Community presidium recently, only Denmark was opposed to an extended use of the variable premium for which the Minister has battled for this country in the past. It would be right to look to that mode of support for the beef industry. I hope that the Minister will give greater thought to that aspect.

It appears that the co-responsibility levy for milk is to be retained and that there is to be a freeze on the target price for in-quota milk. Worse than that, it appears that the supplementary levy for those who go over quotas will be paid on account, on a six-monthly basis. These measures are too tough for the milk sector this year. They ought to be moderated, bearing in mind what has happened to the dairyman's income and to those involved in milk manufacturing. I do not hesitate to say that these changes in the downward production levels cannot be achieved in a short period of time. Such changes should be spread over a number of years. The Commission's proposals are too tough for this year.

It is essential that the cuts that are proposed in the outgoers scheme should be applied equally to all member states. If there is to be a 3 per cent. cut nationally, it must be a 3 per cent. cut in all Community countries, or there must be a compensating cut in the quotas of those countries. That is the single most important aspect of the outgoers scheme, and the farmers will attach great significance to that.

There is another important question on how article 4.1 of the proposed regulation dividing quota between landlord and tenant is to appear in its final form. I agree with those who have already suggested that the proper approach is not an arbitrary one, splitting the quota between the landlord and the tenant on the basis of some notional percentage of input into the milk enterprise. It must be done on an ad hoc basis, relating the particulars of each enterprise to an arbitration tribunal, and there should be no veto on that proposal from either the landlord or the tenant.

Mr. Maclean: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Maclennan: I shall not give way. Although this is a longer debate than usual, many hon. Members still wish to speak.

Another point in connection with the outgoers scheme, which is very much in line with the proposals that the alliance has been arguing in favour of for some time, is that the Government should purchase quota for reallocation to those who are either entering or are in particular difficulties in the industry. I hope that the Government will look favourably on and seek to promote that proposal within the Community.

In connection with sheep, there is a recommendation for a price support freeze from the end of the year—31 December. That is a strange proposal in the context of the conditions of farms in the hills, uplands and less favoured areas. However, an even more serious proposal for the future is the proposed limitation on the annual ewe premium eligibility to 500 ewes on the low ground and 1,000 ewes in the less-favoured areas. The Ministers must resist that as it is quite inappropriate for the structure of farms in this country.

Finally, I should like to discuss the missing structural proposals. The debate tonight is, in a sense, broken-backed because we do not have before us the positive parts of the Commission's proposals for modernisation, processing, marketing and early retirement backed by set-aside. Similarly, we do not have improved and strengthened proposals for the less-favoured areas, how the Commission proposes to enable farmers working in new commodities or woodlands to enjoy an annual income when income is normally derived only at harvest time after many years. Nor do we have the proposals for improving landscape in environmentally sensitive areas and how the Government would back them.

These important matters not having been deployed in the debate, it is more difficult to assess whether the sort of sacrifices that the Government are advocating are tolerable. Had we had these proposals before us, it might have been reasonable to take a different view about institutional prices. However, as they are missing and as only 4 per cent. of the common agricultural policy budget is at present devoted to these structural measures, it is right to adopt a somewhat sceptical attitude to the structural proposals as a means of improving farm income until we see the colour not only of the Commission's, but of the Government's, money. It is inevitable that if the Government are not prepared to back the structural schemes, the money will not be forthcoming from the European Community.

I conclude by emphasising that the industry is in travail. The rural economy is under greater threat now than it has been in the lifetime of the present Government or throughout the post-war period. If the decimation of the rural areas is not to flow from the Minister during his period in office, he must illustrate his intentions with a greater commitment and readiness to take more time to correct the structural imperfections of the CAP and a willingness to spend taxpayers' money to promote and protect the industry upon which our rural economy depends.

5.46 pm

Mr. Andy Stewart (Sherwood): I welcome today's debate on the European Community's agricultural price proposals. The debate gives the House the opportunity to express to the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the needs of our agriculture, but above all to calm the fears of our farmers caused by uncertainty and a lack of understanding at home and a totally discriminatory policy being peddled against this country from Brussels.

Over the years, British farmers have had a special love-hate relationship with the rest of the population. They were loved when food was scarce. In those days there was insufficient time in a week for farmers to fulfil all the invitations that came their way, on the unwritten understanding that their presence would be accompanied by some scarce farm produce.

Today, love has turned to hatred—not hatred towards the farmers individually, but against their industry. That has been brought about by the policies imposed on us by the mandarins in Brussels, particularly the policy of surplus food disposals. Those bureaucrats remind me of the New Zealand pilot who recently took his ship on to the rocks because he took the wrong route. The current proposals will similarly run the CAP on to the rocks within 18 months if they are implemented.

We had such an experience two years ago; before the lifeboats were allowed out, milk quotas were hastily imposed without the long-term implications being fully researched. That resulted in the loss of jobs on farms, and large numbers in the creameries and the dairy supply industry. However, the major lesson we learned then was the imbalance it brought between one sector of the industry and another.

For example, beef producers were hit when a large number of dairy cows were marketed as a result of quotas. Today's beef surplus of 750,000 tonnes is equivalent to the total carcase weight of dairy cows killed. The proposal for taking a further 3 per cent. of dairy cows out of production will only further exacerbate the beef problem. It will also have added implications for white meat producers while, in the process, it will drive a wedge between landlords and dairy tenant farmers over who should receive the outgoers' compensation money. However, if the two sides fail to agree, I hope that my right hon. Friend will adjudicate on the basis of a starting point of 50 per cent. each. The hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) advocates an arbitration policy for every single farm.

Further, there is also a call for an end to intervention buying and to our much traded beef and sheep variable premium schemes. If such a proposal were to be implemented, would British farmers receive in return the millions of litres of milk quotas that were given to other countries for the support of their industries in 1984? On what basis have the Irish Government the right to send prime cattle to the British mainland and collect the subsidy? This discriminates against British farmers.

The problems that I have already mentioned are small in comparison with the Community's greatest problem of surplus cereals, yet it is obvious from the proposals before the House that the Commission has put very little thought into drafting them. I refer to the price reduction, the co-responsibility levies and, what is blatantly discriminatory, the change in the intervention standards for cereals after British farmers have drilled their crops.

The proposals for wheat will not work, because agriculture has an inbuilt efficiency factor of 4 per cent. per annum. The 10 per cent. reduction in price will be made up by a further 9 per cent. increase in yield, equivalent to a 5 per cent. increase per acre. That can easily be achieved by attention to detail. I remind my right hon. Friend that British cereal farms are eight times larger than those of our continental cousins. A tonnage exemption levy will be acceptable only if it is multiplied by a factor of eight for the United Kingdom.

A price reduction in the cereal sector will also have a marked effect upon the income of sugar beet farmers. For example, last year's 1·5 per cent. reduction in cereal prices reduced this year's sugar beet contract by 4 per cent. because of the lower price obtained for sugar beet pulp. Since growers accept the constraints of the sugar quota system and the joint responsibility with processors of financing the cost of exporting surplus production, it is neither fair nor reasonable that we should be subjected to a continuing freeze of beet prices after three years.

The Commission's argument in favour of continuing the price freeze is based on the allegation that we are about to enter a two-year regime as against the normal five-year regime. This is patently untrue, since it is only existing quotas that will be reviewed after two years. The regime itself is for five years. Should quotas be altered after two years, production levies could be similarly adjusted to

[Mr. Andy Stewart]

maintain the self-financing nature of the regime. To give an increase to beet would not create distortions within the arable sector because beet is subject to quota restrictions. Until the present cereal surpluses are disposed of and a self-financing regime is adopted, a short-term licensing system is the only way in which supply and demand can be matched. My right hon. Friend should look carefully at the constructive set-aside programme that has been put forward by the National Farmers Union.

The overall proposals are a further threat to the prosperity of the rural areas and the environment. If, as predicted, alternative uses need to be found for 11 per cent. of the land currently cropped, I suggest that we should seriously consider allowing all villages and towns with a population of under 7,000 to expand by 10 per cent. of their housing stock. This would allow the architectural slums of our cities to be replaced. I recognise that this would result in some population movement, but it would be better to give people pleasant surroundings in which to live than to pay vast sums for intervention storage. In addition, it would revive the rural economy——

Mr. Douglas Hogg: My hon. Friend has made an ingenious and unexpected suggestion. However, would it not have the disadvantage that, if we were to move once again, as we might, to a period of shortage—there is no reason to suppose that we shall always be in a period of surplus — we should have prevented ourselves from meeting our needs during that period of scarcity by increasing production thereafter?

Mr. Stewart: I respect what my honourable neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg), says, but I have been in agriculture all my life and I have every confidence that the industry will continue to increase production and to meet the needs of the British population.

Mr. John: On the mechanics of the hon. Gentleman's interesting idea, I understand that he is suggesting an acreage reduction of 10 per cent. and a population increase of 10 per cent. in villages and towns with a population of 7,000 or lower. The number of houses that would have to be built to accommodate such a population increase would not swallow up anything like the amount of acreage that would be taken out of agricultural production. What would the hon. Gentleman do with the remainder of it?

Mr. Stewart: That would be a matter for my right hon. Friend the Minister. I have not yet reached that position.

This would, as I have said, revive the rural economy and give a fillip to our excellent village schools, with an injection of additional pupils. The infrastructure is already there. Now, for the first time, land is available, so let us use it wisely.

The present method of disposing of surplus food in the Community is the principal reason why the common agricultural policy has become discredited in the eyes of the taxpayers. Literally, giving away food to the Soviet bloc countries is nothing short of criminal. The beef and butter mountains could be disposed of in a year without affecting normal shopping activities, by giving each of our 60 million Community pensioners a pound of beef and butter per month. That would be simple enough, but perhaps it has always been considered a non-starter because the "get-rich-quick" brigade would lose their pickings from the export gravy train.

Mr. Colin Shepherd (Hereford): Does my hon. Friend recall that in 1972-73, when pensioners were given the entree to beef at low cost, the consequence was merely to crucify the poultry industry? The track record shows that substitution habits play an important part in such measures.

Mr. Stewart: I recognise that, but surely it must be sensible to give the produce of our farms to those sections of the community who do not regularly eat beef at weekends. To give one pound of beef and butter to each pensioner every month would not distort the normal shopping patterns for other produce.

Mr. Maclean: That would be better than giving it to the Russians.

Mr. Stewart: My hon. Friend is right.

The treaty of Rome was designed to pay farmers an income comparable to that of industrial workers. As for supporting each country's indigenous crops, is it equality when our Mediterrenean partners, in addition to the temporate foods, receive millions of pounds to create olive oil and wine lakes, not to mention £500 million for tobacco that cannot be used? This country's indigenous crop is grass. The Commission's present proposals, as they stand, would impose further restrictions upon milk and livestock production. Can we afford to stand aside and accept a policy which would result in the demise of our grassland farmers?

Finally, when my right hon. Friend the Minister next goes to Brussels, he must accept only a coherent package of measures giving farmers time to adapt and enabling a better long-term market balance between member countries. That is my bottom line.

6 pm

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): I had intended to make a narrow contribution to the debate because I am concerned primarily about what is happening in the milk sector, especially on the Cheshire plain. However, I have sat through many sittings of the Agriculture Committee of the European Parliament and I am aware that price fixing has become an esoteric process. There are long arguments and there are often about 140 amendments to discuss. Absurd arguments, based entirely on narrow national interests, are advanced on each individual change. At the end of the negotiations, the Council of Ministers will stay up all night and produce a collection of policies which give no clear pattern or plan for the agriculture community and, in many instances, do not produce any positive benefits for the Community consumer.

I became concerned when listening to the Minister, because it seems that there is no clear idea of what the Government want out of the price fixing process. Most of those who are engaged in agriculture in Britain are concerned that they are part of a managed market in which they have little real say. In my view, it should be possible to ensure a genuine income for those working in agriculture, and that includes farm workers and farmers. It should be possible also to offer consumers the positive advantages of reasonable prices from which they can benefit.

It has been said that we hear nothing of the costs of support to the consumer. However, we know only too clearly from the Commission what the CAP costs the

consumer. A House of Lords report on the reform of the CAP stated that food prices were approximately 10 per cent. higher than they need be in Britain. A more recent estimate by Ken Thomson of the university of Newcastle suggested that the cost to the consumer across the EEC is 182 ecu, or £107, per person per year. Therefore, we know the cost to the consumer. We know also that the Community is not doing the one thing that we were always told justified its existence. It is not protecting the income of the farming community. In Britain there was a 43 per cent. drop in farm income last year, and that has been reflected in real difficulty on the Cheshire plain.

Structural change could be dealt with positively within the Community if price mechanisms were used. Guidance expenditure represents less than 5 per cent. of the overall CAP budget, yet last year 95 per cent. of expenditure on agriculture went into the maintenance of simple price regimes.

There are vast and unmanageable surpluses that are costing the Community an enormous amount to store. It would seem to be much better to be in control of the means of storing surpluses than to be creating them or trying to sell them. An enormous amount of expenditure is directed to storage.

I waited for the Minister to tell the House what would happen if we went through the normal pantomime, or mild farce, which involves individuals saying, "If you give me a little of this, I shall give you a little of that." That is what the dance of death has now become. I wanted the Minister to say, "Nevertheless, we know that because of the falling dollar it may be that all our calculations in the price fixing process will be unworkable. It may be that the cost of getting rid of the surpluses because of the expense of the export restitution payments will be greater than that of meeting any other payments within the agricultural budget."

What an absurdity! What magnificent idiocy! The money will not be available to maintain farmers' incomes in disadvantaged areas or sectors, such as the Cheshire plain, where tenant farmers are suffering badly. There will not be a lowering of prices so that consumers will benefit. I agree that to give 1lb of beef to pensioners is better than nothing, but it is not the answer. That is merely another palliative.

At the end of the day, the only individuals who will benefit will be the rather sharp agents who collect vast amounts of export restitution payments by selling a great amount of produce to the Russians. If the produce is not sent to the Russians, the Community will put vast amounts of food on to the world market, where it will be in direct competition with the produce of other countries, many of which are only one-crop producers.

It is not acceptable for Westernised countries, which are highly mechanised and highly efficient and capable of producing large surpluses of food, to seek to endanger the interests of ACP and Third world countries. I am astounded that the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan), in purporting to speak for the Social Democratic party, should have the brutality to say that he would be prepared to support anything of that sort. The Community restricts access to its markets of produce from the African, Carribean and Pacific countries and does its best to manage the export of all their minerals to Europe. It is not prepared to do anything in agriculture, save to accept what are comparatively small amounts of produce. It is a disgrace that any Member of this place should seriously say, "I'm all right, Jack. I don't care what happens to you because you happen to come from a poorer, less efficient and less powerful country."

In the current price-fixing process we shall see the price mechanism used in a number of ways, all of them inequitable. Since the introduction of MCAs there has been constant financial tinkering. There has been a refusal to accept that if the price structure is to be used accurately it is necessary to direct available moneys to areas where income support is needed the most. That has not happened, and under this Government as much as any other the British have had the rough end of every agriculture deal. At the end of the farm price fixing review the British Minister is out-voted if he sticks out for his interests, with the result that they are not taken into account. That has happened before, and it will happen again.

One of the results of last year's price fixing review has been growing unemployment in the milk and related sectors. I am horrified by the pressures that are being put on workers in creameries, those who work in cheese factories and those in my constituency who have traditionally relied upon the production of milk on the Cheshire plain.

Tenant farmers in Cheshire have been badly served by the current arrangements and they need the protection of a correct balance between landowner and tenant farmer. The Government seem not to care too much about what happens to tenants. For example, they are suggesting that many county authorities should get rid of smallholdings that are rented to tenants. Apart from that, they must offer existing tenants some protection of their incomes, by ensuring that they have the real benefit of some of the quota. The landowner should not be allowed to benefit from something to which he has not contributed. I hope that the Minister will fight strongly to ensure that there is adequate, clear and open arbitration. The way in which the base line was set meant that many Cheshire farmers, especially those who came in after the lines were laid, found themselves in considerable difficulty with large overdrafts and heavy bank commitments. They were placed in difficulty because they were required rapidly to alter existing lines of produce.

I know that many hon. Members wish to contribute to the debate, so I shall not detain the House for very much longer. I believe that we must return to a system of direct income support for the farming community. Conservative Administrations which were in office in the 1930s were quite happy to have agriculture suffer to an extent that led to many personal bankruptcies and a great rundown of agriculture. Nevertheless—this is ironic—Conservatives have purported always to speak for the farming community. In my area, that is manifestly no longer the case. There is no point in designating rural development areas if the people in those areas are deprived of their services, their schools, their income and their means of transport, but that is what is happening day by day. There is no point in announcing agricultural reform if many sectors of agriculture are required to undergo great convulsions of change without any positive attempt to cushion them against the economic winds or without their having any clear view of how they can plan for the future.

Many people have already suffered badly, and I see no clear sign that the Government know what they wish to demand of the Community. There is no clear political line in agriculture in the Community. The consumer suffers, workers in the industry suffer, and the only person to

[Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody]

whom we can turn — the Minister — simply tells the House that it is all very difficult and that he will have to think about it and see how to proceed in the future. If that is the best that he can offer, the sooner he is replaced by someone who understands the political implications, the better it will be for everyone.

6.11 pm

Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory (Wells): In the early part of the debate my hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Sir P. Mills) asked where all the anti-Marketeers were. I would not describe myself in that way, but I have always been critical of the way in which the Common Market and the common agricultural policy are structured and financed. I represent an agricultural area and I am a farmer, so it is a difficult tightrope to walk. Nevertheless, I hang my hat firmly on the peg of price restraint and, if necessary, price cuts in the present circumstances.

A properly working price mechanism—a subject to which I shall return—could meet some of the objections of the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) when she complains about the consumer not getting a fair share. Painful price decisions for the farmer may benefit the consumer, stimulate additional consumption and help to find alternative uses for products in surplus. For instance, ethanol production is far from economic at current grain prices, but it could become economic if prices fell sufficiently.

Let us examine the background to the present price proposals. We heard fairly recently that the European Commission was seeking a supplementary budget. My right hon. Friend the Minister said that that was not necessarily certain, but in a letter dated 14 February the Commission plainly stated:

"Accordingly, the Commission will submit a supplementary budget for 1986 in due course."

We therefore know that a supplementary budget is on the way, but the story starts a little earlier.

In November 1985 the Council of Ministers agreed to a 1986 budget which included substantial increases over 1985. The British Government voted against that budget because it threatened budget discipline and the Fontainebleau agreement on budgetary and financial discipline, and because it was in danger of breaking the pledge given to the House when we agreed to increase the VAT contribution from 1 to 1·4 per cent. That budget was therefore passed only by a majority. The European Assembly, however—or should I call it the European Parliament?——

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: No, the European Assembly.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The European Assembly, however, rejected that budget and added substantial additional amounts of expenditure under both the obligatory and non-obligatory headings. We regard that budget as illegal and the matter is before the European Court, but it remains the currently adopted budget of the European Assembly. We are now told that even that is not enough, and a supplementary budget has been announced, although not yet requested, of 790 million ecu, or about £500 million. According to the *Financial Times*, however, that is an underestimate and the sum may reach £1 billion.

In summary, therefore, we face a supplementary budget to an illegal budget, which itself substantially exceeded the Council of Ministers' budget, which the United Kingdom voted against because it threatened budgetary discipline. Of that supplementary budget, 750 million ecu was due to what are described as "exceptional circumstances". What are they? The hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich mentioned currency movements. Because the dollar has fallen, it will be more expensive to dump surpluses on the world market. Currency movements may be exceptional to people in Brussels, but for the rest of us they are normal day-to-day occurrences of freely moving exchange rates and due allowance should be made for them in any responsible budget. After all, if the dollar had risen against European currencies, would we have got the money back? Because the dollar has gone down, should the House therefore grant additional expenditure to cover a budget which clearly did not foresee that development in the first place?

I hope that it is clear from what I have said that budget discipline has not been delivered. We are not even within shouting distance of it. The pledges made when we agreed to the increase in VAT contribution have already been broken. I am not blaming all that on my right hon. Friend the Minister. No doubt his colleagues from the Treasury and the Foreign Office will be seeking to explain themselves to the House in due course. Nevertheless, this shows how urgent it is to achieve a proper and fundamental reform of the CAP this time round. Agriculture is still absorbing more than 70 per cent. of the European budget, and the measures presented so far simply do not match the task before us.

I believe that farmers know that. They tell me, certainly in private, that they know that something radical must be done, because food mountains and wine lakes do enormous damage to the image of British farming. Both agriculture and horticulture both depend ultimately on public acceptance of what they do, and people do not like farmers producing food that no one wants at prices that people cannot afford.

Dumping the stuff on world markets is not the answer. It annoys the United States, which has a similar problem, and it does not solve the problem of world hunger. There is a place for famine relief, but let the House not imagine that it is doing Third world countries a service by periodically and capriciously dumping surpluses on the world market.

Let us take the example of a Bangladeshi dairy farmer. What would he feel like if every other year several thousand tonnes of surplus EEC milk powder were dumped on his market and undercut it? We would not like it if that happened to our dairy farmers, and he would not like it if it happened to him.

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: My hon. Friend could even add that it was dumped just when he had to pay the money-lender.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My hon. Friend reinforces the point. The situation is getting worse, not better. Last year the United Kingdom had a poor harvest, but 2 million tonnes of extra grain found their way into intervention stocks. Yields are increasing. Science does not stand still. The increase in production, better strains of plant, better animal husbandry and more efficient fertilisers are spreading southwards, and exactly the same transformation will be made to the agriculture of Spain and Portugal as has happened in northern Europe.

Getting rid of the surpluses is not, by itself, the answer. Surpluses are only the symptom of the problem — not the cause. The underlying cause is the striking imbalance between production and consumption, and supply and demand. I believe that farmers are ready for a much more radical reduction in prices—I say reduction rather than restraint—than is contemplated by Brussels. Of course they will not welcome it, and their organisations—the CLA, the NFU and so on—will resist it. That is their job. But the great resentment in 1984, when milk quotas were introduced, was caused by the suddenness of what was done by the change in direction and by the discrimination against this country, particularly in relation to Southern Ireland. That is why I am against the co-responsibility levy. I shall not dwell on that, because the point has already been made.

The co-responsibility levy is not a way of reducing surpluses. It is a way of financing surpluses. It does nothing for the consumer. The hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich was right in saying that it does not get cheaper bread into the hands of the housewife. The system is difficult to enforce and police, and it is highly discriminatory against the United Kingdom. For all those reasons, I am against it.

I do not like quotas either. They were necessary in 1984, but squeezing the tube in one place makes it bulge somewhere else. Instead of reducing production, quotas shift it into other sectors, and in turn those sectors need quotas. I hope that we do not go down that road. I hope that we do not reach the situation where we need a licence to produce food—where it is a privilege to be a farmer. A permanent and detailed involvement by politicians in agriculture would be bad for politicians and farmers.

Mr. Charles Morrison (Devises): Would not a combination of lower prices without a quota system—at least in relation to cereals—create the greatest difficulty for the smaller farmers, above all in the more marginal areas?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I am acutely aware of that, as I represent many small farmers. I shall touch on that problem at the end of my remarks. I re-emphasise that we must return to the bedrock of market prices, although not completely, because there are few countries in the world where farmers are completely left to the vagaries of market forces. But I insist that the price mechanism should be fundamental. Price allows for change, and it allows our agriculture to evolve and adapt. Prices are non-discriminatory, and they reward Britain because Britain has more efficient farmers.

Mr. John (Pontypridd): Much of the hon. Gentleman's argument against quotas depends on whether he thinks that his proposals in relation to the reduction in price are remotely likely to be adopted by EEC Ministers. Does he have any evidence to that effect?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The drift of my remarks is that my right hon. Friend must return to Brussels and insist. He has on his side the arithmetic of the European budget. I know, and I suspect that he knows, that very shortly this House will be asked for additional money. In the past, reforms of the type that I am advocating have always failed because at the back of our minds other countries, and many people in this country, believe that somehow, somewhere, the taxpayer will stump up the additional funds. I am saying that the game is up. The CAP must live within the money that has already been allocated.

Last year that concentrated the minds of those responsible, and I hope that it will do so in future. I very much hope that my right hon. Friend and his Treasury colleagues will not return to this House to request additional money or even a supplementary budget. That would be, not a substitute for change, but a betrayal of pledges made to this House.

My commitment to the price mechanism is not one that I make alone. I know that my sentiments are shared by the Front Bench and by the green paper published last year by the EEC. Mr. Andriessen has a good grasp of the reality. As so often with the Common Market, the problem is that the political will does not exist to carry this through into action. That is why I am trying to bolster the resolve of my right hon. Friend.

There is an urgency, and at present the proposals are inadequate. It can be compared with moving the deck chairs on the Titanic. We must grasp this opportunity and not leave it to the future, or we shall have this debate next year and the year after.

I am an advocate, not just of price restraint, but, if necessary, of price cuts in those areas of production where we are chronically in surplus. But those cuts need to be planned and predicted. We must not stagger from year to year — from one price review to another — blindly hoping, like Mr. Micawber, that something will turn up. If necessary, this means separating the social from the economic aims of the CAP. Up to now, by attempting both those aims, we have failed to do either. If the social consequences of what I am suggesting are too serious, I contemplate direct grants or income support, rather than using the clumsy system of higher prices to help the smaller farmer. I also contemplate national as well as European aid.

Naturally, the institutions in Europe are against anything that smacks of renationalisation. But there is nothing wrong with adding to European money where necessary, with national aids specifically tailored to our own circumstances. It is necessary to look more widely and to consider rural policy in the round, as well as alternative uses of land.

My right hon. Friend must persevere. He must take a lead and insist on the radical reforms which for too long we have been promised. On no account let him or his right hon. Friends come back to this House for a supplementary budget or an increase in own resources as a substitute for that reform.

6.28 pm

Dr. Roger Thomas (Carmarthen): Such has been the cut in creamery jobs in south-west Wales over the past three years that a local wag told me the other day that Ladbrokes has now opened a book on which creamery is to be closed next. Felinfach is 5-4 on; Whitland is 4-1; Haverfordwest is 7-4 and there is an even longer price on Llangadog. That is the present situation in south-west Wales.

Welsh Opposition Members — I do not see many Welsh Members on the Government Benches—are glad that the Under-Secretary of State for Wales, the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Robinson) is present. I had hoped — perhaps a false hope — that the Under-Secretary would be able to reply to the debate—I think

[Dr. Roger Thomas]

that he has that responsibility as agricultural responsibility has been devolved to the Welsh Office. I notice that the Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food is making voluminous notes, so clearly we will not have the pleasure of a reply from the hon. Member for Newport, West.

I wish to quote at moderate length from the speech made by the Secretary of State for Wales when we had the pleasure of a Welsh day on the Floor of the House. That debate is held as near as possible to St. David's day. In 1985, it took place on 28 February. The Secretary of State dealt at considerable length with Welsh agriculture. He said:

"The past year has been intensely difficult for farming and particularly for the livestock sector."

I will confine my remarks this evening to the livestock sector. The Secretary of State also said that the dairy industry

"is undergoing a traumatic process of readjustment following the introduction of quotas for milk."

He mentioned the spin-off effect on other sectors, notably beef, agricultural machinery and feeding stuffs. The Secretary of State said that, added to these difficulties,

"farmers in Wales were badly affected by the drought during 1984"—[*Official Report*, 28 February 1985; Vol. 74, c. 500.]

On our Welsh day a week ago, the Secretary of State did not dwell at such length on agriculture. Very little —certainly very little in the package we are discussing today—gives any cause for elation to the Welsh farmer, especially the dairy and livestock farmer in west Wales. I would like to discuss the milk sector in west Wales and the great effect on the livelihood of people in creameries. These creameries have been functioning for 40 years but the Milk Marketing Board through its marketing organisation, Dairy Crest, has suddenly brought down the chopper. People who have given 30 or 40 years service are, at a stroke—I remember that remark being made by someone in an elevated position on the Conservative Benches at one time—without a job.

A co-ordinated policy is essential for the livestock sector—the beef and dairy sector—of south-west Wales. I speak for many farmers in south-west Wales who are upset that the support for beef sector has been reduced when the margins for the beef producers are the lowest in history. The proposed package would cut total support by between a quarter and a third. The proposal to cut the variable beef premium scheme should be rejected. The scheme is highly discriminatory because it is confined to the first 50 cows and to those farms which are specialist beef producers.

The retention of the present scheme formed the keystone of what the Secretary of State for Wales said about agriculture a year ago. He said that this scheme and the sheep support scheme were absolutely essential for the health of agriculture in south-west Wales. In that part of the world since 1979, income has declined steadily, costs have risen twice as fast as the prices that farmers have been paid, and in the past year investment by farmers has been reduced by 12 per cent. The ripple effect on ancillary industries and the food supply industries has been all-round depression. On the other side of the coin, bank charges have continually increased and loans have become more and more of a millstone aroung the necks of farmers, especially small family farmers in south-west Wales.

The closure of the creameries began even before the imposition of milk quotas; we cannot blame the milk quotas for that. However, we can blame the inefficiency of the Milk Marketing Board, because in late 1983 when farmers were encoraged to expand—expansion comes late to areas such as Wales—creameries closed when milk production was on the increase. When the Teifi valley creamery closed, we felt that that would protect jobs elsewhere, but we were wrong. In March 1985, the Milk Marketing Board told us that creameries would be kept open, depending on the supply of milk. The creamery at Johnstown is due to close at the end of this month with the loss of 450 jobs. We are told that it is not because of the supply of milk but because of reorganisation implemented to meet import penetration. It is not the fault of the loyal work force; it is the fault of the organisation and effective marketing of those people who are supposed to be defending the livelihood of not only creamery workers but milk producers.

We have lost cheese production in south-west Wales. It is therefore easy to understand why we are so protective of our present milk production in south-west Wales. We cannot afford further cuts, whether through outgoer schemes or a reduction in percentage effort, because they will affect the jobs of people in Whitland, Felinfach, Haverfordwest and the other places I have mentioned. We want to make absolutely sure that, if there is a cut in milk production, that cut affects not only Wales and the rest of the United Kingdom but—the Ministers in Brussels must make this absolutely sure—other countries which produce far more milk than they use. They are more to blame for the production of excesses and they must obey the rules. It is no good the United Kingdom obeying such rules when some on the continent continually flout them. That is a loser's policy and for the past few years the Government have adopted a loser's policy to farming.

South-west Wales farmers are up in arms. I am sorry that the Secretary of State is not here for this part of the debate because I am sure he well remembers the magnificent, if rather rough, reception he received from the farmers of Llangadog three weeks after the introduction of the milk quotas. Perhaps the farmers over-reacted a little to the milk quotas, but 10 per cent. of the farmers in my constituency are still experiencing immense hardship as a result of the imposition of this quota. They are still unable to get out of the wood. If there is a further imposition of milk quotas the situation is bound to deteriorate.

My hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) mentioned the Cheshire plains. In south-west Wales milk is produced not only on the grasslands; much is produced on the undulating uplands. We are worried about the small family farmers on those uplands. They are aware that agricultural policies are to be imposed from Whitehall and Brussels. These policies have not been thought through. They are introduced in an unco-ordinated, piecemeal manner. They do not reflect a defence of the unique climatic and topographic conditions found in such proponderance in my area but not to such an extent in other EEC countries. There is a crying need for a comprehensive grassland livestock sector policy, and if such a policy does not materialise during the next six to eight years, that sector of the industry is in great danger of collapse and fragmentation. Refraining from a more nationally orientated interventionist policy will be dangerous and provocative to the farmers of south-west

Wales. The farmers are right to fear that the Minister will bulldoze through or, as some of them say, rubber-stamp policies which have been thrust upon him and which he is not strong enough to resist.

I am sure that Under-Secretary of State for Wales, the hon. Member for Newport, West knows very well that, ever since the imposition of milk quotas, in April 1984, Labour Members have pressed the Secretary of State to negotiate in Brussels on behalf of Wales. He has continually refused. I hope that the Minister will take back a message to the Secretary of State tonight. The situation is deteriorating in south-west Wales. There is no excuse for the Secretary of State not knowing that part of the world, because his constituency is there. Carmarthen farmers are right to be apprehensive. The Minister's non-intervention will paralyse our rural areas and bring deprivation on a scale similar to that which has unfortunately afflicted the overburdened urban areas of Wales.

Welsh farmers ask about the interpretation of the word "common" in Common Market. Should it not reflect common beneficial attainments? It certainly should not be attainments that are patently disadvantageous and discriminatory. There must be a fair climate of competition, whether from products that originate in the antipodes or just across the Irish or English channels.

There is a great overlap and interdependence in agriculture, and errors of policy in one sector spread into others. Agriculture cannot be compartmentalised. The continuing lack of a comprehensive policy, particularly for the grassland livestock sector, bites deep into the stability of employment and unsettles the whole economy of that part of Wales. It threatens to turn that part of the Welsh countryside into a low-grade rural locality fit only for retirement and tourism and to bring back the scourge of depopulation.

6.42 pm

Mr. Michael Lord (Suffolk, Central): The welfare of my constituency is inextricably interwoven with the welfare of agriculture, and for that reason I am pleased to speak in this debate. Farmers are constantly criticised. In some people's eyes they are guilty, first, of damaging our countryside, secondly, of producing food no one wants and, thirdly, of making too much money. Farmers are not guilty on all three counts.

It is true that, in some parts of thhe country, particularly where grain is grown extensively, to be more efficient, farmers have enlarged fields at the expense of hedges and trees. I live in the heart of East Anglia. It is still beautiful. Farmers have for a long time been aware of the impact that their operations make on the countryside and, with the odd inevitable exception, they have planted trees in enormous numbers and adopted sound conservation practices. With the assistance of the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group, extremely forward looking local authorities and voluntary bodies, farmers are working to preserve and enhance all that is good in our countryside. The quite devastating effect of Dutch elm disease during the past 20 years is sometimes overlooked. The elimination of that fine tree, especially in the flat East Anglian landscape, has had a much more dramatic effect on the environment than anything that farmers have done. I suspect, however, that, without realising it, many people unconsciously blame the rapid alteration of our skylines caused by the loss of elms on our farmers, who are, of course, entirely blameless.

In the remaining non-grain growing farming areas of Britain, our countryside is, by and large, as attractive as ever. That is due in no small part to the beneficial effect of efficient farming, which creates what people enjoy. It would soon be missed if a decline in farmers' fortunes led to land being unused and neglected. As for producing surpluses, farmers have simply responded to past Government policies. They were asked to grow more to feed the nation and to reduce imports. Their only crime is that they have been too efficient. Farmers did not take the country into the EEC. Farmers did not construct the common agricultural policy. All that farmers have done is farm—probably better than their counterparts anywhere else in the world.

The third charge levelled against farmers is that they make too much money. Statements such as, "You never see a farmer on a bike," may well apply to certain types of farmer in certain years, but they do not apply to all farmers always. It all depends on the size of holding and what the farmer is producing. It is quite absurd to equate the income of a large corn grower in East Anglia with a small livestock farmer in Wales. Whatever may have happened in the past, all farmers now face serious difficulties of one sort or another, and they are unlikely to enjoy in the future those incomes that they enjoyed in the past.

Farmers stand guilty of being successful in doing what the nation asked of them. Who can blame them now for being alarmed and perhaps despondent if all that success has brought them is uncertainty and criticism? I hope that the House appreciates that farming's problems cannot be discussed in isolation. Farming is the hub of activity in our rural economy, and much depends on it. Although much labour has been shed from farming over the years, more farm workers may lose their jobs if things become so difficult that farmers have no alternative but to let them go.

I am sure that we all realise that it is no easier to be unemployed in the countryside than in the town. Many other industries depend on a flourishing agriculture such as the manufacturers and distributors of farm machinery, and of fertilisers or sprays, corn merchants and suppliers of animal feedstuffs. The very vitality of our villages hinges on farming. It is momentous for any nation to decide that it has too much food. Against a background of starvation in some parts of the Third world and the possibility of alternative industrial uses for cereals and sugar beet, I would like to think that we can explore every possible avenue, financial and industrial, to find out how to keep our agriculture moving forward, albeit at a reduced pace.

Nobody knows what the future holds. It is obvious that surpluses create grave problems, but insufficient food would cause even greater problems. We must constrain, but we must think carefully before we put such a successful and forward-looking industry into reverse and possibly into decline. To try to maintain some momentum in agriculture, while restraining production, we must pursue as energetically and urgently as possible the opportunities for improving our environment presented by the possibility of taking land out of farming and of using crops, such as grain and sugar beet, for new industrial processes.

As for conservation, it is essential that using land not needed for agriculture should not be portrayed as some form of set-aside just for the sake of farmers, but as an initiative on behalf of the whole nation to enhance our

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countryside. I am conscious that, without the necessary reductions in production, neither of the possibilities that I have outlined can solve our problems, but they may allow us to maintain an initiative and a different momentum in agriculture. That is important for the future.

I am pleased that our ministerial team is taking a robust stance on the present CAP proposals. As a farmer himself, I am sure that nobody appreciates more than my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how great is the need for action, and how that action will affect our farmers.

Time is of the essence. Decisions must be taken as early as possible, and, hopefully, they will be determined by agricultural and financial criteria rather than purely political criteria as was the case with one of our European partners last year. We must remember that political decisions may be taken hurriedly, but farmers cannot react hurriedly without suffering serious damage. I am sure that the answer is to go for a package of restraints which, taken together, will have the desired effect, rather than to opt for any single draconian measure. Steady pressure on prices and the raising of quality standards for grain so that we do not grow that for which there is little demand, make sense.

The question is whether pressure can be brought to bear quickly enough which will not damage farmers too much yet will have the desired effect of reducing surpluses. Time is running out, and the possibility of quotas being used for cereals in the last resort must be a possibility. One of the many problems with quotas is that, whereas price reductions may force less efficient cereal growers out of production, the introduction of quotas may build inefficiency into the structure.

There is also a grave danger of the whole of our agricultural system ultimately being placed in a framework of quotas, entirely dependent on political decisions, and becoming increasingly divorced from the market place and the ebb and flow of competition and commercial changes. That presents genuine problems and means that in the long-term we could face problems which we have inadvertently created.

The beef variable premium has been extremely valuable because, above all, it gets beef eaten. I should like that sort of assistance to be given to producers of other products to help them similarly. However, because the beef variable premium has not been built permanently into the CAP structure, every year we have to give away another agricultural advantage in order to keep the premium. There must come a point when we have to decide whether it is in our long-term advantage to keep giving something away every year to retain the beef premium, or to negotiate some settlement once and for all.

I should like to remind the House of one important point behind our negotiations and difficulties. We have them because we are members of the EEC, and we are members, above all, to provide peace and stability for all European countries for the sake of this and future generations. No matter how hard we try, it will never be possible precisely to balance the financial books in Europe. With such a patchwork quilt of nations, climates, temperaments and political systems, there will always be some imbalance —some winners and some losers. That is the price that we pay for the peace and stability that we all enjoy. Sometimes we are in danger of overlooking that fact.

With that in mind, I hope that we can acknowledge the achievements of our farmers, appreciate their difficulties, and accept the responsibility for steering our agriculture into calmer waters, rather than, as some would advocate, abandoning it to its fate.

6.53 pm

Mr. Ken Weetch (Ipswich): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Suffolk Central (Mr. Lord), and I listened carefully to what he had to say. However, I shall draw different conclusions from the same information.

Earlier in the debate an hon. Member asked where the anti-marketeers were today. I am one. I do not think that withdrawal is a viable option now, but at one time I was president of East Anglia's Get Britain Out Campaign, and I still hold the most fundamental criticisms of the common agricultural policy. In that light I shall consider the analysis presented in the big bundle of documents to which my hon. Friend the Member for Pontypridd (Mr. John) referred. Having read those documents, I would describe them as an attempt to be realistic in an overall framework which is wholly futile. They attempt to fix a current price framework and to look forward to changes in policies. Parts of the documents are ingenious, worthy, wordy, thoughtful and well-meant. They are a genuine attempt, by their lights, to come to terms with what the Commission refers to in the preamble as

"the gravity of the present situation."

While the proposals are all those things, they are destined to be of no avail, and the reasons for that are simple. No CAP is possible in Europe without the tortuous, agricultural acrobatics which we have year after year and which never change. There will be acrobatics next year and the year after, because the fundamental principles are wrong. The attempt to bind such diversity together in a common policy is wrong, and it will not work. Therefore, I challenge the documents on principle.

A Common Market with a satisfactory equilibrium for all is not possible. The CAP was an artificial creation, and it remains so. The labyrinthine proposals, which amount in principle to the lowest common denominator after everyone has used his calculator, are wholly unsatisfactory for almost all the parties involved.

The aims of the proposals are laudable. They aim to achieve a gradual return to equilibrium between supply and demand, which is unexceptionable; to make a realistic adjustment to market conditions; to begin a process of long-term adjustment so that we can eliminate structural surpluses which are too expensive and which are politically unacceptable; and to find a short-term middle-way adjustment between what is described as the full rigour of the market—I do not know what that means when it is translated literally—and decent incomes for farmers.

Both the Minister and my hon. Friend the Member for Pontypridd gave a fair description of the details of the proposals—and indeed they are a composite package with a great deal of complicated details. The proposals cover intervention buying for beef, intervention prices for butter, a co-responsibility levy for cereals, changes in oilseed regimes and a welter of other details. The House must appreciate the phraseology that the bureaucrats in Brussels turn out, because some of it makes entertaining reading. All of that is part of what is described as

"a continuous path to profound reform."

I, and no doubt other hon. Members, will believe that profound reform when we see it.

As I am an East Anglian Member of Parliament and a neighbour of the hon. Member for Suffolk, Central, and as the port in my constituency is the most important grain exporting port in the country, I have a particular interest in cereals. The proposals rightly advocate the long-term aim of reducing the structural surpluses. Something has to be done. We cannot continue with the imbalance. The proposals must come to grips with that basic problem.

The statistic given in the Commission proposals for the European cereal crop for 1985 was nearly 140 million tonnes. That was the second best after the 1984 record. We are also told that production in 1991-92 is predicted to be 159 million tonnes and that that dramatic figure is the result of a well-marked trend in increased yields and increased productivity. I suspect that that is one of the roots of the trouble. British agriculture has long had the siege psychology of the war. For a long time we have urged farmers to produce, come what may. Then, over a short period, we tell them to try to put the whole process into reverse. It cannot happen. The slowing down of the psychological momentum is a difficult policy to put into practice.

The House should note that the record increases in supply have taken place in market conditions of almost static internal demand. Nor is it likely that milk and livestock activity will encourage greatly the feed element of grain disposal. Therefore, the future is not optimistic. The net result — vastly increasing supply, with static demand—is that stocks will continue to accumulate and will be a constant burden on the Community budget and on the British taxpayer.

The common price proposals are in paragraph 62 on page 47 of the report. One of the most controversial measures, which has occasioned much protest and on which I have had quite a number of letters from people involved in agriculture in my constituency, is in paragraph 65, which proposes to consolidate

"the financial co-responsibility of producers, policy on quality and changes in the intervention mechanisms."

The co-responsibility levy has excited much comment. The report continues:

"producers should bear some of the costs of disposing of production."

We come back to the marvellous proposal that the levy will not be fixed at 6 per cent., so that industry would bear the full force of the rigours of the market—again I am not certain what that is—but will be fixed at 3 per cent. so that there is a more gradual adjustment. I am all for a more gradual adjustment, but I strongly suspect that in the adjustments that will take place in Community agriculture, British farmers will get the worst end of the stick because they consider proposals fairly and squarely and try to do their best by them. I am not confident that that happens in the rest of the Community. On my political journeys, I find that more and more people say that Britain is the one nation which always plays the game in agriculture and industry while others do not.

The right hon. Gentleman gave a fair description of the proposals. He had strong reservations about the levy and was right to criticise it. He also condemned quotas as a system which he said would fence in the existing inefficiencies. That is right as well. In trying to reduce the scale of supply in face of static demand there has to be a combination of administrative and price measures, but the accent must be on the price measures in the proposals. Quotas and management of quotas can become a bureaucratic nightmare.

To sum up my comments on the package, it is right to come to grips with over-supply and surpluses. The bureaucrats in Brussels who labour in notional grain fields are right when they say that, whatever they propose, someone will complain. Strong measures are needed. Some price adjustment is necessary. That is entirely logical, and we should emphasise it if we are to stop the accumulation of surpluses. In recent years farmers have suffered a fall in income. Nevertheless, if we consider the history of agriculture, we see that they have had good years. Any producer must take the good with the bad and must try to strike a balance.

The main point is that we need to undertake a long-term adjustment and some reduction in supplies. The key question is, on what principle should reductions be based? The reductions should be organised so that production is left with the most efficient farms. There is no future in propping up within a framework of agricultural support high-cost, non-viable units. The orthodox economic answer, and the most desirable answer, is to make reductions in such a way that production takes place in the most efficient units. The high-cost, non-viable units, especially on the continent, have caused distortions in the system. No system should be deliberately framed so that it is costed according to the structure of the least efficient unit.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: There is a great deal of force in what the hon. Gentleman says. Can he tell the House whether he thinks that national Government aid should be given to those farmers who are not among the most efficient producers?

Mr. Weetch: I shall answer that directly. Before the hon. Gentleman intervened, I had intended to conclude on this point. The hon. Gentleman made a relevant intervention in an earlier speech, and I made notes to answer the point, because it is a key point in the whole issue.

It is said in the proposals that to get the adjustment right we need yet more money from the consumer and the taxpayer. It is argued that we need short-term funds to put the problem right. The Minister should say, "There will not be any more money or, at least, it will be over our dead body." Perhaps I should not have said that, because it probably will be over our dead body. For as long as I can remember, the common agricultural policy has always been concerned with the philosophy, "Give us a little more money and we will make adjustments." We have always given more money, but I have not seen much rational adjustment, and surpluses are as bad as, or perhaps worse than, they have ever been.

I now deal with the point made by the hon. Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg). I disagree fundamentally with the bedrock principle of the proposals as exemplified by this quotation from the explanatory memorandum:

"It is vital that the rigorous conditions imposed at Community level should not become a justification for a gradual process of 'renationalisation' of the agricultural policy."

I disagree. The policy should lead exactly to that. It is better to have the sum of individual national policies than artificially to bind them together in the way suggested.

When we set out on the common agricultural policy, it was obvious to most observers that it would work only

[Mr. Weetch]

—most people had their doubts whether it would work at all—as the result of tortuous, labyrinthine gymnastics. That must be done repeatedly to reconcile the absurdities. Agriculture in Britain accounts for less than 3 per cent. of the gross national product and employs about 3 per cent. of the working population. Yet we must bind that together with other agricultural producers, when the figures are different.

Mr. Robert Jackson (Wantage): As the hon. Gentleman is in favour of renationalisation of agricultural support, whose farmers does he believe would be the losers in a subsidy race between the agricultures of Europe?

Mr. Weetch: Our farmers have always lost. Each nation should fix a scheme of agricultural support that suits its individual circumstances. That would be the honest thing to do. Agricultural prices should be fixed, not by bureaucratic fiat, but with some reference to supply and demand. If the market price that emerges puts farmers in difficulties, there should be open assistance from the taxpayer. That is the right way to finance the package. If that if heresy, I plead guilty. I see no future in repeating such discussions year after year when, in reality, the policy stands on a quicksand.

7.12 pm

Mr. Robert Jackson (Wantage): A central theme in this debate, which was mentioned by the hon. Member for Ipswich (Mr. Weetch) and on which there was a cross-party consensus—interestingly, there have been many points of cross-party consensus in the debate—is the discriminatory aspects of the Commission's proposals. I will briefly rehearse them.

On cereals, the proposed exemption from the levy of on-farm consumption and of the first 25 tonnes will bear especially hard on the United Kingdom: in the Federal Republic of Germany only half of all producers would be eligible to pay, whereas nearly every British producer would do so. On beef, the proposed limitation on headage payments to the first 50 would affect Britain especially severely. On sheepmeat, the proposed limit of the new premium to the first 500 beasts would discriminate against Britain, which produces more than half the Community's sheepmeat.

All those measures undoubtedly reflect discrimination against British interests, as many hon. Members have said. But let us be clear what we mean by discrimination. We cannot, I think, charge the Commission with intentionally discriminating against Britain. The discrimination is one not of intention but of effect—although it must be said that one could understand the people in Brussels wishing to apply the greatest pressure on the agriculture of that country which has been most pressing in its demands for reforms of the common agricultural policy.

The discrimination we are talking about is the consequence of the particularities of the structure of British farming as compared with farming on the continent. It comes from the relatively large size of our holdings in Britain, and the relatively large-scale development of our sheep production. Thus, the discrimination of which we complain is similar to that inherent in the idea of higher quality standards for intervention cereals, which was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart). This inevitably penalises countries with a wetter climate, such as Britain, and favour those with a hotter climate.

However, the cause of our present difficulties is not just our relatively large holdings. After all, why should the size of holdings be relevant? The cause lies deeper: it lies in the desire, or the political necessity—one might almost call it the moral imperative — of Community Governments to safeguard small producers in an era of increasingly strict CAP regimes.

What does Britain think about the future of small producers? I fear that in the House, and perhaps even in Government circles, there is still a lack of clarity and insight into the problems of these small producers. Thus the hon. Member for Pontypridd (Mr. John) brushed aside in passing the small, part-time producers on the continent, and there was a similar flavour to the speech of the hon. Member for Ipswich. The general idea seems to be that the small producer is a continental problem, not a British problem. But surely under a common agricultural policy it is also a problem for Britain. This becomes clear when the Community's solution to the problem of the small producer leads, as it is now leading, to structural discrimination against our industry. In short, the lack of a clear view of how to tackle the problem of the small producer is a serious weakness in our position in the Community.

So what view should we take? There are two broad possibilities. First, many say that there is no need to protect the small or economically marginal producers. If they are squeezed, so be it: that is, after all, the rule of the market as we accept it in every other sector of industry. That was essentially the view of the hon. Member for Ipswich, and I thought it was the view of my hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) until I heard him say, interestingly, at the end of his speech, that we must separate the social and economic functions of the CAP. I agree with that. There are strong moral, social and environmental arguments for supporting the rural economy and a rural society based on the cultivation of the land.

Much more importantly, my right hon. Friend the Minister also believes that the market should not be left to find its own level. He also knows that the rural economy is important, and, moreover, he knows that he must operate in the Council of Ministers on a basis of political realism. That is, incidentally, the answer to the remark of my hon. Friend the Member for Wells about the use of the famous budget lever. No solution to the problems of the CAP is politically negotiable unless it takes into account the problems of the small producer.

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): Is my hon. Friend aware that in some areas, especially rural Lancashire, the vast majority of farms are small—about 100 to 120 acres—and produce only vegetables? The remainder of the agricultural sector consists of smallholdings producing tomatoes and other foods under glass. Does he agree that we must consider the effect upon such communities of alterations in pricing structure such as those that we are discussing here?

Mr. Jackson: My hon. Friend confirms my point, and I agree with him. However, he should always remember that we are considering the concept of the small producer in the Community context. What is small for him or for us may be large by continental standards.

The second way to help the small producer is for Britain to say, "We must look after the small producer as defined in the Community, but we must not do it in the way proposed in the strange ideas that are coming from Brussels — that is to say, by way of size-related-exemption from levy and by size-related hillage payments." I think that this is what my right hon. Friend the Minister is saying in the negotiations and that that is what has been said today. On national grounds, we have a good case for adopting that position, but the weakness of our position is that we do not seem to be putting forward alternative ways of addressing the problem of the small producer.

I understand the inhibitions felt by hon. Members on both sides of the House when it comes to devising such alternative ways of assisting small producers. Any community policy that will help small producers will be disadvantageous to the United Kingdom, as we have fewer small producers than continental countries. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that in parts of the country, such as Northern Ireland, small producers do exist even on a continental definition of that concept.

But despite the difficulty, it is in our interests to press for less damaging ways of protecting small producers. It is in devising alternative ways of dealing with the problem that we shall find the key to our credibility in resisting the Commission's present approach, based on farm size. From Britain's point of view, the key lies in shifting the burden of support for small producers from the backs of our larger producers — as the proposed system of levies with exemptions entails—towards the Community budget. In short, the Community budget should take the strain of supporting small producers.

Two policy instruments could be used to cut European farm production and to protect small producers, without damaging British farming interests. But both those instruments would be expensive to the Community budget. The first has already been mentioned several times—I refer to set-aside. In my view this should be concentrated on the best land and on the biggest producers, so that we can achieve the maximum effect on production with the minimum social disruption. However, that would be costly.

The second policy instrument—I echo the words of the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody)—is the introduction of a system of direct income support payments for those small producers whom we want, for whatever reason, to support. Of course, that should be linked to limitations on their output so that we can limit the economic irrationality of the social policy that we want to pursue. This again would be costly.

There are, of course, many ideological and practical difficulties to implementing such concepts. Perhaps the most fundamental political difficulty lies in their cost to the Community budget. No doubt that consideration will be uppermost in the minds of our Treasury Ministers—indeed, Ministers in all countries will give it a high priority. I beleive that it is also uppermost in the minds of my hon. Friend the Member for Wells and the hon. Member for Ipswich, who both spoke about the need to restrain the budget.

But while there is no doubt that set-aside and direct income payments from the Community budget would be expensive to that budget, from the British point of view that should not by itself be a serious objection, given that Britain's net contribution to the Community budget is automatically limited by the Fontainebleau agreement. Surely it would be better to take the strain of supporting the small producer on Britain's cash-limited net contribution to the Community budget than to let it fall on the backs of Britain's farmers—which would only bring great economic, and possibly great fiscal, costs to Britain.

In talking about the Community budget and allowing it to increase, we raise a new set of issues, particularly the phobia which many of us have about its growth, but we must overcome that phobia not just for wider reasons but also for the sake of British agriculture.

7.23 pm

Mr. Richard Livsey (Brecon and Radnor): There is much cross-party agreement, and the Minister should take that back with him to Brussels. After all, the Community should know of the broad cross-party agreement that exists.

We must not forget that agriculture is still one of the United Kingdom's major industries. Any tinkering with it will have a major ripple effect throughout our economy. Remarks have been made about the effect on the rural economy, and there are serious implications there.

We have all heard of the 43 per cent. drop in farmers' incomes, as published in the White Paper; but hon. Members should recall, too, that there has been a 75 per cent. drop in farm incomes in Scotland, which represents a severe setback to farmers in that part of the world. Indeed, in my part of the world, Wales, many medium and small farmers are on net incomes of about £67 a week. I do not believe that small farmers can live or raise families easily on that sort of money. Moreover, it is not possible to service borrowings on that sort of income, so the situation is serious.

Some of the remarks of the hon. Member for Wantage (Mr. Jackson) are relevant in terms of discriminating between social policy and policies that generally support the Community's agriculture. From the 7 March edition of *Agra Europe* it can be seen that the figure for the input-output relationship in the United Kingdom for the past 12 months is minus 3·1 per cent. compared with 1984. However, the figure is plus 1·1 per cent. for the Community as a whole. That is indicative of the discrimination against United Kingdom farmers. In the last round of price fixing, the United Kingdom was awarded an average increase of 0·2 per cent. to offset inflation of 5·4 per cent. But the average price increase for the European Community as a whole was 1·8 per cent., with inflation of 5·3 per cent. Thus our farmers were left in a less competitive position than their European colleagues.

That situation is confirmed by the White Paper and the figures for 1986. Moreover, bank borrowing and advances to agriculture in the United Kingdom continued to rise throughout 1985 and were, at £5,520 million, 5 per cent. higher than during the previous year. Interest charges accruing to the industry rose by 19·6 per cent. to £687 million. Those are enormous sums, and the industry as a whole has been dealt a severe knock.

I do not agree with those who say that the consumer has been particularly hard hit. Food price increases have been below the level of inflation, so the consumer has had a good deal out of the CAP. Rather, the issue is how to tackle the problem of surpluses. Several measures could be implemented which could lead to a possible reduction in prices or the imposition of quotas, but clearly the argument is not as simple as that. When Mr. Andriessen

[Mr. Richard Livsey]

was here not long ago, he gave the classic European view against quotas. He said that quotas were always pitched too high. In other words, there was not the political will to impose them at a lower rate. That can be seen in milk production quotas, which range between 14 and 16 per cent. over and above production levels. He also says that quotas freeze production and that quotas represent a further step in state control with more political interference in agriculture and markets. He also said to the Farmers Club that there was unanimity against quotas in Europe as a whole.

Those who advocate quotas and control of production in the United Kingdom must face the fact that in Europe there is a great deal of unanimity against quotas. To advocate those unilaterally, as some people may, is a difficult hill to climb.

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. John Selwyn Gummer): The hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) suggested that the amount of farm produce qualifying for the full guaranteed price should be geared to what can be produced on an efficient family farm. Could that be done in any way except by fixing quotas on each and every item for each and every farm?

Mr. Livsey: I am assembling my argument for the case that the European Commission has set against quotas. I shall not be advocating out-and-out quotas, but I shall be following lines similar to those of the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) who did not advocate an absolute cut-off point, but demonstrated that it was possible to have something like standard quantities with open-ended production, where producers could produce an additional amount and they would have to accept a lower price in the marketplace if they produced above the guaranteed standard quantity.

Mr. Gummer: Quotas.

Mr. Livsey: That is the right hon. Gentleman's definition of quotas, not mine. I should have thought that a complete cut-off would have been an out-and-out quota.

There is great agreement across party lines on many aspects. We see absolute opposition across the parties to co-responsibility in the cereal market. All the arguments against that have already been put forward. I merely underline that we are against that, too, and that co-responsibility is counter-productive to agriculture.

We on these Benches believe that price support for farm production can no longer be open-ended and that eligibility for price support should be limited so as to release an increasing share of present support costs from wasteful storage and disposal programmes. We are looking at the problems of intervention storage funds and making funds increasingly available for positive measures aimed at supportable objectives. We would certainly see those objectives as supporting the family farm in a situation where policies could discriminate in favour of such units.

We support the objectives of environmentally sensitive areas, and existing support to less favoured areas must be continued and developed. We also recognise that with the entry of Spain and Portugal the CAP must be adjusted to the increasingly diverse nature of European agriculture. The limits on eligibility must be adopted in each country and be appropriate to its farm structure. We must have a policy overall which takes account of the farm structures in individual countries in the European community. It is no longer possible to have a generalised CAP which, for example, must apply in Portugal which I believe has an average of only three cows per herd in its dairy herds. Problems arise in different national situations.

As a supporter of the EC I believe that the CAP has done a great deal to help British agriculture, but there must be a move to sort out the general administrative guidelines of the CAP within individual countries. If that can be done, account can be taken of farm structure problems in the United Kingdom, and that issue would not be fogged by small farms in other European countries.

There must be more realism about the competitiveness of grain on the world market. The scheme that we are outlining would make additional production more competitive on the world market.

The outgoers scheme foresees the possibility of a 3 per cent. reduction in milk output. As many hon. Members have stressed, that should be applied evenly throughout the EC. The United Kingdom must not go along that path alone. This is a serious matter, because we do not wish our producers to be at a disadvantage. We certainly would not wish to see a reduction in milk quotas in the United Kingdom. We prefer the outgoers scheme. However, that scheme must be administered fairly and equitably between tenents and land lords. That will be difficult to achieve, but the scheme must be seen to be fair.

The problems of the super-levy in the United Kingdom, in particular, come from the proposal to have a six-monthly calculation. That is clearly not to our advantage. Indeed, it does not take account of the seasonality of production in Britain and it may militate against us. Therefore, we reject the six-monthly calculation for super-levy and wish to see it kept on a 12-monthly basis.

If there is to be a reduction in milk output through the outgoers scheme, the EC must arrange compensation for job losses in industries associated with the milk industry. It is no good accepting a loss of production if we then see, as the hon. Member for Carmarthen (Dr. Thomas) described, 450 jobs being lost in a creamery in one fell swoop. That problem is not unique to west Wales. It occurs in the west country and the north-west of England as well.

The problems of a price freeze for milk to the small farmer are considerable. We must find ways of allocating more quotas to small and medium milk producers. In particular, there is a need for a pool of quota to be administered by the milk marketing boards in an even-handed way. Wherever additional quota is available, it should be given to those most in need.

I agree with much that has been said about the retention of the beef variable premium. It is essential. It benefits the consumer as well as the producer. It is likely that the scrapping of the variable premium would result in a loss of £40 per beast, whereas the 50-beast headage payment works out at just under £13 a head and is no replacement. We are seeing at least a £27 per head net loss on the sale of every beast if we accept that scheme. Clearly, as has already been said, 50 beasts is far too low a figure anyway. I am sure that that message will be taken back to Brussels because our beef farmers are already making losses on their beef enterprises. It would be a disaster to stop the beef variable premium. Britain is the subject of the weekly scheme for target prices, and the last time we abandoned

that, in 1973-74, we saw a complete disaster for the industry, with a loss of confidence and beef prices plummeting as a result.

The sheepmeat regime must be kept, and variable premiums have a significant part to play in that. In the longer term I want to see something done about the possibility of gradually trying to reduce the amount of New Zealand imports and to assist New Zealanders to develop markets in the far east, which appears to have a booming economy.

Mr. Jim Spicer: I have a slight problem when I am talking to those people who have been taking aid to the Third world. Will the hon. Gentleman make clear his position about what the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) said about wanting a ban on feeding stuffs from the Third world? Such clarification would be helpful to us all.

Mr. Livsey: I did not hear my hon. Friend the Member for Caithness and Sutherland say that he wanted a total ban on all such products.

New Zealand lamb is often included as a bargaining counter with our lamb in our negotiations with the European Community. This is a complex programme at which we have to look carefully. We reject the limitation of headage annual payments for sheep to 500 in the lowlands and 1,000 on the uplands. This rejection has cross-party support, and that message should go back to Brussels.

The general principles involved in any reform of the CAP must be protection of the position of small and medium-sized family farms, particularly those in the United Kingdom. I have not been able to understand—but I am sure that there will be a valid explanation—how it is possible for farmers with the equivalent of 50 acres in Brittany to be able to make a worthwhile living for both father and son, when it takes a farm three times that size in the United Kingdom to support a similarly high standard of living. That highlights the problems of different farm sizes throughout the Community and the need for national administration of the CAP.

We must protect the position of farmers in the less favoured areas. I welcome the announcement of increases in suckler cow headage payments, made at the end of last autumn. We must continue to monitor closely the less-favoured areas farm incomes. There has been a 75 per cent. drop in farm incomes in such areas in Scotland, and there is evidence that, in similar parts of Wales, there has been a 60 per cent. drop. We should maintain farmers' incomes on family units, and, if necessary, support them directly.

There is a strong case for devaluing the green pound to protect our agriculture. I make a plea, in particular, that there should be a drive to support rural areas as well as the farmers as a major change in policy. Rural policies have been pressed home hard within other countries in the European Community. We should follow them on that. If we do not, we shall see a grave rundown in our rural areas.

7.42 pm

Mr. Jim Spicer (Dorset, West): My right hon. Friend the Minister made it clear that this debate comes early in the price-fixing round for this year and that we are in the preliminary skirmishing stage. We all wish him and my right hon. Friend the Minister of State well, and we know that they will make a substantial team.

I am glad to see the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) back in the Chamber. When I think of the rough-house in which my right hon. Friend has been and will be engaged in Brussels, my farmers in west Dorset and I thank our lucky stars that we have our team batting for us, and not a team made up of some Opposition Members from the Liberals and SDP. There is a poor attendance on the Opposition side of the House. They have been in and out on to the Labour Benches, and now there is just one Front Bench spokesman and one other Member. We have one of the SDP and one member of the Liberal party.

We are delighted to see my hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Sir P. Mills) back here and in such fighting form. He has said practically all that I wish to say, whereupon others will ask why the devil I do not sit down. I shall not do so, because I shall turn to some of the long-term problems.

My hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West, was a little unkind to the hon. Member for Pontypridd (Mr. John), who made a valid point. Year after year, we in the Conservative party have said at the annual price fixing that we should have been doing this five or six years ago. Three years ago, my right hon. Friend the Minister was saying this at the first price fixing that he attended. We must get this thing straght, but at the moment I am sorry to say that we are tinkering with this matter, which is a time bomb.

The cost of the CAP goes up annually. There are various estimates of what it is today, but it must be in the region of £11 billion or £12 billion a year. That in itself might be acceptable, but what is not is the cost of storage of surplus foodstuffs, which amounts to nearly 50 per cent. of the total. We know that the need to dispose of foodstuffs will continue. We have talked about the plight of our farmers, the drop in incomes of 43 per cent. for 1984 and, we would guess, worse to come in 1985. If all the cost of the CAP were going direct to our farmers in the form of support to keep up their incomes as they need to be kept up, half the problems would disappear.

As we go into this tough negotiating period, we should not lose sight of the need for a root and branch reform of the CAP. Two factors make such reform imperative. The first is the entry into the Community of Spain and Portugal, and the second is the ever rolling programme of national elections. It is self-evident that olive oil and milk do not mix. It is equally self-evident that within the Community we now need two common agricultural policies—one for Mediterranean products and one for products from the temperate climate. Sooner or later we shall have to make a decision to separate the two regions, because we have what might be called a Mediterranean time bomb. It is ticking away, and three or four years after the entry of Spain and Portugal, while we concentrate on temperate products, the production of olive oil, wine and other Mediterranean products will increase and the cost will go out of control.

The rolling election programme is our second problem. In our heart of hearts we know that we go into the price fixing not knowing who will be the French Minister of Agriculture this time next week. I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Minister has a fair idea of who it might be, but in the preliminary encounters the French have not been playing any positive role. They have been blocking as they go, because they have been waiting. We do not know what the position will be after next Sunday.

[Mr. Jim Spicer]

We know that the German elections take place in January next year, and we know the situation in Bavaria, which has an important part to play in those German elections. The attitude of the German Minister of Agriculture on price fixing has shown that he is concerned not about prices but about the votes of German farmers.

Some of us had the privilege of spending time with the Prime Minister of Bavaria last Monday and Tuesday. We know that uppermost in his mind is the query: what will suit my farmers? That is what he will deal with and already in the German agricultural policy team thinking goes very much towards some form of support outside the CAP, using every possible means to support the smaller farmers, in Bavaria in particular.

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: Before my hon. Friend continues, will he agree that the only form of support that does not increase surpluses is one that involves quotas?

Mr. Spicer: I do not believe that that is the case. I shall refer to that matter shortly and comment on that suggestion.

The Prime Minister of Bavaria made the following points to us quite clearly. He said that by 1969 he had recognised that the common agricultural policy in the form in which it was evolved in 1957-58 had outlived its usefulness. He wanted to see a change in the CAP at that stage, but he was overruled by others. We have therefore gone on year after year pursuing a policy that will get us nowhere except increasingly into trouble.

I have some thoughts for the structural changes that are necessary in the longer term for the CAP. My first idea is that there should be a separate policy for Mediterranean and for northern products. That will have to come about in some form or another. The second is for a Community funded programme for everything that relates strictly to really efficient food production. That programme should, in the general interest, be economically viable and derive from viable farms. This area and its produce should be the responsibility of the CAP.

Many hon. Members have already said that we need to develop a genuine rural policy that is a social policy as well. It would be wrong for agriculture always to be locked into the social needs of Bavarian farmers and small farmers throughout the Community. We must get genuine farming away from social needs, although I do not know how that new social structure and rural policy should be funded.

It was with some forethought that in 1975-76, Sir James Scott-Hopkins, just before he became leader of the Conservative group in the European Parliament, produced a document on a rural policy that described the way, that we should proceed. Whether that policy can be funded partly by the European Community and partly from the national Exhequer I do not know, but unless we have a scheme along those lines we will increasingly see some areas, parts of west Dorset, west Devon and of Wales and Scotland, where the bottom, poorer quality farms will be squeezed and farms will be on the market not for a month, or two months before they are sold, but for a year, two years or three years. It is no answer to see the upper end of the market, the grade 1 land continuing in full production and to see those areas comprising land further down the scale become what they were in the 1930s. That is my great fear, and all hon. Members should share that fear.

The time for bodywork restoration on a European common agricultural policy which is some 30 years old is almost past. We must look to a time when we will buy "a new car" with a new engine and new bodywork. We do not know just what shape that car will take, but one thing is clear — that a newly enlaged Community cannot possibly cope and that other measures that might be taken will not be administratively feasible. For example, hon. Members can see the impossibility of trying to administer quotas on milk within some member states of the European Community. If we then try to adopt more involved measures to control production, we have to build up a new bureaucracy to administer that. We must have a simple solution which can be applied across the whole of agriculture in the Community.

If we do not go for radical change, sadly we will slowly go on spending more and more money to less effect. In the meantime, the Minister and the House know that we must fight our corner, and we look to the Minister and the Minister of State to do that over the next few months in Brussels.

7.54 pm

Mr. Eric Deakins (Walthamstow): I must first apologise to both Front Benches for the fact that I was unable to hear the opening speeches. I had to attend a Select Committee which went on for rather a long time. I came to the Chamber as soon as I could.

The hon. Member for Dorset, West (Mr. Spicer) made a very thoughtful speech. To a surprising extent, I agreed with his comments. However, like many such speeches on the common agricultural policy — we shall hear more and more of them as the years go by while we are in the EEC—it sounded very good but will have virtually no impact. Such speeches will have no impact for the reason given by the hon. Member for Dorset, West—because the agricultural lobby in southern Europe has been strengthened by the admission of Spain and Portugal.

The hon. Gentleman said that we should have two agricultural policies. I do not know how that would work; in effect, we have two agricultural policies already in the CAP and we have had them for some years. For at least five years I have beeen warning hon. Members that the admission of Spain and Portugal would mean vastly increased costs for the CAP. It was obvious then, and it is obvious to all hon. Members now, that over the years countries such as France and Italy, and latterly Greece, knowing that Spain and Portugal were going to gain entry, tried to ensure that their own positions were strengthened in advance. They tried to do this, first, by a system of price incentives for olive oil and such products and also by a series of programmes called integrated Mediterranean programmes to strengthen the rural infrastructure in those areas. These have added greatly to the cost of the CAP in advance of the entry of Spain and Portugal.

Once negotiations were under way, those countries secured even more concessions, so that they could meet the competition from Spanish and Portuguese agricultural producers. Now that Spain and Portugal are in, all five Mediterranean countries will be working together in mutual support to ensure that they do not compete too much and that they each have a better standard of living. They are achieving that as a result of support from northern

European countries in the Community. I agree with the concern expressed by the hon. Member for Dorset, West about that matter.

The unusual feature of this debate is that it is the first to take place when circumstances are changing in the Common Market. This is the first year that we have debated agricultural prices in the Community when a financial guideline has been in operation. I was overjoyed, until I read the motion tonight, to learn that the Minister had told the House in an answer on 6 March:

"The Commission and the Council are committed to the financial guidelines. It will be an important objective to ensure that it is held to in the coming negotiations on the CAP."—[*Official Report*, 6 March 1986; Vol. 93, c. 430.]

The Prime Minister said on 5 March:

"A key objective of Her Majesty's Government when examining new expenditure proposals is that they should be compatible with the budgetary discipline conclusions adopted by the Foreign Affairs Council on 4 December 1984."—[*Official Report*, 5 March 1986; Vol. 93, c. 146.]

The motion, although full of good phrases which will no doubt appeal to Government supporters, says nothing about the budget discipline agreements or the financial guidelines for agriculture. It is now 10 March and I wonder whether in the past five days there has been a change of heart, since the Minister of Agriculture, and the Prime Minister firmly told the House that they would be approaching the CAP price negotiations in the light of the budget discipline agreements.

We now know, of course, from the Commission that its original estimate of agricultural prices of 20,445 million ecu for 1986 was within the financial guideline of 20,619 million ecu. Since then, the Commission has come forward with a supplementary estimate of 790 million ecu, making a total of 21,235 million ecu, which goes beyond the financial guidelines.

When the Minister of Agriculture noted this point in a written answer on 26 February he said that he was concerned about the fact that the Commission had put forward proposals that were outside the financial guidelines. I query his use of the word "concerned". If I had been the Minister, I should have been appalled that, in the first year of the operation of the financial guidelines, the Commission had thought it necessary to make price proposals for the 10 members of the Community—I use figures that relate entirely to them, not to Spain and Portugal—that exceeded the financial guideline.

Despite assertions to the contrary from some Conservative Members, there will be a supplementary budget in 1986. If and when that comes about—I think that it will—the House should note that there will be hell to pay. It will go right against assurances given to us by Her Majesty's Government about their approach this year to the common agricultural policy price negotiations. The farming lobby in Britain will find that the climate becomes increasingly hostile—not because of a general hostility to farmers, which I do not believe exists, but because of hostility to paying out more and more money without the exercise of any control so that more and more surpluses can be produced.

I do not want to deal with the deficiencies and evils of the common agricultural policy—they are well enough known and appreciated, even by those who support British membership of the European Community—but I want to stress that this pressure on the budget is likely to have an unfortunate effect upon British agriculture. Eventually the poor taxpayer, let alone the consumer, will revolt. I think that Treasury Ministers also will revolt eventually and say, "We cannot go any further; we must cut agricultural spending. We do not mind how it is done, but it has to be done." That will be the worst of all worlds, in particular for British agriculture.

If cuts are to be made, and I believe that they have to be made, they should be made in the interest of British farmers and British agriculture. They should not be the result of the kind of Treasury chops that have had to be made in recent years in so many other areas of public expenditure. They should be well thought out.

The problem with the common agricultural policy price negotiations is that the package deals that emerge at the end of the day are not well thought out. The packages do not appeal to every member of the Community, but there is sufficient in them to carry the support of at last a majority of the members of the Community. We have to accept that system. I think that it is an absurd system, and other hon. Members may believe it to be absurd, too, but we cannot escape from it. Therefore, all the fine words about living within our resources and keeping CAP prices within the guidelines are as words thrown into the wind, because at the end of the day the power of the farming lobby in Europe, which is much stronger electorally than it is in this country, will have its way.

I have a message for my hon. Friends on the Opposition Front Bench and, indeed, for the country. The Labour party has promised — at the next general election I expect that the Conservative party and the alliance will also promise — to reform the common agricultural policy. However, the electorate should be warned that there can be no effective, radical reform of the CAP. To mix my metaphors, it is not that kind of animal. Its basic principles and objectives are unalterable. There is no way in which it can be so radically altered that surpluses will cease to be produced or costs cease to escalate. The escalation of costs in recent years is as nothing compared with what is likely to happen in the next few years, particularly with the admission of Spain and Portugal.

Consumers will also become increasingly dissatisfied when they see that some countries with inefficient agriculture — like the Soviet Union, which must have one of the most inefficient agricultural industries in the world — can make up for the deficiencies in their agricultural policies by riding on the backs of farmers in western Europe and buying up their surpluses extremely cheaply.

Mr. Baldry: Is not the point that the common agricultural policy enables us to feed our people, whereas the agricultural policy of the Soviet Union does not enable it to feed its people?

Mr. Deakins: I do not recall that there was any starvation in Britain before we entered the Common Market. We had a completely different agricultural policy then. I worked for a long time in agriculture under the provisions of the 1947 and 1957 Acts, and I do not recall any starvation.

Mr. Colin Shepherd: I take the hon. Gentleman's point on board, but is it not the case that the previous system of agricultural support was the cause of grave concern to the Treasury and that it was clear that it would have to be radically overhauled? The move to the common

[Mr. Colin Shepherd]

agricultural policy was not so much one of support as of bringing costs under control, for the previous deficiency payments were way out of control.

Mr. Deakins: I do not think that what the hon. Gentleman says is right, but I stand to be corrected. However, I am not aware that the costs of the previous policy were out of control. When it looked as though they were getting out of control—once or twice on pigs, for example — we introduced the concept that the hon. Gentleman mentioned, of standard quantities. There were deficiences in that system—I know of no agricultural system which does not have its faults—but it was much better than the present system. Moreover, we were not then living as neighbours with a continent that was producing food surpluses, because in the 1960s and the early 1970s the common agricultural policy had only just got going.

I hope that the electorate, if not the House, will take note of the fact that there cannot be reform. Whenever politicians on all sides talk about reform, the electorate ought to take their words with a great pinch of salt. The only way to change the common agricultural policy is by having a different agricultural policy, not more of the same.

8.6 pm

Mr. Andrew Hunter (Basingstoke): My speech will be very short. It is obvious that a number of hon. Members still hope to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I want to return the attention of the House to what seems to be a lesser theme in the debate and to concentrate again on the problems of milk production. I shall speak very briefly on the co-responsibility levy, the super-levy, and the outgoers scheme.

Before I do so, I shall break my self-imposed discipline and refer to an extraordinary exchange earlier in the debate which intrigued me. I regret that the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) is not present. Were she here she would hear me say that for the very first time I find myself in total agreement with her. I refer to that most extraordinary revelation by the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) which led to an intervention by my hon. Friend the Member for Dorset, West (Mr. Spicer). My hon. Friend and I—and, no doubt other hon. Members—will tomorrow study very carefully his words in the *Official Report*. It is certainly my impression that, at the very least, he said that it is official SDP policy to restrict imports from the Third world, despite the moral implications of that policy, despite the impact that it would have upon the economies of Third-world countries and despite the fact that it would undermine so much of what our official aid programme is seeking to do.

I wish to refer briefly to the co-responsibility levy. I was heartened by what my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food said at the beginning of the debate. His attitude has become well known, and I hope that in the near future it will be possible for his words to be translated into action. The continuation of the levy is profoundly unacceptable. Milk supplies are controlled effectively by quotas. They will be controlled further when the outgoers scheme is introduced. The levy has not materially affected supply. Moreover, the money raised by the levy has not been directed—although this was its original justification — towards expanding the market. Many hon. Members will hope that my right hon. Friend will continue most vigorously to champion the immediate end of the co-responsibility levy, or at least to phase its ending over a number of years.

I turn with equal brevity to the super-levy. I accept the comments made by the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Livsey), for on this issue there is appreciable common ground. I think that we all accept and support the principles that were expounded by my hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Sir P. Mills).

I find that there is much merit in the argument that is being advanced by the Milk Marketing Board and by others. They are saying that there is every reason to be concerned about the proposed twice-per-year payment of the super-levy. Hypothetically, not improbably, we can visualise circumstances whereby there is over-production during one six-month phase and under-production the next. In those circumstances, we could witness the absurd fiasco of a levy that has been raised being refunded. Such a programme could not be justified.

I imagine that the six-monthly volume would be based on the 1983 production figures. As we so often remind ourselves, 1983 was a typical year. The Milk Marketing Board observes also that a six-monthly levy would work counter to its own campaign of trying to encourage milk producers to change their original monthly pattern of milk production so that more efficient use could be made of manufacturing capacity while ensuring that sufficient milk remained available for the key parts of the market. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Minister of State will comment on that when he replies.

In a fraction more detail, I shall address myself to the outgoers scheme. I believe that there is a need for an EEC outgoers scheme, but I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West that it must be applied evenly to all member states. Uneven application would be unacceptable.

I welcome the little that my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food said on this subject in his opening remarks, but I wish that he had said a little more. He has to perform a balancing act between potentially conflicting interests—between landlord and tenant. The hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich championed the cause of the tenant, and I do not blame her for doing so. I did that myself when the Agricultural Holdings Act 1984 was passing through the House. I appreciate the dialogue that I have established with the Tenant Farmers Association.

In this instance I am influenced by the arguments of the Country Landowners Association, which has drawn attention to the drastic implications for the landlord-tenant system if article 4 of the proposed regulation becomes reality. I hope that this issue has been taken on board by the Government. Quota is attached to the land, and the basic proposition advanced by the CLA is that landowners have an interest in quota and that quotas should not be disposed of without the landlord's consent. The hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich did not take that consideration fully into account.

If the tenant were to be allowed unilaterally to dispose of quota, he would effectively have the power to ensure that economic milk production could not be carried out by a following tenant on that farm. Surely that cannot be

right. The existing tenant took on the farm, which had potential for dairying, and there is little justice in his being able to deny that right to future tenants.

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: What my hon. Friend is saying can be true only in the absence of transferability of quota. If not, compensation would enable the landlord to buy in quota.

Mr. Hunter: I accept what my hon. Friend has said. If he bears with me, he will find that I shall be expanding on that issue.

I was referring to the proposed change to article 4 which the CLA has advanced. It is as follows:

"In the case of rural leases, the request for compensation should be presented by the lessee with the consent of the lessor, that consent not to be unreasonably withheld."

The CLA suggests that it is reasonable for a quota to be retained so that the farm can be relet with quota. The quota could be reallocated by the landlord to make another dairy farm or estate viable. In general terms, that would allow sound and good estate management to be followed.

The Commission's proposal to pay part of the compensation to the landlord, provided that

"he has effectively contributed to milk production,"

cannot be accepted. The Commission does not regard the provision of land as a contribution to milk production. I believe that is wrong. The provision of land must and should be seen as an effective contribution to milk production. My right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food must in negotiations on the outgoers scheme protect the landlord-tenant system and ensure that article 4 is amended to require landlord consent. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Minister of State will return to this in some detail when he replies to the debate.

8.17 pm

Mr. Charles Morrison (Devizes): It is a pleasant surprise to be called by you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to contribute to the debate. Farming has had its ups and downs over the years. Many of us who have been in the House for a considerable number of years have attended many debates of this sort, and it must be admitted that sometimes when things have been going quite well some members of the farming community have cried wolf and have not been believed. As a consequence, the same members of the farming lobby have not been believed by many Members of this place when things have been going badly for agriculture. The current position is serious, however, and if anyone wants confirmation of that he has only to read table 23 on page 40 of this year's White Paper, the "Annual Review of Agriculture 1986". Part B of the table refers to income indicators in real terms. In 1972 the index for farming income was 200, whereas in 1979 it was 129. In 1984 it was 146, and in 1985 it was a mere 78. That is serious. What is more, there is great apprehension about the future.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Dorset, West (Mr. Spicer) said, most of the issues that he wanted to raise were covered earlier by my hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Sir P. Mills). I find myself in precisely the same position, but I hope that by repeating some of the points which my hon. Friend made I and others will be of some assistance to my right hon. Friend the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in his negotiations in the Council of Ministers.

We know that 1985 was a bad farming year because of the weather, but in essence the problems of agriculture are those of success. For that success, there are two reasons above all others. First, farmers have made the very best use possible of advances in agricultural knowledge and science, and the result has been huge increases in production and enormous improvements in farming productivity. Secondly, the partnership of agriculture and Government has exceeded the wildest expectations. I warmly applaud the partnership and wish it had been repeated elsewhere in industry. However, agriculture is suffering from being too successful. The fault does not lie with my right hon. Friend the Minister, for he has done his best to slow down the dynamic progress of agriculture and its expansion. Unfortunately, he has received precious little or no support from his colleagues in the Council of Ministers.

It is impossible to ignore the size of the market forever. If the Council of Ministers does not face reality very soon, it will bankrupt the CAP and almost certainly bankrupt the European Community as well. That is outwith the fact that the cost of the CAP is exorbitant in comparison with other European Community expenditure needs. I therefore disagree strongly with the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Deakins). I understand why he thinks that the CAP will not be reformed, but I believe that force of circumstance will necessitate that reform very soon, if not this year. I join my hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) in calling for fundamental reform. It is certainly necessary, and the sooner it begins the better.

I welcome the forthright comments of my right hon. Friend the Minister about his opposition to a co-responsibility levy for cereals. I oppose the 25-tonnes levy-free off-farm sales exemption, but I also strongly oppose the co-responsibility levy itself — above all because I believe that it will have no effect whatever on surpluses. Indeed, far from stabilising production, I believe that it is likely to increase production still further. As my hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, North (Mr. Howell) said, farmers will try to increase production to overcome any extra cost that is imposed. I was therefore very glad to hear the comments of my right hon. Friend the Minister.

It is essential that the Commission and the Council of Ministers should look at the world scene in relation to surpluses. The Community is not making itself very popular with the United States, given the problems of excess agricultural production there. Quite apart from that, however, a looming threat to the sale of Community surpluses in the future is the probability—in my view, almost a certainty—that the Russian agricultural system will become increasingly efficient. I believe that the leadership there is at long last adopting a far more modern economic approach. The effect of that will be apparent not least in agriculture, and the consequent increase in the Russian output will be a disadvantage for other world producers, because for so long Russia has been able to soak up surpluses created elsewhere.

All those developments emphasise the need for control of surpluses. The success of the milk quota, after certain initial teething pains, leads me to support the idea of a grain quota system based, as the NFU suggests, on an annual licensing and set-aside system. For a long time, I did not support quotas and believed that production might be controlled by price alone, but I believe that we have now passed that point and that we must have a quota

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system, because control by price alone would have a very harsh effect on smaller farmers, especially those in the marginal areas. We cannot simply divide agricultural policy from social policy, because however much we seek to do so we shall not be able to cope adequately with the problems.

I agree that the co-responsibility levy on milk should be abolished, because it has achieved nothing, and I am glad that the Community has decided to propose an outgoers scheme—somewhat ironically, in view of its earlier opposition to the idea.

At home, it is important that agreement should be reached between the NFU and the CLA. I do not entirely agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) on this. Both organisations have strong arguments to support their case, but I believe that if there is any bias in the balance ultimately struck it should be in favour of the tenant farmer. Nevertheless, I cannot believe that it is beyond the ability of the NFU and the CLA to reach a sensible solution without my right hon. Friend the Minister having to impose one, and I hope they will be able to do so.

I hope, too, that my right hon. Friend the Minister will support devaluation of the green pound. There is no doubt that the devalued pound has been of benefit to British industry generally, and a devalued green pound would be equally beneficial to agriculture.

A number of farmers and agricultural traders in my constituency have raised the subject of capital allowances. There is no doubt that the reduction in those allowances has already adversely affected capital investment to some extent, but it is feared that in the coming financial year the effect will be very serious indeed. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Minister will press the Chancellor in this regard. While he is arguing with the Chancellor, he might also put in a word about the adverse effect on farmers of high interest rates.

I have taken enough time, so I end by wishing my right hon. Friend the Minister well in his negotiations in the Council of Ministers. I hope that he feels that he has the full support of his Back Benchers in his endeavours to fight for British agriculture.

8.27 pm

Mr. Colin Shepherd (Hereford): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Morrison) in this very important debate. I strongly agree with much of what he has said, as my subsequent comments will show.

There have been some very interesting interventions, especially those of my hon. Friends the Members for Dorset, West (Mr. Spicer) and for Wantage (Mr. Jackson). My hon. Friend the Member for Dorset, West said that it was time for a major reappraisal of the whole common agricultural policy and the Common Market approach to agriculture. I disagree with my hon. Friend only to the extent that I believe that that thought process is already well in hand. The bright point of the year was the introduction of the green paper entitled "Perspectives for the CAP."

I suggest that my right hon. Friend the Minister should do the same for British agriculture. At a time of intense change, it is right to broaden the debate as far as possible and to obtain the views of those likely to be affected as early as possible so that known views and problems can be taken into account in developing policy. That is what the green paper set out to do.

I was pleased at the rate of progress of that document. Document 4130/86, published at the turn of the year, sets out the Commission's response to the consultations in connection with the green paper and is most constructive. It confronts a large number of problems head on and sets out some very interesting guidelines for further discussion. I must, however, express some disappointment—with the Commission rather than with the document, as the one merely reflects the other.

In his explanatory memorandum, my right hon. Friend the Minister paraphrases the document when he says that the consultations have

"brought out the importance of the family farm and the diversity of structure and conditions of production".

That is the nub of the matter before us. Where is the base line to be drawn in considering the family farm?

In opening for the Opposition, the hon. Member for Pontypridd (Mr. John) drew attention to the differences in average sizes of holdings in the various member countries —from 6·7 hectares in Greece to 67·5 hectares in the United Kingdom. I believe that the right place to start is at the point of self-standing viability rather than taking the size of the farm as such and assuming that it must produce a living for its incumbents.

In considering the point of viability, it is important that my right hon. Friend the Minister should bear with him a copy of his own White Paper to the Commission and to the Council of Ministers.

In that White Paper he said that the small family holding dairy farmer of England — average size, 30 hectares—had a net farm income of only £3,637. He also said that the small cropping farmer—average size 44 hectares — had a net farm income of £2,672. By today's standards those are not viable farms. They are not the sort of farm incomes that we want to see. However, at 44 hectares or 30 hectares, the size is large. There are many dairy farms with smaller acreages than that.

These figures show what the base level of viability should be. That being so, the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Wantage fall into place, as do the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Dorset, West. Income support for those smaller farmers should be found from separate sources and under a separate aegis, rather than from the agricultural commodity support mechanism. There has been a strong thread of harmony throughout the debate that the two should be separated, that one confuses the other, and that we run into immense difficulties if we take the lot on board as a single entity. That is because the shape and size of the structure is different and is too great.

Given that in the latter six months of the year my right hon. Friend will become President of the Council of Ministers, it is important for him to try to get this point across. British agriculture is very important in this respect, and in no way must it be penalised. In the past it has gone through a number of traumas which continental Governments have not imposed on their producers. If my right hon. Friend wants to reinforce this point, I suggest that during his term of office as President he brings across those members of the Commission who seem to have set their faces so steadfastly against the British scene. If he would like to give them three action-packed days of tours and visits in Herefordshire—which as well as having the

best farms contains the smallest and most difficult—I would be delighted to arrange that. It would be valuable if they got away from the ivory tower of Brussels.

One of the purposes of the debate is to give muscle to the arms of my right hon. Friend and the Minister of State when they go to Brussels to continue the negotiations in which they have been heavily engaged for such a long time. We have heard that the House dislikes the co-responsibility levies. I welcomed what my right hon. Friend said about firmly and resolutely seeking the cessation of the milk co-responsibility levy. That has been totally ineffective, as my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) said. In fact, it has become a source of revenue to the Commission, and, as with any other sources of revenue, it is difficult to wean Governments or Commissions off them.

My hon. Friend the Member for Devizes, like my right hon. Friend, spoke of the unfairness of the cereal co-responsibility levy. We cannot agree to such a concept. In no way can I envisage that levy dealing with this problem, unless it is set at such a level as to cope completely with the funding of the disposal of the surplus. The Commission has blown its own argument by shying away from the full level of co-responsibility that would be necessary and by setting it at 3 per cent. Therefore, the Commission denies itself its own argument and lacks credibility. It must therefore be resisted with the strongest possible will that my right hon. Friends can summon up.

The delayed opening of intervention will not make intervention the primary market. British agriculture will be disadvantaged if that is the case. We do not have the agricultural structure of the continental cereal producers, who through their co-operatives can store the grain until it is possible to offer it into intervention. Our farmers will therefore be forced to accept a lower price sooner than will their counterparts in the Community. There must therefore be a transitional mechanism to enable the structure of British agriculture to match its cross-Channel counterparts so that it is possible to bat on the same wicket.

Beef is another area of discrimination against the British producer. I do not understand why it is necessary to exclude the dairy farm from assistance under the headage premium, as is proposed in the beef regime. We have made it very difficult for the small dairy farmer to continue to produce an income, and the figures that I quoted earlier demonstrate that.

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: And no suckler calf subsidy for dairy herds either.

Mr. Shepherd: Exactly. My hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton (Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop) puts his finger on it. Farms in the south-west and in the west of my own constituency find it difficult to do anything other than use the land for grass. If we accept this aspect of the beef regime, we deny them the ability to do anything else with their holdings. The figures do not show that they can sustain such damage to their enterprises.

The United Kingdom rears sheep well. Initially, one of the basic tenets of the treaty of Rome was that agriculture should develop in those parts of the Community that are best suited for it. With regard to sheep, that is an argument that we should deploy in our favour. We are good at producing sheepmeat, but yet again we find ourselves discriminated against by Commission officials who have drawn together a set of proposals based, from the beginning, on a premise that was wrong.

My hon. Friends the Members for Basingstoke and for Devizes mentioned the outgoers scheme. I should like to know the progress of negotiations between the CLA and the NFU. Is there a prospect of agreement? I am worried about the future of the landlord and tenant relationship if this problem does not have a proper solution. It is in the interests of the NFU and the CLA to achieve such a solution. The landlord and tenant relationship can easily be damaged. I hope that the arguments put forward by the CLA to amend item 4:1 of the regulations are taken seriously. I hope that the question of reasonable consent is dealt with properly to provide a long-term solution.

The green pound differential is currently running at 12·5 per cent. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Minister will give consideration to and press for the devaluation of the green pound. I get nervous when the green pound differential moves into double figures. I remember the damage done to the pigmeat industry in the late 1970s when, under the auspices of the then Labour Government, the green pound differential was allowed to let rip. Such action proved a positive disadvantage to the bacon industry. However, the bacon industry has been doing great things to try to recover. If we allow a green pound differential to develop, we will damage that recovery as sure as bacon is bacon and eggs are eggs.

I wish to comment on the use of land which might be called set-aside land, or land that is taken out of production, and the incentives for doing that. The paper work that surrounds this notion makes repetitive mention to the desirability of establishing forestry, farm woodland or whatever phrase one seeks to use. I urge that this is pursued with urgency, to finding the source of resources for it from within the Community budget, to make parallel representations to other Departments to get the tax position right. If that were done, the cash flow position would be dealt with and long-term incentives would be granted so that farmers could deploy their land in this respect at an earlier rather than a later date. There is a need to start right away to get land out of agricultural or cereal production into a non-agricultural use, such as forestry.

I am on borrowed time. As my peroration, I think that the Commission and the Council of Ministers should be left in no doubt, as a consequence of our debate, that this House, this British Parliament, will not go along with measures which discriminate against British farmers. I think that the aggregate of our debate expresses that message well.

8.43 pm

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Grantham): I shall heed your injunction, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to be brief.

I think that one of the most worrying features of this debate and perhaps of the Secretary of State's speech is that we cannot give any clear guidance to agriculture as to where we are going in the course of the next decade or, indeed, what farmers are to do. I do not blame the Secretary of State for that. We are the prisoners of a system which precludes us from exercising any control over what has happened. Perhaps even worse than that is the fact that the system prevents us from having a vision of where we are going

In the course of the debate hon. Members have stressed the importance that they attach to curbing surpluses. I accept that we must curb surpluses, but I am conscious, whenever we speak of that as a policy objective, that we

[Mr. Douglas Hogg]

are also talking of curbing farm incomes. Whenever I come to that realisation, I am acutely conscious of the needs of those farmers whom I represent.

The objective of curbing surpluses must not ignore the interests of our own agriculture. That is not shallow nationalism, nor is it merely a different political point. I represent perhaps one of the most efficient farming areas in this country——

Mr. Maclean: Next to Cumbria.

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend may wish to suggest an alternative site, but few people would deny that Lincolnshire is one of the most efficient farming areas. That makes me conscious not only of the position of farmers, but of the extent to which the rural economy is bound up with the viability and prosperity of agriculture. I should be slow to support any policy that would do permanent injury to agriculture and, thus, to the rural areas which I represent.

Any proposals that we put forward as policy objectives should be interpreted not merely against the question whether they will abate surpluses, but also against the question of the effect they will have upon the agricultural interests that we represent. I am not sure which is the most important. I am by no means certain that the conventional wisdom of constraining surpluses is necessarily more important than the desirability of maintaining a prosperous agriculture. I am prepared to pay a price in terms of surpluses and of costs to protect and preserve a prosperous agriculture industry.

My right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food made a powerful speech to the National Farmers Union on 11 February. He set out the broad principles that he will adopt in negotiations with Agriculture Ministers and echoed those principles here today. He said that all measures should be sufficient, by which he meant that they should be adequate to achieve the purpose. My right hon. Friend said that the principles should be even-handed — that they should not be discriminatory between the United Kingdom and other EEC countries. He also said that the negotiations should not impose a straitjacket upon British agriculture. I question whether any of those principles are maintainable within the fabric of the common agricultural policy as we know it.

That brings me to my central and last point. My right hon. Friend has often told the House, rightly so, that the CAP was devised in a time of shortage. It was an effective instrument to increase production, and that happened to coincide with the other purpose of increasing rural incomes. That has now changed. We are living in a time of plenty and the instrument that we have designed for a previous age is now inappropriate. I am concerned that we cannot use that apparatus to meet the problem of containing surpluses and at the same time of achieving the maintenance of rural incomes. I wish to do that.

I support the package approach that my right hon. Friend has put forward. I am prepared to back the policy of gradual change. I not think we should be over-panicked by the high cost of surpluses, but I deeply doubt —I am very sceptical—whether we can ever use the CAP, as it exists, as a means, on the one hand, of constraining surpluses and, on the other, of maintaining and protecting agricultural incomes. I suspect that we will have to alter the framework of the CAP. It is imperative that any agriculture policy that is characteristic of European policy should have some form of national aids designed to support farming incomes in areas which are not categorised as the most efficient. I hope that nothing will be done to work against what I hope will be an inevitable process.

8.49 pm

Mr. Charles Wardle (Bexhill and Battle): Ever since our entry into the Common Market, I have made no secret of my view that the advantages of being a member significantly outweigh the disadvantages and that the benefits of participating more or less freely in a market of more than 200 million people—now 270 million people —means much more to our long-term prosperity than any isolationist attempt to go it alone in an increasingly competitive world. My enthusiasm for membership has always been based on the assumption that, although we should have to prove our worth in the market, we should be able to do so under a set of rules that are in the main equitable, and by means of a mechanism which is basically workable.

During the past week we have had the opportunity to read the report of the European Court of Auditors, especially those parts of it which concern CAP finances, the document, "Perspectives for the CAP" and Mr. Andriessen's paper, "A Future for Community Agriculture". The premises on which I have previously made judgments about membership have been somewhat shaken. Taken together, those European papers present a depressing picture of vast over-production, resulting in large and increasingly expensive surpluses against which, as the Court of Auditors report shows, there are scarcely any effective controls and few properly co-ordinated policies for diversification or restructuring except at the very margins of agricultural production. For many products, the imbalance between supply and demand in the Community has beome a chronic and embarrassing difficulty which will get worse as farming efficiency improves and yields increase. Nor is there always a solution to be found by exporting from the Community because, as we have heard today, agricultural trends in eastern Europe, north American and Australia are following similar lines. Aid to Africa and the famine-stricken Third world is only a very partial answer for European surpluses, which are not wholly suited to tropical and sub-tropical diets, as there is a pressing problem in countries such as Ethiopia to help improve indigenous farming methods rather than dumping European surpluses.

The root of the CAP problem is the need to reduce capacity. That will not be achieved by generalised policies which no more than tamper with overall targets. Nor will it be achieved by abrupt pricing changes which deter more efficient and ambitious producers from seeking further productivity gains and therefore undermine the need for continued improvement and progress. That answer can lie only in fundamental restructuring such as my right hon. Friend has repeatedly advocated with his European counterparts. The recent record suggests, however, that it is extremely doubtful whether there is sufficient will in Europe or sufficient common interest among member countries to tackle restructuring with the necessary resolve and efficiency. I hope that I am proved wrong.

Some of the figures in the Court of Auditors report highlight the monumental size of the problem. In 1984, budgeted CAP spending was just below 18 billion ecu—roughly equivalent to £11·2 billion. The original budget for that year had been struck at just over 16 billion ecu and it was later revised to about 18 billion ecu, but the final outturn was 18·3 billion ecu. In the current year, it was expected to be about £12·6 billion in sterling equivalent but, to judge from what my right hon. Friend has told us today, the outturn is likely to be above £13 billion.

It is worth bearing it in mind that some £800 million of those revenues will be spent on storage charges and interest payments for surpluses with a book value of about £5·6 billion, much of which is perishable and will be destroyed in due course. There can be no other business in which Britain has a significant stake which costs about £13 billion a year to run and has warehouse stocks with a book value of more than £5 billion. On the basis of our 21·7 per cent. contribution to Community revenues in 1984, our contribution to this year's budgeted CAP expenditure will represent about £2·7 billion. Bearing in mind the Treasury's strictures on the major spending Departments, which seem often to involve intense negotiations about relatively small sums to be pruned from the domestic programme, how in the name of common sense can we part with £2·7 billion to help pay for a massive exercise in over-production and subsidies, merely to add to unsold surplus stocks which already cost more than £5 billion? It is nothing less than a huge exercise in social engineering which is poorly targeted and inadequately controlled. Moreover, it does very little for the British taxpayer.

Milk production is a central concern to farmers in my constituency and it demonstrates the anomalies and difficulties that we face with the CAP. Milk production last year cost the Community about £4·3 billion, of which our share, I calculate, was more than £900 million. Much of the money went towards the cost of storing surplus butter and other dairy products. Much also went on the various means employed to reduce overall production from 112 million tonnes in 1983 to the target of 107 million tonnes in 1985. While Britain reduced its output of milk to dairies by 1 per cent. in 1984, Germany, which produces a much greater volume of milk, cut its production by only 0·27 per cent., France cut its by just 0·36 per cent. and Ireland made no change whatever. In addition to the contributions by member states, producers paid about £350 million through the co-responsibility levy.

Much has been said about the levy's unfairness and inappropriateness, so it might be worth bearing it in mind that the elimination of storage and interest charges on butter surpluses alone would go a long way to fund the revenue now brought in by that levy. In other words, if we got rid of most of the butter surplus, which will only be destroyed in due course anyway, we would do much to obviate the need for the levy. With tight financial controls such as most major commercial enterprises employ, the levy could be quickly removed.

The quota system was undoubtedly needed and will continue to be needed if adequate restructuring is to take place. However, the system has been difficult to understand and harder still to administer, at least in its early stages. It began full of anomalies and hit hardest the many producers who are quite small by British dairy farming standards—those with herds of 50 to 80 cows—but who are far from small in European terms. The inability to buy and sell quota or to lease it in a secondary market, and the lack of flexibility in the outgoers scheme, especially for tenant farmers, have been damaging to east Sussex dairy farmers, many of whom are highly geared at the bank and whose commendable drive for greater efficiency and productivity has been thwarted by the application of quota limits.

What can be done? My right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food pointed the way. I should like to divide the priorities into two categories—immediate and short term. There are several immediate priorities. First, the co-responsibility levy must be abolished. It is out of place and I hope that I have already shown how the revenue that it generates could be saved elsewhere by more efficient financial management of the CAP. Its removal would be a major coup for my right hon. Friend, and an important psychological boost to British milk producers. Secondly, we need to ensure that any levy payments that are charged are collected in a fashion that pays heed to seasonal fluctuations in output and to farmers' cash flows. Thirdly, we need to ensure that the outgoers scheme is more flexible. Fourthly, we need to ensure the ability to trade quota between farmers. Fifthly, we need to ensure that our quota reductions are matched 100 per cent. by each of the other member states.

Against that background it should be possible to stabilise the market, which is still highly uncertain, and then to concentrate the inevitable need for further reductions in quota in a relatively orderly fashion. For the short term, we also need two positive commitments from our European partners, and my right hon. Friend has already campaigned for them. The first commitment is to bring about tighter and more commercial financial controls on CAP finances, and the second is to agree without reservation a determined programme of restructuring which goes well beyond the present bland recommendations about diversification, and which acknowledges, at last, that social engineering in rural communities should not be the principal goal of the CAP.

If we do not tackle those problems soon, we shall suffer increasingly from a system that offends taxpayers and farmers. My right hon. Friend has shown the way to remedy the problems, and it is in the interests of many of my constituents that he succeeds in the near future.

8.59 pm

Mr. Robin Maxwell-Hyslop (Tiverton): Many hon. Members on both sides of the House have taxed themselves with what they believe to be the incompatible requirements of limiting European Economic Community expenditure under the common agricultural policy without producing surpluses. It is offensive to a large proportion of taxpayers to spend huge sums on taking food into surplus storage which deteriorates at great and continuing cost. However, that dilemma is artificial, because the quota system enables surpluses largely to be avoided, payments to be controlled, and a social structure to be achieved by those payments which is held to be desirable.

That being so—I am entitled to say this now as I said it in 1977 — the ideal time to inaugurate programmes is when quotas can be allocated which will still enable individual enterprises to expand. It is only because the desirability for quota systems was ignored by successive Governments that, in the moment of disaster, they are not applied until they entail diminishing the output from individual enterprises. That is not an inherent vice

[Mr. Robin Maxwell-Hyslop]

of a quota system; it is due to the inherent cowardice of Governments and international organisations which do not implement them until it is unduly late. Even so, better unduly late than unduly later still.

Let us not go off on a red herring about the additional cost of bringing Spain and Portugal into the EEC and the effect of that on the EEC budget. That was known four or five years ago when the Trade and Industry Select Committee was discussing problems within its sphere, as it periodically does, with officials of the EEC in Brussels. The unofficial figure then was that their accession would cost an additional £1,400 million a year to the EEC budget. That was a known, estimated cost of following a certain political line. It is, must, and should be wholly divorced from considerations of financing the CAP, because it is not connected to the vagaries of that.

I have already mentioned in an intervention in the speech of my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the astonishing anomaly that the reasons for giving New Zealand access to the EEC for milk products and lamb are substantially the same as the reasons for giving Algeria and Tunisia access to the EEC for wine.

In the case of New Zealand the burden is carried by the British farmer. In the case of wine from Tunisia and Algeria, it is carried not by the French wine producer but by those who pay the budget of the EEC as a whole. More wine now has to be distilled into ethanol, at a cost to the European budget, because of the wine imports from Algeria and Tunisia, which were negotiated because Algeria and Tunisia wre once part of metropolitan France.

I do not dispute the logic of that so long as it is accepted that by the same logic the economic cost of the EEC taking New Zealand lamb and milk products should be borne by the membership of the EEC as a whole, not by the British taxpayer, nor by the British farmer. If the cost is not to be borne by the EEC as a whole, it should be borne by the British taxpayer, since it depends on political considerations, rather than by the British farmer, since it is not because of agricultural considerations that those imports are allowed. I do not see how that proposition can be disputed.

I turn to the spending of the same penny more than once. It has become apparent that when something is unacceptable to the United Kingdom Government, nevertheless it is permitted to happen in the EEC. We are told that something which is unacceptable to the German Government cannot be permitted to happen merely because it is unacceptable to them, particularly with their elections coming up. The same considerations must apply to both.

It is no good my right hon. Friend asking me to look up the record. He may have forgotten that once before he challenged me to do that, and I produced the record and defeated him on it. He has told the House before that he safeguarded the beef variable premium by agreeing to a massive increase in quota for Eire, which had made such a large contribution to bringing about milk surpluses in the first place. My right hon. Friend cannot go on spending the penny of claiming that he has to do this or that to keep the beef variable premium. If those were the conditions on which Eire got that extra quota, if the beef variable premium is done away with or restricted, so must be the coin that was given in exchange for it—the extra quota for Eire. We must be adamant on that point, which is one of elementary integrity and justice.

As for the difficulties of the new outgoers scheme proposed by the EEC, I wholly endorse the frequently uttered proposition that the decrease in production which it brings about must be the same throughout the EEC. None of us can foresee the future with clarity, but we have observed that new crises produce new measures which have new base years. We have seen that in fisheries and in many other contexts. If the British proportion of EEC milk output is permitted to be reduced, I predict with confidence not the year in which it will happen, but that it will happen. The new lower base would be inaugurated at some time for United Kingdom production as compared with that of other member states.

It is sometimes alleged that quotas freeze agricultural output in an inefficient posture. Nothing could be further from the truth. The inherent error of that proposition is to confuse maximum output with efficiency. There was a time when we feared that we were running out of agricultural land in Britain. Each year, we heard about the rate of erosion of our agricultural land by roads, town expansion and industrial development. The Labour Government produced a document, "Food from Our Own Resources," which the House accepted; but the same Government omitted to provide the financial basis to put it into effect.

That mattered a great deal, because farmers assumed that it was a temporary aberration and borrowed the funds to put the policy into effect. The evil consequences of that are still with us. Last year, the debt service costs on British agriculture increased by nearly 17 per cent., while incomes decreased by 43 per cent. The Labour Government have a heavy burden of responsibility to bear for that. They were kept in office at the time by the Liberal party, without which they would have fallen. That Opposition Front Bench bears great responsibility for the indebtedness that besets the industry now.

Confusing high output per acre with efficiency has other evil consequences. It has led to the gross over-use of phosphates, which has materially harmed the quality of our drinking water supply where, as to a large extent it does, it comes from rivers which take the off-flow from agricultural land. The quota system has refocused attention on lower-input farming, which makes better use of agricultural land — not maximum use in terms of output per acre, but use more compatible with the needs of the community that those farms serve. In many cases, good crop rotation has suffered from the pursuit of maximum output per acre, as heavier and heavier tonnages of fertiliser are applied in lieu of proper crop rotation.

A quota system would enable a proper income to be supplied to the farming community without open-ended budgetary commitments and avoiding the scandalous waste inherent in stocking deteriorating surpluses. Of course, quotas got off to a bad start because they were associated with milk. Those quotas were introduced not at zero notice, but retrospectively, after frequent assurances that, whatever happened, there would be no quotas. That is not the way to introduce a quota system that is designed to avoid anomalies and injustices in the best way possible. That is why we should be bringing in quotas on all the agricultural produce that is likely to go into permanent surplus in the foreseeable future. Without that, the distortions caused by quotas on any one section will

merely overflow into other sections. That is the only way in which a reasonable income to preserve the social pattern in rural areas, budgetary disciplines that are necessary to contain the burden of the Euro-budget on national taxpayers, and the avoidance of evil and wasteful surpluses can be ensured. It is the only way in which that circle can be squared.

The proposed EEC outgoers scheme must not result in a massive transfer of milk quota from owner-occupied land to landlord-controlled land. Yet if only owner-occupiers are free to accept the outgoers scheme and tenants are not, that will inevitably happen. Most of the outgoers will be confined to the section of producers that can give their consent without the interdiction of another party.

The way to overcome the problem that has been posed on behalf of landlords is to introduce transferability, so that, if a man wishes to spend part of the compensation accruing to him, he can do it on transferable quota. It is widely agreed in agriculture that when quota is transferred, a percentage should be put into a pool that is used for two proposes: to deal with identifiable hardship cases thrown up by the inflexible boundaries of the quota system as introduced, and to enable new entrants to commence milk production. Those two flexibilities can be secured only if there is a percentage fine—say, 10 per cent.—that goes into such pool on the transfers.

It has also been suggested that there should be an additional 3 per cent. quota—there is no magic about that figure—by which national Governments can buy in quota for reallocation. However, if they do not do so, the quota would go into an EEC pool for cancellation. Over and over again my right hon. Friend has pointed out, when it suited his case, that the British Government cannot interdict a development of which they alone, or they and the Netherlands, disapprove. Of course, Spain and Portugal could also disapprove, but without interdicting. But if my right hon. Friend is unable to prevent such an additional outgoers scheme from coming into existence, the British Government must buy in the whole of that quota. If they do not, Britain will have a declining percentage base when new measures are taken.

I turn to the division of compensation between landlord and tenant under the proposed outgoers scheme. It is not enough to say, "Leave this to arbitration," because arbitration can be wholly inconsistent in different parts of the United Kingdom unless the criteria are laid down in advance. If those criteria are not quantified as to maxima within the total formula, again there can be completely distorted assignments of compensation as between landlord and tenant. Therefore, it is most important— *[Interruption.]* Does the Parliamentary Private Secretary wish to intervene? He does not. Perhaps he finds this an embarrassing point for me to raise. Is it one with which he is unfamiliar? No. Good. He will find that it is one with which the agricultural community is familiar.

I take as my starting point 50 per cent. as the maximum for the interest in land element. Unless that is constrained specifically in the arbitration it will undervalue the other elements in the formula to such an extent that the tenant's interest will become inadequate. There must be no interdiction by the landowner on the tenant exercising the right to avail himself of the outgoers scheme, given an allocation of compensation between the two parties along the lines that have now been discussed. To say that it should be left to the NFU and the CLA to come to an agreement begs the question why anybody should suppose that agreement will ever be reached. There is no obvious interest that propels the CLA to reach an agreement on the issues as long as it can interdict outgoers on the ground that the value of the landlord's land will be reduced by participating in the outgoers scheme. That is a reality that will not go away. Saying, "Let them reach agreement," can only mean eroding still further the tenant's legitimate interest in the compensation under the proposed outgoers scheme.

This debate need not end until 11.30 pm. It is not subject to the 10 o'clock rule. As we proceed with the debate at a crucial moment for agriculture, let us not be hurried in our deliberations by the belief that the debate must end at 10 o'clock. These issues are far too important. They will be no easier next year because they are not properly debated or decided this year. That is most assuredly so.

I hope that my right hon. Friend the Minister will bear it in mind when he replies to the debate that he must not try to spend the same coin yet again. The Government must not agree to any restriction on the beef variable premium scheme. We must not limit headage payments under the sheepmeat regime or under the hill schemes, whether they apply to sheep or to cows. We must not adhere to a co-responsibility levy which was imposed as a budgetary trick and which cannot be the mechanism for discouraging surpluses. Lastly, my right hon. Friend must acknowledge the Government's abandonment of the exploded myth that reducing prices reduces output. Unless that is carried to the point of bankrupting producers, the most probable effect of reducing prices is to increase output to spread the overheads over a greater volume, thereby increasing the budgetary costs of storing surpluses. Those are the considerations that will not disappear tonight if my right hon. Friend refuses to recognise them.

9.24 pm

Mr. Tony Baldry (Banbury): In any debate on EEC price fixing one must never forget that Britain is an agricultural country, that British farmers produce 80 per cent. of Britain's food and export a considerable amount, and that only 20 per cent. of land is not used for agriculture. Secondly, agriculture cannot simply be considered like any other industry, because it is not like any other industry. Therefore, we cannot extrapolate what happens in agriculture simply by looking at other industries. Agriculture is different, not least because one must have a system that enables a sufficient number of people properly to steward the land. Thirdly, any system of agricultural support can be expensive, and I venture to suggest that if the old system of guarantees and efficiency payments were still in place the cost to the taxpayer would be three times that of the CAP.

The mechanism of the CAP is the cheapest form of agricultural support, provided that one does not produce too much. Beef production today is only 4 per cent. above what it was four years ago, but the amount of beef intervention is 50 per cent. more than it was four years ago, and the cost of storing beef surpluses in intervention is 200 per cent. more than it was four years ago. It is because of the gearing of this ratio that surpluses are expensive, and we should seek to tackle them, not seek to undermine Britain's agriculture or rubbish the CAP, which guarantees people in the Community access to secure supplies of food.

[Mr. Tony Baldry]

If somebody does not believe that, he should go to Warsaw or Cracow and see the Poles queueing daily for the necessities of life—bread, butter, flour and sugar. The only reason why we can sell butter and beef cheaply to the Russians is that their system of agriculture fails to feed their people, while our system of agriculture succeeds in feeding ours.

We should be attacking, not British farmers or the CAP, but the surpluses. Tackling surpluses today is increasingly difficult because the European Community is not the only part of the world that is over-producing. There has been an agricultural revolution throughout the world. For example, last year the Chinese fed a quarter of the world's population and still had surpluses to export. Last year, India gave more food aid to Ethiopia than did the whole of the Soviet bloc. Tackling surpluses today is increasingly difficult because of the speed of improvement in agricultural productivity. In 1975 we were getting 2 tonnes of cereals to an acre, and in 1985 it was 4 tonnes. We have doubled agricultural productivity in just 10 years.

In tackling surpluses, we must not forget that at the end of the day it is better to have surpluses than to have a shortage. We should be grateful that we have enough to feed our people. Therefore, in tackling surpluses we have to find a way to restrain production without undermining our rural economy. Such a way must find a solution that will work, and a system that is fair, so that no country should have to say that it is bearing a heavier burden than anyone else.

Also, we must have a system that does not exclude enterprise, invention and innovation or exclude new entrants, because we cannot seek to hold agriculture in a developmental time warp. We must have a solution that will work, and that means a solution that will curb the surpluses and prevent further surpluses. It makes no sense to allow cereal surpluses to increase from 30 million tonnes today to a projected 80 million tonnes by 1991. That is roughly 5 cwt of grain for every man, woman and child in the Community. There will have to be price restraints that lead to long-term market balance.

Let us be clear that a solution which will work, which will cut prices and help dispose of present surpluses, will mean more money for the CAP in the short term. That will almost certainly mean a supplementary budget. It will therefore behove all those who constantly and properly urge reform of the CAP to support such a supplementary budget when it comes before the House.

We need a system that is fair between countries, producers, retailers and consumers. For example, the proposed 3 per cent. co-responsibility levy on cereals is not only largely irrelevant in tackling surpluses, but treats British farmers unfairly. It applies only to off-farm surplus after the first 25 tonnes. It would operate unfairly between farmers who use their own cereals and those who sell them. That would mean that virtually all British farmers, but only half the West German farmers, would be subject to the levies. That cannot be fair. We cannot and should not accept policies which ask Banbury farmers to bear an unfair proportion of the cost over Bavarian farmers, simply because so many of our family farms are larger than those on the continent.

A realistic solution to cereal surpluses must inevitably involve price restriction, but I strongly suspect that in the not-too-far-distant future we shall seriously have to consider ways of taking land out of cereal production, although I would not go as far as some hon. Members, who have suggested that we should remove the whole of Wiltshire from cereal production.

Similarly, any changes should be fair to beef producers. A proposal to limit headage payments to the first 50 beasts can only be seen as discriminating against British beef producers. Likewise, any reductions in milk production should apply equally to all member states, without exemption or qualification.

I hope that the National Farmers Union and the Country Landowners Association will be able to agree a fair and workable formula for the outgoers scheme. To date, that scheme has helped considerably. After all, those milk producers whose development awards formed a large part of their total quota will now have sufficient quota restored to them to ensure that they have at least 90 per cent. of the quota that they would have had if there had been no cuts. Small producers with development awards would have their quota restored in full up to 200,000 litres.

I recognise that some farmers may not necessarily like what they hear about the need to tackle surpluses, but from the meetings that I and my European Parliament colleague Sir Henry Plumb have had with our farmers, I am sure that sensible farmers will support the Government's realistic approach.

We should not forget that, thanks to the brains and brawn of British farmers, combined with the CAP, food today is cheaper in real terms than it has been for 30 years. Grain is cheaper today in real terms than it was in 1900 and beef is cheaper, in real terms, than it was 30 years ago. Because of these improvements, people have to spend less of their disposable income on food today than ever before. That means that our pensioners are spending less in real terms on a loaf of bread than ever before and need to use a smaller proportion of their income to do that.

There are substantial problems to tackle here and in Brussels. It will not be easy and will need commitment and clarity of thought. However, in tackling surpluses let us not undermine all that the British farmer, British agriculture and the European community have achieved in the past 30 years.

9.33 pm

Mr. David Maclean (Penrith and The Border): I imagine that during the past six hours practically everything that it is possible to say on the current and future problems facing agriculture has been said, and well said, by hon. Members on both sides of the House. I do not therefore propose to go over the same ground and quote the same statistics.

I agree with the stance taken by my right hon. Friend the Minister and the stance that he proposes to take in Brussels. When one adds to that the excellent suggestions and exhortations of my hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West, (Sir P. Mills), and the analysis of the chronic problems facing agriculture by my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg), I shall be well satisfied if he can go some way towards achieving what they described.

I shall concentrate on a small problem which I raised earlier when I intervened in my right hon. Friend's speech. I shall understand if he cannot elaborate tonight, because negotiations are at very delicate and tricky stage. I suspect that they will continue to be at that stage for a long time to come.

I do not believe that the Country Landowners Association will want to give any ground. There is no need for it to budge an inch. However, the National Farmers Union has moved a considerable distance. I refer to the apportionment of quota between Landlord and tenant. As I understand the Ministry's embryo proposals, there will be a basic quota of approximately 4,500 litres not 5,000 litres. It will be based on 1·35 cows per grassland hectare.

If a formula were invented to take account of the value of tenants' improvements that is based upon the gross rental value of the whole estate, tenants would receive approximately 17 per cent. of the basic quota. Any production over and above the 4,500 litres would be called super-quota and would be added to the tenant's entitlement. The average tenant of a lowland dairy farm in England and Wales would therefore receive 17 per cent. of the basic quota and his super-quota. At the very most he would receive about 33 per cent. This is only an average formula, which means that in some areas it could be increased to 50 per cent. It may even be increased to 70 per cent. in an extraordinary case.

If this formula were applied, the result would be the reverse of what many of us had hoped would happen. The landlord ought to receive 30 per cent. of the quota, while the tenant, in extraordinary cases, should receive 70 per cent. However, we find that normally the tenant will get 30 per cent., and 70 per cent. only in extraordinary cases.

This formula cannot be worked on an ad hoc basis, as was suggested by the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan). It would be crazy to say that if both sides cannot reach agreement each case must be treated on its merits. An interpretation of that kind was not even included in the Rent Acts. We lay down basic guidelines for the arbitrator. There may be extreme cases at each end of the margin, but the House has a duty to say to my right hon. Friend that if he is unable to give the details tonight—rightly so, because the negotiations are at a delicate stage—this is what we want him to do.

My right hon. Friend ought to pay close attention to the fact that my right hon. and hon. Friends have presented to him the CLA's arguments. I have no doubt that the NFU's arguments will also be put to him. I leave my right hon. Friend merely with the thought that if the formula for the average dairy farmer for the lowlands provides the tenants with only 33 per cent of the outgoers scheme, we have to consider the effect that this will have in the upland areas, where there will probably be no super-quota at all. It means that tenants in upland areas will come out of this very poorly indeed. One may even find on upland farms that although the tenant has carried out most of the improvements he will not receive even 50 per cent. of the quota.

I do not think that that will be regarded as fair by the country or by Conservative Members. If my right hon. Friend bears that point in mind, I am confident that when he has to act as piggy in the middle, or, as may be more appropriate, as bully in the middle, he will come down on the right side, if he has to come down on any side at all.

9.38 pm

Mr. John H[illegible] Robertson (East Lothian): I agree with the final point made by the hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean). If we could draw an extra export restitution for every Scottish Conservative Member whom we have exported south of the border, we should be doing quite well out of it. The experience that the hon. Member has gained from dealing with members of the Scottish Landowners Federation in the Black Isle will stand him in very good stead in his dealings with the Country Landowners Association in Cumbria.

It seems a long time since I came into the House this afternoon. Before I did so I looked at the Press Association tapes and saw that for the second year running a supplementary contribution will have to be made on top of the £20 billion budget of the common agricultural policy in order to stop the CAP going bust. It is appropriate, therefore, that the House should be debating such a critical matter at this time. It is inevitable that this has been a wide-ranging debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Pontypridd (Mr. John) had the strength, which I have not, to pick up the entire bundle of documents that we are supposed to be debating. I had them weighed last week in the Post Office and I was told that their combined weight was 2·1 kg, which in English is 4½ lb of paper. It is inevitable that the debate has been wide-ranging. I welcome the helpful contributions of my hon. Friends the Members for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody), for Carmarthen (Dr. Thomas), for Ipswich (Mr. Weetch) and for Walthamstow (Mr. Deakins).

The Minister suggested at the beginning of the debate that he was beginning to follow the ideas and the lead of my hon. Friend the Member for Pontypridd of setting aside land and encouraging the change of use of land to forestry. I hope that he will pay due attention to our proposals for creating incentives for small farmers, making land available for new entrants into agriculture and taking out of production land that has been used to grow crops that are in surplus. For the present, we have what is fundamentally a package of price-cutting or freezing proposals. It is a variation on what was debated in the Council of Ministers last year, when the then proposals were vetoed by Mr. Kiechle of the Federal Republic of Germany. What prospect is there that he will not use the veto this year?

We must all acknowledge the need to cut the cost of the common agricultural policy. We must recognise that farming has been led into a state of chaos. The present production package is the result of European Community incentives which have applied throughout recent years. I suggest that the European Community has the responsibility to help to restructure the pattern of agricultural production for the future.

It is not good enough merely to talk about cutting prices, although price cuts must be an element of the package. There must be scope for proper and constructive incentives so that the industry knows in which way it is supposed to be heading.

Cereals form the best known mountain in the European Economic Community. We have read recently that the Intervention Board for Agricultural Produce managed to double its stocks last year from 2,831,000 tonnes to 5,701,000 tonnes. Some of the stocks have been in intervention stores for as long as three years.

The Commission has three proposals. First, it is proposing a 3 per cent. co-responsibility levy, leaving the first 25 tonnes from each farm for off-farm sales that are exempt from the levy. It has already been said by my hon. Friend the Member for Pontypridd that Germany is producing 18 per cent. of cereals and will pay only 11 per cent. of the levy under the proposed arrangement. We in Britain are producing 16 per cent. of cereals, and if the proposal were implemented we would find ourselves

[Mr. John Home Robertson]

paying 26 per cent. of the levy. We say that the proposal is discriminatory, and I hope that the Minister will be negotiating against it in due course. Secondly, the Commission is proposing that intervention should apply to cereals only for the five months between December and April. Thirdly, it is proposed that there should be far stricter quality criteria.

All these proposals seem likely to discriminate against the United Kingdom. In effect, we are being presented with back-door price cuts of 12 per cent. for wheat and 15 per cent. for barley. That would be fair enough if it were part of a package, but it is not. There appears to be no positive guidance towards set-aside or alternative uses for land. The Minister has said that he is prepared to start thinking about set-aside and the use of land apart from other measures and I agree with that principle. Perhaps the Minister of State will explain when he replies what we shall start moving into as an alternative use for land. If land is taken out of cereal production, what shall we do with it instead? We could do with a constructive debate on that subject. Agriculture is waiting for it from the Government and from the House.

I hope that the Minister will now admit that price restraints alone would be either intolerable or ineffective. As the hon. Member for Tiverton (Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop) said, for it to be effective there would have to be draconian price cuts which would be intolerable for the rural economy. If it was tolerable and did not hurt anyone, the chances are that it would merely jack up cereal production. In addition to price restraint, constructive guidance is needed. Set-aside would clearly be part of that, but we need more elucidation as to what the Government wish the industry to do.

The proposals for milk come on top of the very unhappy experience of the imposition of milk quotas two years ago. There are three detailed proposals. The first is to retain the co-responsibility levy at 2 per cent. That is no more and no less than a milk tax and has nothing to do with co-responsibility. I see that the Minister agrees and I hope that he will be more successful than in the past in his negotiations on that.

Secondly, it is proposed that the super-levy should be collected every six months on account. The Milk Marketing Board, among others, is strongly against that. Apart from anything else, we could have a ludicrous situation in which the board has to collect the super-levy on excess production in the first six months only to pay it back if production falls in the following six months. That is not a very clever proposal, and I hope that it will be rejected.

Thirdly, an extended outgoers scheme is proposed in relation to milk. We support the principle of such a scheme, although we understand the concern expressed by landlords, tenants and others, because it is always complicated and it was an agonising experience for the industry last time. I have read what the National Farmers Union and the Country Landowners Association have said about it. I hope that on this occasion the Government will also bear in mind the impact of another outgoers scheme on people working in the dairy industry.

I trust also—I keep returning to this—that there will be more positive guidance as to what should happen to the land. It is not good enough to say that the land must simply be taken out of milk production. If the Minister wants it to come out of production altogether and lie fallow, he should say so. If not, let us have sensible incentives to help the industry to go in a different direction. On the last occasion, much of the land simply went over to beef production. The result was a knock-on effect, with further surpluses being generated in the beef market and also in the sheep market.

I appreciate the controversy that the new outgoers scheme has generated and I agree that an outgoing tenant should not be able irrevocably to strip the assets of a farm, including the milk production quota, by selling the quota, but neither should the landlord be able to dictate who can and cannot take part in the scheme. I believe that there is a strong case for an independent body to adjudicate in such cases.

Perhaps the Minister will also tell us what has happened to the Agriculture Bill. We hear rumours that the Government may put a new clause into the Bill on Report in connection with the outgoers scheme. The Bill had its Second Reading in November and came out of Standing Committee on 30 January. We even have a bound volume of the Committee proceedings, but there is still no sign of Report stage. Perhaps the Minister will tell us the fate of that Bill. Some of us would be happy for it to disappear without trace, but it would help if the Minister could explain what is going on.

Once again, the beef variable premium is under threat from the Commission. The sheep premium is constantly being undermined by the French and by the illegal clawback mechanism—we wish the Government well in their legal action on that.

The beef variable premium must be defended. It is good for consumers and producers, and in that respect it is unique in the CAP. The industry and all hon. Members must be getting sick of the recurring threat to the beef variable premium. There are signs that this question is raised by the Commission year after year only as a red herring in the hope of getting other concessions out of the Minister. It is time that this was consolidated once and for all into the support system, and that is what the Minister should be working towards.

There is also the proposal to phase out the intervention scheme for beef and to replace it with a single premium headage payment for up to 50 cattle over six months old on each farm, and a further premium for suckler cows, wherever possible from national funds. The figure of up to 50 animals per farm will clearly be restrictive and discriminate against British farmers. Similarly, the restriction to 500 sheep on lowland farms in Britain and 1,000 in the less-favoured areas to qualify for the sheep premium will also be discriminatory against British farmers, and such discrimination must be resisted.

It is plain that these proposals are discriminatory and the Opposition and the industry expect the Minister to resist them in due course. By all means let there be penalties to discourage over-production, but let them be fair throughout the Community. That is all that we and the industry are asking for.

There is a proposal to reduce surplus stocks by means of a three-year disposal programme. That is obviously necessary, because we cannot continue to keep stocks in intervention stores for ever. We know that the CAP accounts for 60 per cent. of the entire budget of the European Community, of which 30 per cent. goes towards the storing and disposing of surpluses. We must get rid of that so we can cut our losses, but why on earth, year after

year, are such surpluses given to the Russians and Libyans at cut price? If anyone is to have the benefit of highly subsidised beef and dairy produce, it should be British pensioners and people on low incomes.

We must ensure that we do not produce further costly surpluses in Britain and in the rest of the Community. We must learn from the past. If necessary, let there be milk quotas and effective action to control the beef surplus. The ultimate irony is that the Russians, the Libyans and so on get the benefit of our dumped surpluses. They are the only beneficiaries of this costly and complicated system of agricultural price support.

The CAP must be seen as a wholly mixed blessing for British agriculture. It has undeniably distorted our industry beyond recognition. Indeed, the Minister's last annual review of agriculture confirmed that £2·2 billion went into support for British agriculture, whereas net farm income in 1985 was only £1·1 billion. In other words, only half of the subsidy going to the industry showed up as net farm income at the end of the day. Therefore, something is seriously wrong with the system.

From time to time, Ministers and others tell us that agricultural support expenditure is intended to support the entire rural economy. An interesting paper published by the Scottish Office last year attempted to defend the Government's record in rural Scotland, and it gave figures that showed rising public expenditure on "assistance to rural economic activity". The total figure quoted was £311 million, of which £204 million went on agriculture, and of that £109 went on price support. Last year, more money was spent in Scotland on agricultural price support than on the whole gamut of expenditure on rural industry, forestry, tourism and fisheries. That did not help the economy of rural Scotland much; in effect, it distorted it. We need a comprehensive rural policy, rather than this approach.

Mr. Maclennan: Would the hon. Gentleman like to complete the Scottish picture by pointing out that, despite that expenditure on agriculture, agricultural incomes in the last financial year stood at 12·5 per cent. of what they did a decade ago, in real terms?

Mr. Home Robertson: It is undoubtedly true that, largely because of the weather but also because of other factors, farm incomes last year were about as low as they have ever been since the second world war.

Mr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East): In addition, is it not a scandal that the Government are closing research institutes and cutting the number of those productive scientific jobs?

Mr. Home Robertson: I intend to refer to that, if my hon. Friend can contain himself.

British agriculture is at a turning point; the Government have a duty to guide it in the right direction by a combination of incentives and advice. As my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East (Mr. Strang) said, we know what has been happening to the research and advisory services. I ask once again: what has happened to the Agriculture Bill? Not that I ever want to see it again, but part of that package is a 41 per cent. cut in the funding of the advisory and research services in Scottish agriculture, with parallel cuts in England and Wales.

We also know that the Government are cynically playing off colleges and research institutes in Scotland against one another in this vicious regime of cuts. We have seen the tragic spectacle of two excellent agricultral research institutes in Scotland — the Hill Farming Research Organisation and the Macaulay Institute of Soil Research—having to fight it out because of the cuts to see which will survive. That is tragic, because the industry will require all the scientific guidance that it can possibly get in the coming months and years.

This is relevant because, when and if Ministers do manage to agree on the way forward, it will not just happen; it will involve restructuring the whole industry. It will involve changes of use, new crops and trees on land which has hitherto been in agriculture. We shall obviously need an effective advisory and research service and other incentives.

Last year's statistics show that farm incomes are close to an all-time low, as the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) said. Having experienced the 1985 harvest in Scotland, I have a good idea what has caused that fall in returns. It had much to do with the weather, but that bad year followed a succession of extremely profitable years.

That brings me to the problems facing farm employees. Quite apart from the low incomes of far too many farm workers, we should be concerned about the number who have been laid off or made redundant in recent months, following the bad harvest. Farmers will not enhance their reputation by calling men out at all hours to save the harvest and laying them off the following month at only a few weeks' notice. It is worth remembering that in Scotland redundancy from a farm can also mean homelessness, because we still have the agricultural tied housing system.

The hon. Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Sir P. Mills), who is no longer in the Chamber, said that he deplored the difficulties of rural areas and warned about the effect that a further squeeze on agriculture would have on rural communities and the economy of rural Britain. Until today, the Minister of Agriculture was advocating indiscriminate price cuts. He must know that such a proposal would be a further burden on the rural economy. Marginal price cuts will simply increase production. If the cuts are to be big enough to have the effect that the Minister seeks, they will have an intolerable impact on the rural economy. Price restraint must obviously be an element of this strategy, but it cannot possibly be the whole story.

However, I welcome the Minister's belated conversion to set-aside and other mechanisms to restructure the industry. He is following the lead given by my hon. Friend the Member for Pontypridd (Mr. John) in advocating incentives for planting trees on land currently used for surplus crops. Perhaps he will also pay attention to what we will say about the provision of land for new entrants to the industry and about the strategy which my hon. Friend intends to outline shortly on income support for small farmers and on a tonnage-based quota system for cereals. My hon. Friend suggested a whole new national approach to the CAP, which was echoed by the hon. Member for Dorset, West (Mr. Spicer).

Mr. Jopling: The hon. Gentleman seems to be giving us a sneak preview of the Labour party's next election manifesto, so could he tell us whether the manifesto will still say that Labour would nationalise alternative land?

Mr. Home Robertson: The Minister will have to wait and see, but I think that that is a little unlikely. I have just

[Mr. Home Robertson]

come from the Labour party conference in Scotland at which a whole range of resolutions on this subject were passed, but that was not among them.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: How many tenants has the hon. Gentleman got?

Mr. Home Robertson: I do not know why Conservative Members get so excited. If a Conservative Member is a farmer, he is a good, honest, hard-working yeoman farmer, but any Labour farmer must ipso facto be a rapacious landlord.

Mr. Hogg: But how many tenants does the hon. Gentleman have?

Mr. Home Robertson: None.

We recognise the need to cut surpluses and the need to cut costs drastically, but it must be done responsibly and it must take account of the needs of the full British rural economy. The Labour party has a proud record of care for agriculture, which started with the Agriculture Act 1947. We intend to maintain that record.

These proposals might well turn out to be academic if Mr. Kiechle of the German Federal Republic vetoes the whole package, as he did last year and if it is not the German Government it is just as likely to be the Irish or someone else and meanwhile another year's crop has been sown. Next year's surplus is being grown. There is a long lead time in agriculture and we cannot go on putting off decisions for ever. That is why my hon. Friend the Member for Pontypridd has suggested that the agricultural support system should be repatriated, subject to clear guidelines laid down by the EC. That means that if the United Kingdom had production quotas for milk, beef, sheep or cereals, our Government would take whatever steps they thought appropriate for British conditions to achieve those targets, subject to penalties for over-production. Such a scheme would include national measures to support the rural economy and to restructure agriculture.

It would be too complicated and take too long to negotiate a comprehensive package for the entire EC of 12 countries this year or next year. The surpluses for 1987-88 are already in the ground being grown. We should seriously consider repatriating national agricultural policies.

The industry is now in a crisis and this debate will not settle the matter—I wish that it would. The Opposition are working on detailed proposals for food supplies to Europe and the future of agriculture, but there was precious little sign, at least until this evening, of any constructive thought from the Government. We were interested to hear what the Minister of Agriculture said. It was in marked contrast to what his noble Friend the Minister of State, Scottish Office said when he addressed the annual general meeting of the National Farmers Union of Scotland at Coylumbridge last week. When Mrs. Fiona Dalrymple, an NFU representative from the Lothian region, accused the Government of being irresponsible, saying that land would have to come out of production without showing a policy direction, Lord Gray of Contin said:

"I am all ears. You tell me what the policy should be."

If that is the state of mind of the Minister of State responsible for agriculture in Scotland, we urgently hope that more constructive views will be forthcoming from the Minister of State with responsibility for agriculture in the rest of the United Kingdom.

10.4 pm

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. John Selwyn Gummer): During today's debate we have seen that a number of issues have brought both sides of the House close together. First, there has been a demand that the common agricultural policy should be accepted, and that whatever we do must be addressed to the problems of surplus and solving them. Secondly, it has been demanded that the CAP should be fair and should not discriminate between farmers or nations within the European Community. Thirdly, it has been demanded that the policies should be open in the sense that they should enable the industry to take on new recruits and to reward efficiency and success.

Those three points seem to have become the common currency of all who are concerned to reform the system. I understand that the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Deakins), who has long-standing views on the matter, does not believe that the system can be reformed. He is becoming an ever lonelier figure, but he takes a consistent view, which we must accept as his. It is more sensible than the proposals of the hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) for the repatriation of the agricultural support system. That would mean that we would retain within the Community all the issues about which we argue most, and that we would have to argue first about what the pointer would be, and then what suitable national decisions would be. Without guidelines about what would be suitable, we would soon complain about the French using their internal arrangements to undermine the markets that we have created for ourselves. We would be the first nation to argue about that, if the guidelines were not tight, fair and properly implemented.

The hon. Gentleman talked as if it would be easy to ensure that no country overproduced. Many Labour Members have put that argument tonight. They have played the usual Labour trick of saying that all foreigners cheat, and we never do. That is almost true, but it is not utterly true. A certain amount of policing would certainly be needed. The hon. Gentleman's solution to the problem was merely a restatement of the present problem. It is that we must come to agreements about the way in which we share the supply of food to a market which is diminishing, and which faces increases in supply.

My hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Sir P. Mills) put his finger on a most important point. It is not merely that our ability to poduce food is increasing, but that our ability to consume it is decreasing. In many major respects the population of western Europe has decided that to eat less of certain sorts of food would be beneficial for health, and that is for it to decide. While we are producing more dairy products, the demand for them is decreasing.

The hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) came to the House with what appears to be yet another version of SDP agricultural policy. He said no to every suggestion, saying that every suggestion was unsuitable, unworkable and would have to be delayed and given time. After listening to his speech, it was impossible to imagine any workable proposal, but one. I hope that

hon. Members on both sides of the House will remember what he said—that we could not put up with the Third world knocking the CAP sideways.

That is an interesting view — to kick the poorest people in the world because we cannot solve our problems. As that party is constantly saying that it is supported entirely by Church of England clergymen, I hope that every parish priest in Britain heard what the hon. Gentleman said. I hope that he realises that the poorest people in Thailand who provide manioc for the EC will hear what he said tonight. Having told us that no farmer can bear any restriction put forward by my right hon. Friend or by the Commission, or any change, because it has to be given time to work, he has said that the people of Thailand can be kicked in the teeth because none of them has a vote for the SDP. That is the reason for that choice.

Mr. Maclennan *rose*——

Mr. Gummer: I shall not give way.

Mr. Stephen Ross (Isle of Wight): Sit down, you cheat.

Mr. Gummer: I shall not give way. I have checked the record. The hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland refused to give way the last time he spoke, and today he refused to give way until he was forced to do so. Therefore, I see no reason why I should give way to him.

Mr. Stephen Ross: Sit down.

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Ross) was not even here. The farmers on the Isle of Wight — an agricultural area — must wonder why their representative has not been here.

For most of the evening the House has had the opportunity to listen to two different agricultural policies put forward by the Liberal party and the SDP. I have considered carefully the difference between them, and I have looked carefully at the debate that the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland asked us to read. In that debate the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Howells) suggested that we should have no quotas. Then I discovered that the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Livsey) said that we should have quotas, but they were not really quotas because they were to be open-ended; in other words, there should be quotas on everything, but if a farmer grew too much he could sell it wherever he could get a market for it. So we have a new kind of quota—the open-ended quota.

Then we had a most interesting statement from the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland. I hope that hon. Members on both sides of the House will remember it. It is one about which we shall hear a lot — if not from him, certainly from us. He said:

"If, instead of an open-ended system of support, limits are placed on the amount of farm produce qualifying for the full guaranteed price and that amount is geared to what can be produced by an efficient family farm, anything produced above that limit can be allowed to find a price level on the open market."
—[*Official Report*, 29 January 1986; Vol. 90, c. 1037.]

I have read that carefully. As I understand it, it means that every farm product will have a quota based on the most interesting and obvious objective standard — that which can be produced by an efficient family farm. An interesting thing about SDP Members is that they swap the word "family" for the word "small" regularly. But that is not true of many farms. In my constituency there are many family farms, which are large even by British standards, but several families live off and round them. Are they the kind of farm that the SDP is talking about? If they are, there will be no quotas at all. If the whole of Britain raised its ability to produce to the standards of the best land in Suffolk, we would have a bonanza for surpluses, the like of which we have never seen before. The hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland did not mean that. What he meant, no doubt, is an idyllic weekend farm of the kind the SDP is always talking about. That is when SDP Members do their farming. The hon. Gentleman will produce a figure which will no doubt be satisfactory for his purposes. That is what he will do. Then he will tell everyone else that they have to work to that. Where will come all his sadness for the poor position of farmers under our proposal? Farmers would be worse off if every product had to be checked upon. Can we imagine people calling round checking on the quotas per farm? What makes it believable is that the SDP wants people to go round checking the day on which piglets were weaned. That would help the unemployment problem, because more people would be checking in agriculture than has been dreamt under any policy we have known.

The SDP claims that it is the natural party of agricultural opposition. That is where it should stay. I must not leave that point without mentioning the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnor, who made an important contribution to the debate and applied himself to the problems listed in this series of documents. But in the middle of it, he said something that we must press a little harder, and I hope that in future he will have the opportunity to answer it. He said that gradually—very gradually—the imports of New Zealand lamb should be slowed down and that we should find it new markets, probably in the far east, for what it produces. As a policy, that lacks some certainty. It has a fuzziness which some have suggested might often apply to Liberal policy generally. But it has the advantage of possibly being carried out and, therefore, it shows another difference between the two parties in the alliance.

The noticeable aspect of the official Opposition was the paucity of its attendance during the dabate——

Mr. Maclennan: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Gummer: No, I will not give way. The hon. Gentleman may set me an example on the next occasion, and I promise to give way then.

My hon. Friends the Members for Dorset, North (Mr. Baker) and Wantage (Mr. Jackson) tried to discuss the future of the common agricultural policy and looked for ways in which the system, which was so successful in times of shortage, should be changed to meet times of plenty. The House should have heard more speeches from the Opposition putting forward their views on the CAP. However we may fare in the continuing debate during the next few months, we must find an answer to the surpluses and we must find that answer within the CAP.

I am sorry that the hon. Member for Ipswich (Mr. Weetch) is not present, for he spoke with great compassion on the subject. His constituency borders mine. He said that Ipswich is a great grain port. What does he think made it a great grain port? It was the common agricultural policy, which turned Britain from a net importer of grain to the sixth largest exporter in the world. It is a good thing for

[Mr. Gummer]

the people of Ipswich that the hon. Gentleman's policy on the Common Market was not followed. The hon. Gentleman not only opposes——

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): My hon. Friend supports the Common Market.

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman was not here for the debate, so I can report to him that the hon. Member for Ipswich is president of the "Get Suffolk out of the Common Market" movement. The hon. Gentleman should return to Cumbria, about which his facts are more accurate.

My hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter), in connection with our arguments on the landlord and tenant legislation and tenants going out of milk production — the point was signally lacking from the speech of the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) — remarked that however important it is to find a solution, it is not easy to find such a solution. It must be true that both landlords and tenants have an interest in quotas. The tenant must have a clear interest in the quota. It must also be true that if a tenant removed from a landlord's land a milk quota, thus leaving the landlord with land worth much less than it would otherwise be, the landlord also has some interest in the quota.

If it was easy, as the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich suggested in her rather typical anti-landlord speech, as if somehow landlords could be discounted entirely, because, according to Labout mythology all landlords are wicked—*[Interruption.]* The truth is that we did not want to go into the details of the discussions this evening because we wanted them to be fruitful. It is all very well for the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland to laugh, but such a result could be jeopardised. It would be a good thing if landlords and tenants could reach a conclusion, and it would be a bad thing if the House made that more difficult.

The problems of the quotas for milk production were exacerbated, as my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton (Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop) said, not just because the quotas came in so rapidly but because they were in many ways implemented retrospectively. Indeed, my hon. Friend is right to say that quotas cannot properly be evaluated on the basis of that experience.

However, my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton underestimates the degree to which quotas can ensure that an industry becomes inflexible, unable to change to meet new demands, unable to open up to new entrants and unable to take on the effects of efficiency resulting from the new technologies. I beg him to accept that there are those who feel that quotas are not the sensible solution to our problems. Nevertheless, I accept that his points must be properly considered. He is right to suggest that it would be unfair to judge quotas merely according to our dairy experience.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton will not be carried along by the thought that quotas are somehow inevitable. That is not so. We must find an alternative that resolves the problems. Thus, it is perfectly right for us to continue to say what we have always said —that there must be price restraint at the centre of any package. After all, none of the suggestions can work if the price continues to rise in a world of surpluses. That would be economic nonsense and would be seen as such by all those who complain about how the CAP now works. Price restraint must be a central part of any package.

The rest of the package must be judged on three criteria. First, it must work; secondly, it must be flexible enough to allow for technical advances, success, and for new people coming into the industry; and thirdly, it must be fair between countries. When my hon. Friend the Member for Hereford (Mr. Shepherd) made that point, he was echoing several others. He said that for farmers in Britain, as, I believe, for farmers in the rest of the Community, the first criterion is whether other people are being asked to shoulder a smaller burden than they are.

Our farmers are most concerned to know whether the burden is fairly shared. They accept that major changes must be made and that surpluses do farming no good. Indeed, several of my hon. Friends made that point. But having accepted that point, they ask that the burden should be shared among the countries of Europe. In that, I must echo the words of several hon. Members who demanded that we should fight not only for Britain's interests in the round, but for a fair share that must not be imperilled by the sort of special arrangements that were made recently, for example, in the case of Ireland and dairy quotas.

The hon. Member for Carmarthen (Dr. Thomas) made several points about the problems that the dairy industry ran into with quotas and which would continue if there was a reduction in production; but he must also accept that we very much take the point that every country must obey the rules. It is not just that things must be seen to be fair theoretically, but that other countries obey the same rules as we do. That is always difficult because it is common practice in all European countries to claim that one's own nation obeys the rules while all the others do not. However, there is no doubt that we in Britain are more efficient than some in controlling and checking such matters. Part of our policy must be to ensure that that fairness is not only theoretical but actual.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) properly reminded the House that the inevitable result of dealing with agricultural surpluses one by one is that there is a knock-on effect and an increasing imbalance between the sectors. I fear that we cannot face all the problems at once. What we are seeking in this particular round is to deal with some of them effectively, but we should not ignore what my hon. Friend said in our search for a solution.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) made a particularly helpful speech from his point of view. He is no lover of the CAP. However, he rightly supported the price cuts, and also made the point about restraints being central to any package, which I think the House in general would accept. I do not want to encourage him in his views about ethanol. However, low the price of grain were to fall, I cannot see that it would be sensible to make it into ethanol, particularly as the oil price falls. We must be careful about misleading the farming community by suggesting that there are simple answers of that kind to these complex problems.

My hon. Friend the Member Devizes (Mr. Morrison) put clearly the reason why he was opposed to a co-responsibility levy. We share with him that reason, particularly the point about the 25-tonne cut-off. It cannot be acceptable that Britain, whether intentionally or merely by accident, should be discriminated against because of the different structure of our family farms.

My hon. Friend the Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg), whose speech I missed, sadly, but which was reported to me in detail, returned to the question of national aids. We can only see a successful means of helping those who most need help in agriculture, whether it be in Portugal or in Britain, if we deal with the surpluses overall. That will give us the elbow room to deal with specific problems. I refer again to the speech made by my hon. Friend the Member for Wantage, which will be well worth reading.

My hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry) made the point that is often missed on the gearing of the CAP. There is no doubt that that policy is supremely successful as long as surpluses are not easily made. It becomes faster and faster and more and more expensive even with small increases over the amount needed for consumption. My hon. Friend mentioned the 4:50:200 gearing. Four per cent. over production means 50 per cent. more in intervention and 200 per cent more on the price. That is a devastating picture. However, it should be compared with the fact that if we went back to the system of deficiency payments, the increase in the cost that Britain would by paying for the CAP would be well over the £1,500 million. There is no solution that way. The real solution comes in reforming the CAP, guided by three principles. It should be done in an effective way, in a fair way and in a way which keeps farming open to new entrants and to new ideas and technology.

The sadness about the debate is not the common attitude that so many of us share on the present discussions, not even the small number of Opposition Members who attended and spoke about the future; the sadness of this debate is that, in discussing the arguments, the Labour party put forward its views of the future with great vagueness. However, it managed to achieve something, which I am sure in retrospect alliance Members will wish that they had achieved. The Labour party did at least manage to put forward some policies rather than putting forward so many policies which showed most of us that alliance Members would be wholly unsuited to run anything, least of all an agricultural policy.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House takes note of European Community documents Nos. 4963/86 including Addenda 1 to 5, 10174/85, 4075/86, 8480/85, 5098/86, 10492/85, 4130/86 and 4150/86; and supports the Governments intention to seek an agreement on 1986-87 farm support prices and related measures, including a Community Milk Outgoers Scheme, which maintains the process of reform, and, in particular, which tackles the problems of surpluses and costs in the Common Agricultural Policy, which makes the policy more market-orientated and which does not unfairly disadvantage the United Kingdom, taking account of the interests of British agriculture and its associated industries, of consumers and of taxpayers.

Privileges

10.30 pm

The Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Biffen): I beg to move,

That this House agrees with the Committee of Privileges in its Second Report of the last Session of Parliament (House of Commons Paper No. 555 (1984-85)); and declares that the Recommendation contained in paragraph 14(iv) of the Summary of Conclusions and Recommendations of the Report do have effect from the beginning of this Session.

Last summer the Select Committee on Privileges undertook a comprehensive review of the procedures available to the House for dealing with leaks from Select Committees. It may help the House if I first set out the background to its inquiries and then outline the general conclusions reached.

In its first report of last Session the Privileges Committee concluded that the leak of a draft report prepared for the Select Committee on Home Affairs was a serious contempt of the House. It concluded, however, that there would be no benefit in taking further action in relation to this specific matter. Instead, the Committee decided to examine further the procedures and practices generally of Select Committees with regard to their proceedings in the context of the privileges and rules of the House.

The House will also be aware of the second special report from the Select Committee on the Environment regarding a leak of its draft report on radioactive waste. This is a further regrettable example of the kind of leak which occasioned the Privileges Committee's inquiries last year.

As the House will know, Select Committees in their reports do frequently adopt a consensus approach. The aim of seeking unanimity or, failing that, broad agreement, is a guiding principle in the way that they do their work. Leaks, therefore, particularly at the draft report stage, strike at the very heart of this method of consultation. The point is well made in the second special report of the Environment Committee.

Unfortunately, the Privileges Committee discovered in its proceedings not only the very considerable difficulty of identifying members of Committees who provide information to the media but also no sympathy in the media with the view that the confidentiality of the proceedings of Select Committees should be respected.

The Committee concluded that the problems of enforcement of the rules of privilege in these circumstances are not easily overcome. The way ahead lay in seeking to define the circumstances in which enforcement would be appropriate.

The Privileges Committee, therefore, proposed that the Select Committee concerned should first investigate the circumstances of the leak. As I recently informed the House, the Liaison Committee has already agreed with Select Committees that the steps proposed by the Privileges Committee should be adopted straightaway. They have been so followed by the Environment Committee in its recent investigation. The Committee also suggested a number of practical steps which Select Committees might take to stop leaks in the first place by way of informing Members of their responsibilities and the marking of documents.

The only remaining matter in the report for the approval of the House is recommendation 14(iv). This says that a report that a leak had caused substantial interference to the work of a Select Committee should automatically stand referred to the Committee of Privileges. There is no technical requirement to change Standing Orders to do this. It requires only that the motion which the House is considering tonight be approved. Hon. Members will see that the terms of the motion are retrospective in that it would allow the Environment Committee second special report to be referred forthwith to the Privileges Committee.

Before passing the motion, therefore, the House will wish to be assured that an automatic reference to the Privileges Committee would constitute a right and proper use of the Privileges Committee itself. We need to be realistic on what can reasonably be sought of the Privileges Committee and what it can reasonably deliver. As Chairman of the Committee, I have considered this further since the Committee agreed its second report in July 1985.

The matter can be divided into two aspects: first, seeking the identity of the leaker; and, secondly, what penalty should be exacted. On the first point, it does not seem reasonable to ask the Privileges Committee to try to establish who a leaker might be when the Select Committee had already failed to do so through its own endeavours. In those circumstances, the Privileges Committee would be duplicating the intensive inquiries which the Select Committee might reasonably be expected to have set in hand into the sources of the leak.

On the second point, however, I see merit in the Privileges Committee retaining its historical responsibility for advising the House on the privilege aspects and looking at the wider question of what sanction might be applied. The Privileges Committee could usefully bring to bear the very wide range of authority and experience contained in its membership to decide on what an appropriate penalty might be. This would, in my opinion, also accord with a general principle that the Privileges Committee should concern itself only with the more serious aspects of the privileges of the House.

If the House accepts such a distinction between the identification of a culprit and the penalty he should bear, some kind of mediator is needed between a Select Committee and the Privileges Committee to ensure that these principles are observed when a Select Committee is considering the reference of a leak to the Privileges Committee.

The best body to perform that task might be the Liaison Committee, which I think could act as an informal filter and sounding board for a Select Committee Chairman to consult when a reference to the Privileges Committee was being considered. There would be no need to lay down hard rules or a code of practice. Suffice to say that if a Select Committee wished to take advantage of the opportunity to refer a leak to the Privileges Committee, it would be on the understanding that members of the Liaison Committee had already been consulted and agreed that there was a useful task for the Privileges Committee to fulfil, not with regard to identifying the perpetrator of the leak—that would normally be the task of the Select Committee—but with regard to whether there had been a contempt and what sanction or penalty it would be appropriate to impose.

It would also be appropriate in some circumstances for leaks to be referred to the Privileges Committee

irrespective of whether the leaker had been identified. That would be when issues of particular importance arose for the Privileges Committee to consider. I think the House would agree that the facts set out in the second special report of the Environment Committee is such a case.

It would also be open to the Liaison Committee to bring to the attention of the Privileges Committee any important factors which it felt the Privileges Committee should consider in dealing with the points raised with it by a Select Committee.

I understand that my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins), who is Chairman of the Liaison Committee, has already consulted his colleagues and that the kind of understanding that I have outlined would be broadly acceptable to members of the Liaison Committee. It would not be my intention to go any further, but to rest on what I have just said in relation to the arrangements that I have outlined.

Perhaps I should add that nothing in the arrangements would preclude the Privileges Committee from conducting any investigation into a leak as widely as it felt fit. It is, of course, for the Privileges Committee alone to judge on whether any question of privilege arises.

I hope that the House will agree with what I have outlined as an acceptable way of proceeding. No one can doubt the damage that leaks do to the work of Select Committees. The second report of the Privileges Committee outlined a pragmatic and comprehensive framework within which these matters could be considered. What I have said tonight is by way of further reflection which I trust that the House will find helpful. On that basis, I commend the motion to the House.

10.38 pm

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): The Lord Privy Seal has set out the background to this debate. The House is being asked tonight to agree with the Privileges Committee in its second report and to give effect retrospectively to the beginning of this Session, to recommendation 14 (iv) of the second report from the Privileges Committee which states that—

"A special Report stating that a leak had caused substantial interference, as described in paragraph 67, should automatically stand referred to the Committee of Privileges."

In his speech the Leader of the House has—I think sensibly—proposed that a Select Committee should first consult the Liaison Committee and obtain its agreement before the matter is referred to the Select Committee on Privileges. He added the caveat that he would not generally envisage that the Privileges Committee would consider a leak if the Select Committee had not itself been able to identify the leaker. These are sensible amendments. There is a danger that without such additions the Privileges Committee could find itself saddled with references that would simply be exercises in frustration and impotence.

The reality is that the ability of the Select Committee in the first place, and the Privileges Committee in the second, to identify the source of leaks and to act effectively to deter them is very limited. That is manifest in the report that is before the House tonight.

The problem is twofold. First, as paragraph 29 fairly states:

"it is clear from the evidence and from the nature of many of the leaks, that the majority of them—especially the more serious disclosures of the contents of draft Reports—are the deliberate work of members of committees acting for political or personal motives . . . These may include a political desire to undermine a Chairman's draft Report, a wish to influence the decisions the Committee will take, or a desire to maintain good and friendly relations with a particular journalist or editor."

Since it is rare indeed for a Member of Parliament to identify himself, the sanctions — dismissal from the Select Committee, suspension or even expulsion—can operate only as very remote deterrents indeed.

The second problem is that the press and broadcasting media simply do not accept any strong constraint upon themselves in the publication of confidential material, other than material that directly affects national security. That was made quite plain in the evidence that was given before the committee by representatives of the press and of the media. It was very forcefully stated by the late editor of *The Times*, Mr. Charles Douglas-Home.

The press argues that its function is to publish news and information about matters of public interest. That includes the work of Select Committees. The same attitude is taken by those journalists who work in the Palace of Westminster. This represents a change of attitude and conduct in recent years, since the Notes on Procedures of Lobby Journalists, dated as recently as 1982, lays down that the rules of privilege prevented the publication of unreported proceedings of Select Committees. Unlike the original source of the leak—the unidentified Member of Parliament—the publication of the leak is, of course, highly visible.

We are told that the House can impose such major penalties as imprisonment for the remainder of the session, or a reprimand by the Speaker at the Bar of the House. But imprisonment has not been used since 1880 and, as was shown in *The Economist* case in 1975, the House was not prepared then to back the Privileges Committee when it recommended the much less potent penalty of excluding the editor and reporter from the precincts of the House for six months. Thus, there are major limitations on the ability of the Privileges Committee and the House to prevent unauthorised disclosures of Select Committee proceedings.

Since self-restraint is by far the most effective barrier against leaks, the committee's analysis of serious leaks in recent years is particularly valuable. As it says in paragraphs 52 to 54 of its report, there are three kinds:

"First publication of significant material improperly acquired, such as stolen documents, or documents clearly marked as confidential which have been found by chance, or information obtained by payment or for other improper reward or by means of threats."

There is no recent evidence of leaks of this kind, but they could happen. The report continues:

"The second type of serious case would be those involved in leaks of clearly classified information, including commercially confidential, whether in a classified document or by oral disclosure. Again, there is no recent experience of such leaks . . . but the evidence referred to . . . makes plain the damage such leaks could cause the committee system, quite apart from the damage done by leaking the actual material.

The third category would be those cases where a Member or other person has deliberately attempted to damage the working of a committee by premature press publication—perhaps by revealing the contents of a draft Report or unreported evidence or other working documents—or where such publication can be shown to have caused, or to be likely to cause, substantial interference with the committee's work."

That is a direct quote from the report.

It is good to know that the first two and most serious categories of leak have not recently occurred. That is important. It is the third category which has caused, and is causing, most of the trouble. Why is that? I think that

[Mr. Peter Shore]

the answer lies in the fact that there are right hon. and hon. Members who do not think that draft reports should be protected by privilege, who believe that the deliberative process should be as open as the rest of a Select Committee's work. I do not hold that view, and it is my opinion that those who act upon it do not help and positively hinder the general trend towards more openness in the affairs of government.

The purpose of a Select Committee is to investigate and to give the maximum publicity to the matters that it decides to study. Differences of view and of votes taken are faithfully recorded in the reports of the Committee when it presents them to the House. Written and oral evidence is published at the same time as the Select Committee's report, and sometimes earlier. All that is withheld is the thinking aloud and the exchange of view that take place on the basis of the chairman's draft report. That this stage is confidential is helpful to calm consideration and to the process of reaching agreement on some or all of the Committee's recommendations.

If a Committee's recommendations are unanimous, the authority of its report is undoubtedly greater. I can think of occasions when the evidence taken by a Select Committee may lead it to conclusions that are highly critical of—indeed, unacceptable to—the Government of the day. After all, Select Committees are investigating matters that come within ministerial competence and responsibility. The thrust of a Select Committee's report is to expose matters that are sensitive to Ministers of the day. If the draft report becomes public before decisions have been reached, there is a danger of pressure being placed on Committee members from Ministers and Whips. I accept, therefore, the desirability of preventing serious leaks. I accept the statement in paragraph 56 that reads:

"If a Member of the House is found to be responsible for a leak . . . he should be punished."

The paragraph continues:

"If an editor or a journalist (or any other person who enjoys the facilities of a Lobby or Press Gallery) has been responsible for publishing such a leak, he too should be liable to an appropriate penalty."

Whether the particular penalties that are mentioned in paragraph 56 are appropriate and sufficient—removal of the offending Member from the Select Committee and suspension from the Lobby and Press Gallery of the offending journalist — must depend on the circumstances, seriousness and nature of the leak.

The conclusions and recommendations of the Select Committee are, I believe, sensible, modest and realistic. It is right that the Liaison Committee and the Select Committees should themselves take steps to ensure that Members are aware of their responsibilities. It is certainly sensible that the Select Committees should themselves take steps to identify the source of the leaks and to distinguish between the serious and the trivial offence. If it is the former, it is sensible and right that the Committee should make a special report to the House and that, with the qualifications made by the Leader of the House, there should be an automatic reference to the Privilege Committee.

The report's recommendations are realistic because we are all aware of the practical limitations of taking effective action against those who are determined, for whatever reason, to breach the rules. I, too, therefore, commend the report to the House.

10.49 pm

Mr. Terence Higgins (Worthing): I support the motion moved by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House, and I agree with much of what has been said by the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore). We need realistic rules in this area, and we well understand the difficulties that we face, but the considerable success of the new departmentally related Select Committees may be jeopardised if we do not seek to reduce and, if possible, eliminate the damage done by the premature disclosure of proceedings of Select Committees. It is therefore important that we take practical steps to reduce the impact of such leaks.

It is important to stress, as my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House did, that the Select Committees have already adopted the procedures recommended in the report. The matter outstanding is the automatic reference to the Committee of Privileges, to which I shall return in a moment.

It is also helpful to distinguish the various cases that are possible in this area. I suppose that the first is simply the premature disclosure of a report which has already been agreed. Both the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney and my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House have stressed that there seems to be no great agreement among Committee members and the press on the need to stop that kind of disclosure. Personally, I find that most regrettable. I should have hoped that the press would understand that in many cases it is actually interfering in the effective working of the Select Committee system and that responsible journalists should not go along with such a practice.

If a particular journal or branch of the media can get something in advance of the others, I suppose that it secures some kind of "scoop", but very often detailed examination of what is said to be a leak shows that it is possible to construct what has been published and held out to be a report or draft report from evidence already in the public domain. Some of the leaks hold out as a report of a report something which is in fact an earlier draft. To that extent, I suppose that the authors should be prosecuted under the Trade Descriptions Act because they seek to take credit for getting something in advance when in fact they have not done so.

Be that as it may, however, we must recognise the real risk that such premature disclosure may diminish the impact of the report even though it has already been agreed. I agree with the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney that in cases of this kind it is very much a matter of timing. He said that the press felt that it had a right to publish and to give information, but all that is really at issue here is the stage at which that happens. It is thus perhaps not the most important kind of leak.

One is reluctant to grade leaks in order of importance, because in my view they are all deplorable, certainly if any member of the Committee in question is involved. Nevertheless, the category that I have described clearly has done less damage than the kind to which the Chairman of the Select Committee on the Environment, my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Sir H. Rossi), has drawn attention or that which occurred in relation to the Select Committee on Home Affairs a short while ago, which are regarded as constituting substantial interference and likely to cause far more damage. More damage is likely to be caused by leaks of that kind because

Select Committee reports are vastly more influential if they are unanimous and cut across party lines. If draft reports or reports of proceedings of the Committee appear in the press before the deliberations are completed, it inevitably becomes more difficult for the Committee to achieve a unanimous view. I know from my own experience that it makes a great difference if the report is unanimous, so I believe that in such cases there is substantial interference.

The third category, happily, is one of which there have been no examples at all. If commercially confidential information or classified Government documents made available to a Select Committee were leaked, the damage would be very great indeed.

From my own experience I know that the Government of the day and commercial organisations are often prepared to make information available to Select Committees that is not generally available. Such information can be sidelined in the final report, but at least the Committee has had the advantage of seeing it. If there were a leak of that kind, I do not doubt that it would be extremely difficult to get the commercial companies or the Government to make available the amount of information that these Committees now obtain, and which is immensely helpful in enabling them to carry out their work. As I said in evidence to the Select Committee, it is important to retain the traditional sanctions that the House has had over the years.

My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House referred to identifying the leaker and distinguishing that from any penalty that might be imposed. As he suggested, given the number of occasions on which leaks have appeared, there would be a real danger if we did not have a filter mechanism to deal with matters that were of no enormous significance. It is appropriate that such a filter should be provided, and I am assured that, should the House wish it, the Liaison Committee would be prepared to carry out that function. It is also important to recognise that there may be cases that are sufficiently serious for us to take the view such matters should go to the privileges Committee, even if it has not been possible to identify who was originally responsible for the leak.

We must be realistic and practical. We are discussing automatic reference and the removal of the stringent question of timing that was originally applied under the old rules. It is right that the Privileges Committee should have recommended these changes. I hope that its recommendations, combined with my right hon. Friend's constructive suggestion, will enable us to make some progress. This is not an easy matter. We may need to review it in the light of subsequent developments. But for the moment, I welcome the motion and the support that it has received from the Opposition Front Bench.

10.58 pm

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): I was unable to accept the report of the Committee when I was a member of it, and, having heard the consensus view expressed by three previous Ministers of both parties, I find their arguments wholly unpersuasive. Not one of them confessed that we are discussing a restriction on the right of elected Members of Parliament to say what they know to those who elected them. That is one of the central questions.

Many debates and conflicts take place in this Chamber, the most common of which is a conflict between Government and Opposition. There is another conflict between the Front Benches — along with the usual channels in which they wallow—and the Back Benches which are excluded from these pleasant occupations. There are also arguments between Left and Right. But tonight we are in a remarkable and rare position of discussing the relationship between the Executive as the Executive, the legislature as the legislature, and the electorate as the electorate. I say that because only in that way will we be able to get to the root of the matter. The issue which led to the Committee discussing this matter was the premature disclosure of papers from a Select Committee. There is no doubt whatever that that was a technical breach of privilege under the old resolutions of 1837 and 1971.

Therefore, when the Privileges Committee decided to confirm the old judgments with a slightly new mechanism, we were inviting the House, against my opposition, to protect itself from public scrutiny, not in the Chamber itself but in respect of Select Committees. Therefore, we have a double standard. We do not go into secret session in the Chamber, as we did in wartime — we discuss things in the open—but in Committee we are intent to preserve a higher standard of security.

I do not doubt for one moment—it was obvious from the evidence we had — that leaks cause great embarrassment to Chairman of Committees. That embarrassment came over most vividly in the evidence they submitted. I do not doubt, either, that leaks build up pressure on a Committee to look at its draft report against a background of the likely reaction that the report might elicit from the public.

Mr. Shore: From the public?

Mr. Benn: From the public.

Mr. Shore: Surely the principal people who are likely to object are Ministers, not the public. It is an investigation of what Ministers are doing that is at the heart of the work of Select Committees.

Mr. Benn: I understand what my right hon. Friend is saying. Like him, I have seen the argument from both sides — from the Executive side and from the Back Benches, and even from the Opposition Front Bench. However, what I am saying is that, if there is a leak, there is pressure. I am arguing—I will come back to it—that pressure is of the essence of parliamentary democracy. Taking measures to remove pressure will destroy one of the central functions of the Chamber. I speak as a Back-Bench legislator for the purpose of this argument.

It is also clear that the culprits could not be traced. Two of my hon. Friends—the hon. Members for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours), who is sitting beside me, and for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) — have on occasions made papers available and have said that they did it.

I have always regarded the practice of leaking as utterly disreputable. I believe in publishing—that is one thing —but to leak is to make use of the worst aspects of secrecy; that is to say, one bows down to the principle of secrecy and then talks to the lobby. Then it appears in the papers that a "senior Government spokesman", a "senior Opposition spokesman" or "certain hon. Members" are "known" to have a certain view.

The House will ignore at its peril what really happens in this place, which is that the formal structure of the Official Secrets Act and the official protection of

[Mr. Benn]

Committees, which we are discussing, is penetrated daily, and is known to Members of all parties and to the press. The press protect it; hon. Members protect it. We are not prepared to act against the press because Members are frightened that if we do we will be unpopular with the press.

I refer here to the evidence of the late editor of *The Times*, when I cross-examined him on that question. I asked Mr. Douglas-Home:

"I think you accept that privilege, which is the law of Parliament at the moment, prohibits disclosure?"

He replied:

"Yes."

I asked:

"You conceive it to be your duty to assess whether such prohibition is in the public interest, and if you decide to publish, that is to say, you think it right to break the law, you take the consequences and hope public opinion will support you or that Parliament will not enforce the law. Is that a correct representation of your analysis of the functions you perform?"

He replied:

"Certainly, yes."

Those are answers that might have been given by the councillors of Liverpool and Lambeth: "We broke the law, we take the consequences; we did it because we think the public interest is greater"——

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): The consequences—that is the difference.

Mr. Benn: The consequences; I do not want to be diverted into that.

The House knows that the law is broken, the press knows it, and we accept it. Why? Because it is convenient to leak rather than to be identified. It is much easier to go to a lobby correspondent and let something be known without being identified. The lobby protects the leaks because it protects its sources.

Let no one be taken in by the argument which we have just heard, that commercial matters are secret and should be protected. Look at the Westland case. I do not want to be diverted into that, either, but within a matter of days we had a complete revelation from a Minister who had resigned and who had therefore won the freedom to give an insight into things which, had they emerged in evidence to a Select Committee, would have been so secret that they would have had to be protected by privilege. We must be very careful that we do not so organise our business in Parliament that we allow a disreputable practice of leaking, which gives an advantage to Ministers and those with knowledge to the disadvantage of those without knowledge, including the electorate, to be a loophole through which these things can continue.

We took evidence from Select Committee Chairmen, who were in favour of the recommendations. One of the arguments was that enforcement would protect consensus. I heard my right hon. Friend come out with a powerful argument for consensus. My view is very straightforward. If there is a genuine consensus, so be it, but do not protect a Committee from external pressure to create an artificial consensus, which is what the secrecy does. Hon. Members may go along with a consensus because they have never confronted, in public criticism, the case against. Someone said in evidence that, if there is not consensus, there is confrontation. There is a third route, and it is the one that the House itself follows. We have two views, we listen to both and decide which we prefer. The idea that there must be a blind confrontation or a shallow consensus is to miss the very heart of the Chamber—we discuss, debate and decide the majority view.

Mr. Shore: I appeal to my right hon. Friend to declare that the consensus in the case of Select Committee reports is nearly always anti-Government. That surely must appeal to him.

Mr. Benn: I do not want to appear to be defending the Government, but I see no merit in a consensus that is artificially constructed by protecting the Committee from the knowledge that there are others outside who do not share that view. I have never shared the view that Governments crumble when a couple of their Back Benchers join up with the Opposition and criticise the Government. That is one of those illusions taught by the Hansard Society.

The second argument, which we heard from the right hon. Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins), is that he fears that if the information gets out, he will lose the confidence of Government Departments or industry, and that there will be a drying up of resources. I listened to him carefully because I heard him give evidence. If I misunderstood him, I hope that he will tell me.

Mr. Higgins: Why does the right hon. Gentleman suppose that such a consensus is artificial? It is a consensus that has resulted from a discussion in the Committee. Nobody in that Committee is then forced to agree with what happens. It is undoubted that if the report emerges as a consensus it is likely to carry more weight with the House and the electorate. Has he found one member of a Select Committee who has given evidence to that effect or who is prepared to say now that he thinks that it would be much better if all Select Committee proceedings were held in public and none in private?

Mr. Benn: If the consensus is genuine, it will not be interfered with by disclosure. My reason for saying that it was a fragile consensus followed directly from what the right hon. Gentleman said — do not disturb the consensus by letting information get out. If it is so fragile that disclosure would destroy it, it is not a real consensus. I could have followed that policy of the Privilege Committee and said, "I am outnumbered 10 to one: I had better fall in with the consensus." I would then have denied myself and the House the opportunity of hearing a contrary view. If this matter goes to the vote, I do not doubt that my view will go down as it did in the Committee. Would it have been better if I had abandoned a strongly held view to bring about a false consensus? Not at all. It is better to argue the case. I shall leave it at that.

The right hon. Member for Worthing fears that Ministers and Departments will not disclose to him. What a craven attitude for a legislator to take about the Executive. When we give Committees the power to send for persons and papers, we do not tell them that it can be exercised only if they can win the confidence of their witnesses. We are a Parliament. We are not just an advisory committee to civil servants which can be trusted only with what civil servants wish to tell us. That argument shows what I have long suspected, which is that for a variety of reasons the House is unwilling, although it is able, to impose its will on the Executive, even to the extent of disclosure. So, we have new rules and a filtering

system. The Leader of the House has added a new liaison link, which I do not remember being discussed. We have a Liaison Committee, a Privileges Committee and enforcement, and I oppose the recommendations root and branch.

My reasons are first that electors have the right to know what Members of Parliaments say and do, and need that knowledge to exercise their vote. Secondly, the Official Secrets Act 1911 is a statute imposed by law on Ministers, who do not have to accept office, if they do not wish to be bound by it. But the House has no authority in law or in practice to restrict Members of Parliament, who are not here because we want them. No hon. Member is elected for another hon. Member, except by chance, depending on where one lives. The House is full of hon. Members elected from outside.

I do not accept that the House has the power to restrict hon. Members' speech. Indeed, privilege is to protect the free speech of hon. Members, not to restrict it. If we start to use privilege to protect hon. Members from embarrassment, public confidence, on which privilege rests, will erode because the public will see that hon. Members are using it to protect themselves, civil servants, Ministers and commercial companies. Privilege allows us to speak our mind without being involved in action to make that freedom possible.

All hon. Members have a right to discover what they can, to disclose what they have discovered, and to mobilise and influence opinion before decisions are made. If that is not the case, why are we here? Part of our time is spent externally mobilising opinion with a view to winning support at the general election. If that is excluded in pursuit of consensus, a little kernal of coalitionism will be introduced into the scrutiny of the Executive which would be damaging.

Select Committees are political in character, not judicial. Some evidence suggested that they are like a jury and can listen only to the evidence that they receive. They are not juries, 12 angry men or 12 consensus men who must reach a judgment. They are there to reach a conclusion, and consensus has no merit unless it is genuine.

The evidence showed the cosiness of Select Committees with the Departments which they examined. I was strongly in favour of Select Committees, against the view of many of my colleagues, as I thought that they would strengthen Parliament against the Executive. I was encouraged in that view by the hostility of permanent secretaries to them, but there is no hostility now. Select Committees have been tamed and brought within the orbit of permanent secretaries. The argument "Don't alienate permanent secretaries and interfere with consensus" throws a new light on Select Committees. It is dangerous to use parliamentary privilege to extend the Official Secrets Act beyond Ministers and officials to Parliament.

However much merit the report has in hon. Members' minds, I do not believe that the public will support it. The media, who may report this debate, will not change their practice. Charles Douglas-Home's evidence remains their view. Therefore, I wish to recommend first that we should end all secrecy in Committees. If the House is not prepared to enforce the disclosure of what it wishes, its secrets are not worth having. Secondly, there should be no complaints of privilege made against hon. Members who disclose what they are elected to discover for the benefit of those whom they seek to represent. Thirdly, each committee should look after its own affairs and if it has problems it should sort them out. Finally — this is the most important point—if any action is taken against an hon. Member for disclosing what he discovered, privilege should be used to protect that hon. Member, not to discipline him.

I cannot accept the recommendations of the report, not just in the sense that I argued my case, but personally. I have never leaked a document, but as a Member of Parliament, if I discover something which I believe to be in the public interest, I owe it to those who sent me here to disclose it. On that principle every hon. Member should stand. Whatever the decision tonight—it will obviously go the Government's way—I feel very strongly about a group of senior people who have all held high office, with the lovely consensus that my right hon. Friend loves so much, joining together to snuff out a bit of the liberty of Members of Parliament. That is wholly unacceptable to me.

11.15 pm

Sir Hugh Rossi (Hornsey and Wood Green): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House for bringing forward for debate the second report of the Committee of Privileges and for doing it in such a way that it is possible — if the House agrees — for the second special report from the Environment Committee entitled "Leak of Draft Report on Radioactive Waste" to go forward to the Committee of Privileges for further consideration, especially as, in preparing that report, we followed the recommendations made by the Committee of Privileges.

I shall in a moment recount to the House the experience that my Committee had in two instances. In doing that I shall disagree profoundly with the comments and approach of the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), who has got the matter entirely out of perspective.

Before that, I want to speak briefly on enforcement. I realise the dilemma that faces the Leader of the House and that will face the Committee of Privileges when it has to deal with the matter and decide what action, if any, it has to take. From my Committee's experience, it is clear that it is impossible to discover the identity of an hon. Member who may have leaked a report if he is determined not to disclose his identity. If hon. Members or their staff betray the trust that has been placed in them and pass on papers which they should not, for whatever motivation, and they cannot be identified, is it fair that a journalist who publishes those papers should be made to suffer a penalty?

There is an analogy in criminal law—it is no more than an analogy—that a receiver of stolen property is punishable even if the thief is not caught. It is generally accepted that if there were no receivers there would be fewer thieves. If there were no publication of confidential documents, there would be no leaks. Such an approach could be regarded as treating the question too seriously. Indeed, dealing with the reports of Select Committees raises a somewhat bizarre position. The reports are not secret documents that people want to protect and hide from the light of day. They are, by their very nature, intended for publication, and published they will be. My Committee would be more than anxious if it thought that its reports were to receive no public attention. That would be extremely damaging for Select Committees. Therefore, it is arguable that a tantalising pre-release of a report acts a

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film trailer and whets the public appetite for more. A leak can ensure that a report attracts interest and does not die a death in oblivion.

My Select Committee has experienced two such leaks. The first related to its report on acid rain. The Committee concluded its inquiry, agreed the report and reported it to the House just before it rose for the summer recess in 1984. Arrangements were made for publication at a press conference on 6 September at 11 am. On 2 September, *The Sunday Times* ran an article on the report; in the early morning of 6 September, the BBC "Today" programme commented on the report; and the *New Scientist* appeared on the stands containing an article on the report. All those comments were clearly in breach of the embargo.

I did not think that any real harm had been done, although at the time I and members of my Committee were rather irritated, because many of us had declined invitations to discuss the report on radio and television, as we would have wished to do. But we were honour-bound by the embargo. It was not for our benefit, but for the benefit of Fleet street, to give all the opportunity to receive the report at the same time and to comment upon it together. Pre-empting the embargo was a clever piece of journalism by one individual——

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): Not clever.

Sir Hugh Rossi: My hon. Friends may agree that it was the jungle code of dog-eat-dog. I do not complain about the breach of privilege in this case. The press is obviously not interested in this debate, because it is not here to report it. That in itself is indicative of its attitude.

If it is an acceptable journalistic practice to cheat on an embargo—that is what we are talking about—I see no reason why a Committee need feel an obligation to impose and to be bound by an embargo. The moment that we report to the House, we might consider negotiating exclusive publication rights with one organ of the press. It would cost Fleet street dear if we did that, but at least we might recover some of the expense involved in the inquiry and publication of the report. If that is the way Fleet street wants to play it—by cheating the embargo that we put on for its benefit—so be it. Perhaps the House and its Committees might be open to offers in such matters.

The great dramatic statements of the right hon. Member for Chesterfield about secrecy, consensus and declaring to the electors that which we were elected to find out have no merit at all. He takes the matter entirely out of context and distorts the position. We are not trying to hide documents; we want to publish them. But we want to publish them in a way that gives fair and equal opportunities to every newspaper and to every radio and television commentator. We want to prevent cheating, if possible; but, if the press cheats, we may have to think of other ways of publishing reports that may be to our advantage rather than to Fleet street's.

The second case relates to the report on radioactive waste, which will be published at 11 am on Wednesday. We completed our inquiry just before the summer recess of 1985. We were unable to prepare and agree our report before the House rose. The report was therefore drafted during the summer and autumn months and was fully revised and rewritten about five times. The final draft was eventually circulated to Committee members on 10 December. On 16 December an account of the report appeared in *The Times*. The reporter, Mr. Richard Evans, a Lobby correspondent, said that a copy of the report had been obtained by *The Times*. From his account it was clear that a copy, or parts of a copy, was in his hands.

To the Committee this was a more serious and damaging matter than what happened over the acid rain report. When the Committee met on the afternoon of 16 December to consider the draft, it felt that it could not proceed. There was a feeling that the trust that had existed between members of all parties and had enabled us to tackle problems objectively without partisan attitudes had been betrayed.

Everyone looked round the Committee Room asking "Who is it?" They thought that they could trust everyone. They had been working together for nine months trying to discover the truth so that they could publish a document with which they all agreed. Someone betrayed that trust.

Some members felt that they were constrained if they wanted to amend parts of the report. They all felt that it was difficult to discuss the draft and the recommendations in a free and impartial atmosphere. That was the feeling of all members of the Committee of all parties, save perhaps the person responsible for the leak, if he were a member of the Committee and not a research assistant or someone of that kind.

So strong were the feelings of members that the Committee seriously contemplated abandoning the inquiry and throwing away nine months of work. We desisted from that only because of the argument that, if we created a precedent, a dissident minority could always destroy a report by leaking it prematurely.

In the event, we decided to defer further consideration until after the Christmas recess and meanwhile to conduct an inquiry into the leak, along the lines proposed by the Privileges Committee report. The result was to delay the publication of the report by about one month, during a period of intense public interest because of the problems at Sellafield and the announcement of four possible sites to be explored for radioactive waste disposal.

It also led to further uninformed speculation about what our report might or might not say. For example, *The Guardian*, on 6 March, in a banner front page article, suggested that the report would challenge the evidence of Lord Marshall, chairman of the CEGB. The contrary is true. We quote him with approval. It also suggested that we would recommend no foreign contracts to import nuclear waste for reprocessing. Again, that is not true. I am saying what is not in the report, but which somebody else said was in the report. I am not disclosing what is in the report; I am underlying what is not.

This article, in a respected newspaper, has seriously misled the public, because it is based on one of the early drafts which was rewritten five times. A false impression was created by that newspaper article on the first of our reports, simply because it was based on a draft document which had not been considered and approved by the Committee.

All will be revealed in that report on Wednesday. Meanwhile, I implore that serious consideration be given to preventing serious interference in the work of Committees in that way so that, I hope, it will not arise again in future.

We have followed the procedures recommended by the Committee of Privileges in its report now under discussion. We have tried to ascertain the identity of the

person responsible. We have published the replies that we have received from every individual who had received a copy of the draft report that had been leaked. In our report we set out the history of the unhappy affair.

I am afraid that there are no George Washingtons in the House and we do not know who was responsible. According to the right hon. Member for Chesterfield, there is no need for any George Washington; everybody has the right to leak and to disclose——

Mr. Benn: No, not to leak.

Sir Hugh Rossi: I am glad to hear that.

Mr. Benn: The hon. Gentleman must give me credit. I am absolutely opposed to leaking. What I am objecting to is the fake secrecy that is penetrated by a leak. I am saying that everybody has the right to publish, but not to leak. I have never supported leaking.

Sir Hugh Rossi: The distinction becomes a fine one.

Mr. Allan Roberts (Bootle): As a member of the Select Committee I was completely opposed to the leaking of the report. I felt the same as the Chairman, but that was because the system operated as it did. If we had met in public to discuss our findings and to move our amendments, that would be different. A betrayal of trust is different from advocacy of an open system.

Sir Hugh Rossi: That is another matter. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that as long as the House considers that Committees should proceed in a particular manner, it becomes a matter of trust, and that once that is the case we expect hon. Members to behave honourably?

Mr. Roberts: I agree. My right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) is arguing not for people leaking and betraying that trust, but for a new system in which that would not happen. That is completely different.

Sir Hugh Rossi: That is another matter. In addressing the House this evening I am concerned with what has happened under the existing rules. The Committee has tried to act in a certain way, a breach of trust has taken place, and a document leaked in that breach of trust has been published.

I ask the House to support the motion so that my report can go forward to the Committee of Privileges which can then discuss what sanctions, if any, in the circumstances, it feels it right to impose upon those whom it can identify as having responsibility in the matter.

11.33 pm

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): I am a member of the Public Accounts Committee and I once published, or, in my words, deliberately leaked, a document of that Committee. It was not a report of the Committee—I would condemn any such action. It was a document which was the subject of a deliberative session. The leak arose during inquiries which we were carrying out into procurement by the National Health Service of medical gases from the British Oxygen Corporation. During the inquiries it became clear to me that the BOC was threatening *The Guardian* with legal action if it persisted in accusing the BOC of overcharging on medical gas supplies to the NHS.

On 26 November 1984 the Department of Health and Social Security gave evidence to the Committee on the subject of oxygen supply. On 27 November the chief executive for corporate communications of BOC, Mr. Nigel Rowe, approached the Clerk of the Public Accounts Committee and asked for a transcript of oral evidence so that

> "BOC could submit further evidence if they found it necessary".

The Clerk to the Committee agreed to the request citing precedent, and on the strict understanding that it was supplied to the company in its capacity as a potential witness.

Members of the Committee were not made aware of the existence of the transcript until 18 December. It subsequently transpired that the document had been quoted from at length, with evidence in detail, in a letter dated 30 November from BOC to *The Guardian*. In the forum of the letter, and using the transcript as evidence, BOC threatened *The Guardian* with possible legal action, and a reference to the Press Council, unless it agreed to meet BOC to discuss the retraction of articles critical of BOC. The company was using a document marked "In confidence till published", and was breaching the confidentiallity and privilege of a PAC document.

You will recall, Mr. Speaker, that I raised this matter on the Floor of the House. On 21 December BOC wrote to you and pleaded that it had taken "copious notes"—an undoubted deception. It then claimed to have checked the notes against the transcript. You ruled that substantial damage had not been done and did not find in favour of the application that I was making.

Therefore, BOC had established a right to use documents marked and provided in confidence. Whether it was right or wrong that the documents should be so marked is not what I am here to discuss. Clearly the case had far wider implications. I thought that the matter should go to the Privileges Committee, but the PAC refused to back me, so I deliberately leaked a letter from the PAC to BOC. My letter told the company in clear terms that it had quoted from a House of Commons document.

When the Committee was taking evidence, my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) said:

> "Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours, did leak some information which he passed on to the Press about a deliberative session in which he took part. That information was published. I brought it up at the next meeting of the Public Accounts Committee, and he immediately owned up to it . . . This put us in some difficulty because clearly it was a breach of privilege, and it was a matter which should have been raised in the House itself."

I had asked that the PAC refer me to the Privileges Committee, because I wanted to draw out the argument over the actions of BOC.

I recount this long saga to illustrate the nonsense of marking documents "in confidence" when no action is taken when that confidentiality is broken. I do so also because it illustrates the nonsense of muzzling Members on aspects of a Committee's deliberations, when, equally, the Committee is unwilling to act against that Member, as it refused to act in my case.

I was involved in another leak, this time unintentional, which involved Aish and company. I had repeatedly raised on the Floor of the House the question of excess profits being made by that company in defence contracts, in pursuit and in support of my campaign to help Mr. Jim Smith, who revealed that that company had been making

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excess profits on defence contracts. The Committee was carrying out an investigation into excess profits, and particularly into Aish.

A newspaper with which I had jointly been campaigning again in this case *The Guardian*, received from me, in a pile of documents, a letter from the Comptroller and Auditor-General in which he said:

"Mr. Smith has contributed significantly to the ability of the Ministry of Defence to identify excess profits in the case of Aish."

The point was that on that occasion, quite unintentionally, publication of those words constituted a breach of the confidentiality of the Committee, and, as far as the House was concerned, a breach of privilege. The Comptroller and Auditor-General objected, but in my ivew, and that of many others, it is in the public interest that this matter be placed on the public record. Indeed, if I can again breach privilege, the inquiries are still going on into that matter.

The House is free to report me, but I think that the way in which the rules are set at the moment is nonsense. Under the new arrangements the Committee in the first instance, that is the Committee whose privilege has been breached, will decide whether substantial damage has taken place. If it decides that that has happened, it will refer the case to the Committee of Privileges, although today I noticed that the Liaison Committee has been introduced as a filter. I take strong exception to that principle. All that that Committee is doing is what you, Mr. Speaker, have historically done. By introducing the Liaison Committee, the House is undermining the merits of that course.

The question is: what is substantial damage? I promise the House a little bit of business. I give notice that I intend to push this matter. I do not leak liberally. I believe in the confidentiality of reports, but when we place privilege and the requirements of confidentiality on letters which circulate in Committees, but which on no basis can be construed as confidential, we discredit our system. I believe that by questioning the system I shall force the Privileges Committee and the PAC — which under the new rules will have to take a preliminary view—to look closely at what amounts to a breach of privilege and what constitutes substantial interference or damage.

I have no intention of breaching privilege in the sense of revealing any documents which are officially secret to the Committee. That would be wrong. I am interested only in ensuring that hon. Members are not shackled in the way that they have been historically shackled in Committees. Today, when we were discussing the naval dockyards, we went into private session. I believe that some of the matters which were raised in private session under the cloak of confidentiality—which I was told was justified by the need for commercial confidence — were of public interest. I believe that the designation of those documents was wrong and that some of those matters should be on the public record. The new procedure will help define the measure of substantial interference and damage and, as I have said, I intend to press the matter to find out what that might be.

During the proceedings I have read some comments which I was told came from a Granada television executive. In his view, confidentiality is a legitimate interest of Members of Parliament, and disclosure the legitimate interest of the media. I must say that that Granada executive does not understand what the business is about. We are not in business as Members to cloak our procedures with confidentiality. We do not want to be surrounded by confidentiality. We want that only when it is absolutely necessary. That is why I believe that tonight's debate is important and I hope that as a result of these new measures—although I express concern to the point of dividing the House over the question of the Liaison Committee—we will more accurately and reasonably be able to define what constitutes confidentiality.

11.44 pm

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): The hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) argued that we did not want confidentiality unless it was absolutely necessary. The trouble with that argument is that he has taken it upon himself, perhaps alone in the Committee, to judge when that is or is not necessary. That is where the hon. Gentleman's argument falls down.

The right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) expressed what is perhaps a more logical approach when he said that we should open up the whole shooting match to the public. I concede that there is some logic or honesty in the approach of the right hon. Member for Chesterfield compared with the argument that has been advanced by the hon. Member for Workington.

I hope that I shall be forgiven if I approach this difficult area from my experience of many years in the Press Gallery, in particular as a Lobby journalist. I think that I am the only former chairman of the Lobby ever to have become a Member of Parliament. There is no great merit in that; most of my predecessors were far wiser than I and did not leave the Press Gallery. However, I agree with the Privileges Committee when it says that in recent years there has been a marked change in the practice and approach of the Lobby to this question. I shall probably sound like an old man, but when I first entered the Lobby it was almost inconceivable that Lobby journalists would breach privilege in this way. A clear rule was impressed upon members of the Lobby. Many is the time that I was 'phoned late at night by the night news editor of the *Daily Telegraph*, who said that he had heard from perhaps another specialist reporter on the *Daily Telegraph* or that he had realised that in the first edition of a rival newspaper — usually *The Times* — there was a story about the proceedings of a Select Committee. My advice to the night editor and, through him, to the editor always, was, "If you want to publish it, go ahead, but I am here on a clear basis of rules — rules not of my choosing but rules of the Lobby and of the House — that to publish the proceedings of a Select Committee in advance of its official report is a breach of privilege." There was no argument about it. There was absolute clarity.

What worries me about the report before us tonight is that perhaps for the first time we are placing quite clear rules, be they right or wrong, within a rather grey, murky area. I am thinking of the position of members of the Lobby who are now in exactly the same position as that in which I was placed in past years. What are they to say if they are confronted with a telephone call?

Page *xviii* of the Select Committee's report says this, that and the other. However, on a simple interpretation of the report of the Privileges Committee, it seems that harmless breaches of privilege are quite all right but that serious breaches of privilege are a different matter and that perpetrators of them might get into trouble.

I am not sure that that is a very good way for the House to proceed. There may be an argument for having a clear-cut rule, as there always was during my time as a journalist, that all breaches of privilege are likely to be frowned upon by the House and that those who take that risk could be ordered to stand at the Bar of the House. Lobby correspondents could be expelled. All sorts of things could follow from such breaches.

The other way to approach the matter would be to scrap privilege and to say that the proceedings of Select Committees of this House are no different from the proceedings of the national executive committee of the Labour party. I spent many happy years finding out the so-called secret deliberations of the sub-committees of the national executive committee. I have had many stories on the front page of the *Daily Telegraph* about the right hon. Member for Chesterfield when he occupied the position of chairman of a certain sub-committee. I shall not go into that now.

I am seriously worried about the report. I recognise the difficulties that face the Privileges Committee and the intense irritation felt by members of Select Committees —I am a member of one—and by their Chairmen, for example by the Chairman of the Select Committee on the Environment, when leaks take place, particularly when they are inaccurate. I have serious doubts, however, whether this report will improve the position.

11.50 pm

Mr. Allan Roberts (Bootle): I am a member of the Select Committee on the Environment and I had exactly the same feelings as the chairman of the Committee, the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Sir H. Rossi), when the Committee's report was leaked. A report appeared on the front page of *The Times*.

My hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) has said that he does not leak liberally, and I thought that perhaps the Liberals had had something to do with the leak. I was in the Tea Room this afternoon when my hon. Friend entered and asked "Did you leak the report?" I replied, "Of course I didn't." He replied, "Well, the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) said you did." I said, "I thought that he had done it."

That is how things develop. Members were looking at one another and wondering who had leaked the report. When that started to happen, all trust had gone, but that is not an argument about getting rid of privilege and having all our meetings in public. There is an argument, however, against betraying trust when a certain system operates. I am against the leaking of the Committee's report. The member of the Committee, the Officer of the House—it could have been an Officer—or the research assistant who leaked it was entirely wrong to do so.

There were other leaks. At an earlier stage a semi-accurate article appeared in *The Sunday Times* about what the Committee's report was likely to say. I thought that there had been a leak. I received a letter from the Committee Clerk that told me that there had not been a leak. It appeared that the journalist who had attended most of the Committee's sittings had read the public parts of our deliberations and had put two and two together and six and six together and had made five and 13 respectively. He had prepared an analysis of what we might produce, and that was as accurate as the leaks.

As the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green, the Chairman of the Committee, has said, there have been leaks which have been less accurate than the articles which have been produced by those who have attended our sittings when evidence was taken in public, who surmised what the Committee would or could produce. I am in favour of having all our meetings in public, including the rows between the different party Members who are members of the Committee—Labour and Conservative Members—so that members of the public know how we are voting and can follow what we are discussing. All the feelings of antagonism and of being let down to which the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green referred can be avoided if that course is taken.

I am not revealing the findings of the Committee's report when I say that when the members of the Committee visited the United States — as my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) would observe, one of the advantages of being a member of a Select Committee is the chance to have an odd trip abroad, but I am not in favour of that—we were shown by the Americans—I am not a pro-American—the relationship between the nuclear industry and civil nuclear power and the American's defence commitment. We learned about the monetary relationship and the reprocessing that was carried out. We were taken to plants where spent fuel rods are reprocessed for military purposes. As British Members, we are denied the same information in Britain. Why is that? The answer lies in the Official Secrets Act 1911. That measure does not apply in America. We asked why the same information could not be made available in Britain. How can we make recommendations that we should have that same access if our Committees are not open to the public and the press as they conduct their deliberations and function as a part of Parliament?

We complained, and there has been a full inquiry. The members of the Committee are answering the chairman's letters. Everyone has been in dispute. The only item that has been the subject of more leaks than Sellafield is the Committee's report. One of the reasons why I am opposed to the concept of privilege in Select Committees is that it is unenforceable. It is unenforceable now and it will continue to be even if we pass the measures that are before us.

As I have said, there has been a full inquiry. I have answered the chairman's letters, and so have the other members of the Committee, and it is clear that someone is telling lies or hedging his bets. We cannot ascertain who leaked the report. The press will not tell us who did it. It is rather like getting rid of councillors in Liverpool. If a councillor is surcharged and ceases to hold office, or if a member of the Lobby is thrown out because he will not disclose who leaked the report, both the councillor and the Lobby member will be replaced. Their political views, their attitudes and their desire to get leaks will not alter. The only way we shall know is if someone actually admits it and is brought to the Bar of the House——

Mr. Campbell-Savours: It does not happen. That is the point.

Mr. Roberts: It might happen. When I was interviewed on Granada television about leaks from Sellafield, I was asked about the Select Committee on the Environment. I told the interviewer that if I answered that he and I would finish up in the tower behind Big Ben.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: No, they would back off.

Mr. Roberts: There have been examples. Two Members were brought to the Bar of the House after the Poulson affair. Had freedom of information and access to information about the letting of contracts operated in local government at that time, as we advocate that it should operate in our Select Committee, I believe that that would not have been possible.

It is easy to distinguish confidentiality in relation to people's personal problems, children taken into care and information of that kind on file in local authorities and elsewhere from matters which affect the public interest. The people who advocate freedom of access to information also advocate a law protecting privacy. That certainly applies in the United States.

If we had freedom of information and open government, and if we opened all our Select Committee proceedings, nothing but good could come of it. We must open the Select Committees and get rid of the mistrust that the leaking of reports creates by stopping the problem at its source and we must tell the press that the House of Commons is as we want government, Whitehall and the Executive to be—open, free and with free access to information.

11.56 pm.

Sir Edward Gardner (Fylde): As so little time is left, I will confine myself to one point—the Committee's findings and its ultimate conclusions, which are clearly based on the rules in the old resolutions of 1837 and 1971. Whether we should still have those rules is a separate question altogether and has nothing to do with freedom of information or open government.

Nothing could be more open—and I should like to boast that nothing was more open—than the meetings of the Select Committee on Home Affairs which I chaired when it investigated the special branch of the police. It was the premature disclosure of the report of that investigation which activated the Committee on Privileges and brought about this debate. I make no apology for that, because it seemed to me that under the rules as they stand it was a serious contempt, as the Committee of Privileges subsequently found.

In the course of that investigation I was firm, and every member of the Committee supported me, in ensuring that all the evidence was examined in public and that there were no secret sessions, however difficult it might be to keep information which should not come before the public in its proper context away from the public. We agreed that that would be achieved by the Chairman saying, "That question cannot be answered", and that is how we did it.

I have no complaint of any inhibition or restriction on the ability to put forward arguments in public. I am as keen as the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) and other Members of the House to see that matters as important as that investigation into the special branch should be seen to be debated in public and that all the facts that we can properly obtain in the public interest should come before the public.

I was trying to do that then, and nothing that I or any member of my Committee have done since has gone against that rule. It is quite unrealistic to suggest that we should do away with the rules because, if we do not, we shall in some way mysteriously affect the freedom of information or the necessity of open government.

11.59 pm

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): I have only a short time left, but there are two points that I would like the House to consider.

The first is that in our report we have undoubtedly backed away from having to hold the press—particularly the editors—responsible for bearing in mind that at times the work of Select Committees requires some confidentiality until they are able to publish——

It being one and a half hours after the commencement of the proceedings on the motion, MR. SPEAKER *put the Question forthwith, pursuant to the Order of the House this day.*

The House divided: Ayes 29, Noes 5.

Division No. 96] **[12 Midnight**

AYES

Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Best, Keith
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Cope, John
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Durant, Tony
Emery, Sir Peter
Gardner, Sir Edward *(Fylde)*
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Nicholas
Major, John
Neubert, Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Penhaligon, David
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Steel, Rt Hon David
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Waller, Gary
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Watson, John
Watts, John

Tellers for the Ayes:
Sir Hugh Rossi and
Mr. Jonathan Sayeed.

NOES

Alton, David
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Pike, Peter
Skinner, Dennis
Wallace, James

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours
and Mr. Allan Roberts.

Fewer than 40 Members having taken part in the Division, MR. SPEAKER *declared that the Question was not decided and the business under consideration was stood over until the next sitting of the House.*

Sir Hugh Rossi: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. As it is not possible under the new procedures, which have not been passed, to refer the second special report of the Environment Select Committee to the Committee of Privileges, may I invoke the old procedures under which I may refer the matter to you so that you may consider referring the matter to the Committee of Privileges?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman must write to me on that matter.

Mr. Allan Roberts: Further to the point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I add my voice to what the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Sir H. Rossi) said? I oppose the proposals and the present procedure, but, as that is all that we have left and as there was some feeling in the Environment Select Committee, perhaps you will consider the matter.

Mr. Speaker: If the hon. Gentleman will write to me, I shall consider the matter.

WELSH GRAND COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That, during the proceedings on the matter of the Roads Programme and the Transport Infrastructure in Wales, the Welsh Grand Committee have leave to sit twice on the first day on which it shall meet; and that, notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 67 (Meetings of standing committees), the second such sitting shall not commence before Four o'clock. —*[Mr. Archie Hamilton.]*

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at to-morrow's sitting—

(1) the provisions of paragraph (1)*(b)* of Standing Order No. 3 (Exempted business) shall not apply to the Motion in the name of the Prime Minister relating to European Community Shipping Policy or to the Motion relating to the Local Government (Temporary Provisions) (Northern Ireland) Order 1986; and

(2) Mr. Speaker shall put any Questions necessary to dispose of the first Motion not later than three hours after it has been entered upon, and shall put the Question on the second Motion not later than one and a half hours after it has been entered upon. —*[Mr. Archie Hamilton.]*

Mr. J. A. Singleton

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Archie Hamilton.]*

12.12 am

Mr. John Watts (Slough): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise the case of my constituent, Mr. Singleton, who was unable to work for two years because of ill health before he qualified in 1983 for invalidity benefit and retired prematurely due to permanent ill health.

While Mr. Singleton was still in receipt of sickness benefit, a friend offered him an opportunity to spend two weeks' holiday in Spain between 24 April and 8 May 1983. He was aware that he should notify the Department of Health and Social Security that he would be going abroad for a holiday from the instructions in form BF11P which, on page 3, states:

"You must tell your local office if any of the following changes occur while you are receiving benefit".

One is, "You leave this country."

The form continues:

"You should consult your local office as soon as possible so that they can advise you if benefit is likely to be affected during or after the absence from this country."

The words in form BF11P are important. Claimants are instructed to "tell" the local office

"so that they can advise you if benefit is likely to be affected".

It is apparently a model of clarity.

Mr. Singleton complied with the instructions on 7 April 1983, when he wrote to the Slough DHSS office to "tell" it that he was leaving the country for a short holiday and to give the dates, which were then two and a half weeks ahead. He then waited for the advice which was promised to him in form BF11P. Regrettably, no advice came. Perhaps if he had been aware of the volume of case work handled in the local office, he may have realised that two and a half weeks was not long enough to allow for a reply. If the information in the form had been that benefit was likely to be affected if one went abroad, he might have chased that elusive reply. But his information was only to notify the office so that it could advise him if benefit was likely to be affected. As he received no such advice, he made the perfectly reasonable assumption that his entitlement to benefit was not affected.

On Mr. Singleton's return from holiday he found a letter from the DHSS dated 21 April—three days before his departure on holiday—but date-stamped 28 April, four days after his arrival in sunny Spain. Much to his consternation, the letter told him that he would lose benefit for the period of his holiday. Understandably, he felt aggrieved that he had not been given information to which he was entitled before his departure, although he had complied to the best of his ability with the Department's instructions and given adequate notice of his intentions. He was further aggrieved that the letter was back-dated. If that back-dating was deliberate, it was reprehensible. If the letter was written on 21 April before he set off on holiday, but nobody bothered to post it for a further seven days, that would also merit censure.

Mr. Singleton took up his case with the local tribunal, which upheld the decision of the insurance officer of 26 October 1983. At that point he came to see me. On 9 November 1983, I wrote to the local manager, Mr. Peasley. I always find him and his staff extremely helpful in trying to resolve problems. I asked whether he could

[Mr. John Watts]

exercise any discretion to pay the £50 which had been withheld, but he replied that, as he had no such discretion, he could not make the payment. Mr. Singleton was then refused leave to appeal to the commissioners.

In February 1984, I wrote to my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Dr. Boyson), who was then Minister for Social Security, pointing out that the insurance officer's submission to the tribunal made great play of the nature of Mr. Singleton's letter of 7 April. The officer claimed that

"the letter from the claimant was purely a notification of the claimant's intention and did not make any inquiry",

although the back-dated reply of 21 April from the Department commences:

"In reply to your inquiry about the effect on benefit of your absence abroad".

Clearly, Mr. Singleton's letter was seen as an inquiry, although later that was explained away as the use of a standard letter which should have been adapted before issue. Mr. Singleton's reply of 9 May 1983 was turned against him because he stated:

"I would have expected my letter dated 7 April to have made it perfectly clear I was not making an inquiry but acting in accordance with your note in form BF11P which requires me to inform you of absence abroad."

Such nit-picking by the Department has not been at all helpful.

If at any stage Mr. Singleton had received any semblance of apology for the dilatory back-dated reply, and an acknowledgement that he had complied with the requirement to tell the office of his intention to go abroad, he might have been willing to let the matter drop.

In his reply to me of 20 March 1984, my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North arranged for further inquiries to establish when the holiday was booked, whether Mr. Singleton believed that he would be entitled to benefit and whether he would have cancelled his arrangements had he known benefit would be lost. Such inquiries did not and do not seem to me to have been particularly relevant, because Mr. Singleton's complaint is not that benefit was not payable under the regulations while he was abroad, but that he was entitled to be advised of his position before the start of his holiday, about which he had informed the local office in good time.

In the event it was not possible to establish whether Mr. Singleton would have cancelled his holiday. Clearly such hypothetical questions can rarely be given definitive answers. Subsequently the complaint was referred to the ombudsman, but it appeared that he did not have adequate powers to investigate. Mr. Singleton also pursued the complaint in correspondence with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services and with my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. The cost of answering all the letters alone, and of the hearing before the tribunal, must easily have exceeded the £50 of benefit lost. Because no other means of redress have been found, I raise the case in the House on the Adjournment.

At the very least Mr. Singleton is entitled to an apology from the Department for not having been given advice to which he was entitled, and at the right time. Further, if there is any power under which he could be given an ex-gratia payment, that also should be done.

Finally, I ask my hon. Friend what steps, if any, have been taken to revise the advice contained in the now notorious form BF11P so that no one in future should be the innocent and unwitting victim of its less than adequate advice about the effect on benefit of going abroad.

12.21 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security (Mr. John Major): The case of Mr. Singleton has been a long-running saga and I congratulate my hon. Friend on the persistence with which he has pursued the matter on behalf of his constituent. It is entirely proper for him to have brought the matter to the Floor of the House. I am grateful to him for the clear and precise way in which he has set out Mr. Singleton's cause for grievance.

Let me begin by saying—without any equivocation—that I well understand Mr. Singleton's disappointment and annoyance when he returned from his holiday in Spain to find that he would not be, as he had expected, paid sickness benefit for the period that he was abroad. I respect the persistence with which he too has pursued this matter. He and my hon. Friend make a formidable pair.

I must also accept at the outset that there were shortcomings in the way in which officials in my Department dealt with Mr. Singleton's first letter. If the local office's reply telling him that he would not be entitled to sickness benefit while he was in Spain had been sent to him earlier, he would have received it before he left this country and would have been aware of his position. I understand that the local office did, in fact, apologise to Mr. Singleton for its failure to write to him promptly and I hope that Mr. Singleton is content to accept this apology. There is, of course, no question of Mr. Singleton having been at fault, nor of his being penalised by the Department at any time. I wish to make that quite clear. It is simply that the straightforward application of the law means that he is not entitled to benefit. My hon. Friend will understand that the Department is bound to apply the law as it stands.

If this situation seems curious to my hon. Friend, I will endeavour to explain how it comes about. Under the Social Security Act 1975, and the Social Security (Persons Abroad) Regulations 1975, sickness benefit is not normally payable in respect of a period abroad. There are two exceptions which applied at the time of Mr. Singleton's holiday in April and May 1983, and which continue to apply. These exceptions enable benefit to be paid to someone who has either gone abroad for the specific purpose of being treated for incapacity which commenced before he left this country, or to someone who has been continuously incapacitated for six months or more. Neither of these exceptions applied to Mr. Singleton, and it is for this reason that he was not entitled to benefit.

My hon. Friend will know that my Department issues leaflets describing all our benefits, which are freely available to claimants, and the one which deals with sickness benefit, under the heading, "If you go abroad", says:

"Generally you cannot get sickness benefit for any period outside Great Britain, Northern Ireland and the Isle of Man. But, you may be able to get benefit in some circumstances and in some countries."

That sets out the position clearly, and should not lead anyone to think that benefit will automatically be paid during periods abroad. Form BF11P, which my hon. Friend called "notorious"—perhaps he made it that way

—entitled "Notes on Sickness or Industrial Injury Benefit" which is issued to claimants, says under the heading, "Leaving the Country", that he or she should,

"consult his Local Office as soon as possible so that they can advise whether benefit is likely to be affected during or after the absence from this country."

This is brief, but I think it gives adequate warning and again should not lead anyone to think that benefit will necessarily be payable during absence abroad. None the less, my hon. Friend asked me to reconsider the form, and I undertake to do as he requests.

However, in the absence of specific contrary advice Mr. Singleton believed that he was entitled to sickness benefit while abroad, and, as was his right, appealed against the decision which had been given by the insurance officer in the Department's overseas branch at Newcastle. His appeal was heard by the local tribunal on 26 October 1983, and dismissed on the grounds that Mr. Singleton did not comply with the conditions for payment of sickness benefit to someone abroad. He applied to the tribunal for leave to appeal to the commissioner, but this was refused, and his further application to the commissioner for leave was also refused. Thus, the statutory authorities confirmed that the law had been applied correctly.

My hon. Friend—and I suspect Mr. Singleton—may wish to know why we have this restriction on entitlement to sickness benefit. Why do we not simply continue to pay when people who are entitled to sickness benefit go abroad?

The main reason for the longstanding rule is that when someone is abroad we cannot carry out the normal checks on incapacity for work which we apply to anyone who claims benefit in this country. These are the checks which have been found to be necessary if the national insurance fund and the interests of the general body of contributors to the fund are to be properly safeguarded. When sickness benefit is paid in this country the usual doctor's statement will have come from a practitioner here whose existence can be checked, and who can, if need be, confirm his signature. Then we can ask a claimant to attend for a medical examination, or we can send someone to visit him at home. Because those checks can be operated, we can be reasonably certain that sickness benefit is being paid correctly. However, I should say that there is not the slightest doubt about Mr. Singleton's illness, and we would not have seen any need to check on his capacity for work—that is not in question at all.

We recognise that there may be individual cases from time to time where it may seem unreasonable not to pay sickness benefit, but a scheme the size of the national insurance scheme must operate within broad rules that apply to the generality of cases. The exceptions to the general rule are those where overall risks are kept to an acceptable level. Where someone goes abroad for the specific purpose of being treated for an existing incapacity it is reasonable to accept the evidence that there will be treatment abroad as an alternative to our normal controls. Where someone has been incapable of work for six months we can accept that incapacity is likely to continue for a further period and pay benefit during a temporary absence. There are also a few reciprocal agreements on social security with other countries which provide for payment of sickness benefit while a person is there, but these are normally dependent upon the other country's giving us the benefit of its supervision system.

It has also been suggested that had Mr. Singleton received the local office's letter dated 21 April 1983 before he left, he could have cancelled his holiday. Had the letter from our local office been sent to him at the proper time, he would have had the opportunity to change his arrangements, and even if he had had to pay a cancellation charge, this could have been less than £41·67—not the £50 my hon. Friend mentioned—which was the amount of sickness benefit that would have been payable had he remained here. The question arises: should we have made an ex-gratia payment, as my hon. Friend suggested we might consider, to compensate Mr. Singleton for his lost opportunity?

Considering the situation as a whole, and in relation to the interests of other insured persons, I fear that the answer must be that we should not. The situation was clearly set out in the sickness benefit leaflet, and there was no reason to assume that sickness benefit would be payable. Had Mr. Singleton been positively misinformed by officials, this would have been a different matter, but this was not so.

Thus, while I sympathise very much with Mr. Singleton in his disappointment at finding that he was not, as he had thought, entitled to benefit for the period of his holiday in Spain, and I regret that he was not promptly informed of his position, I must say that he has received the benefit to which he is, in law, entitled. I hope that my hon. Friend will accept that Mr. Singleton's problem has been considered carefully and in detail, and that it would not be appropriate for me to take any further action.

However, I accept that there is an element of misfortune about this case. I hope, therefore, that my hon. Friend will express my apologies to Mr. Singleton for the frustration he has suffered and that Mr. Singleton will understand why I am unable to recommend an ex-gratia payment.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at half-past Twelve o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 11 March 1986

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

DEFENCE

Trident

1. **Mr. Hoyle** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what will be the effect of President Reagan's current intermediate nuclear forces proposals on the Trident programme.

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. John Stanley): None, Sir.

Mr. Hoyle: Does the Minister realise that the Prime Minister's rejection of the Russian proposal for a ban on intermediate range nuclear weapons in Europe is disgraceful? It is a blow to peace. It means that, as usual, the Prime Minster has got it wrong. Will the Minister confirm that the reason for the rejection is to enable the Government to continue their folly of the deployment of Trident in this country?

When the Prime Minister talks of the goal of a nuclear freeze being long term, she is not speaking for Britain. We cannot afford to wait, because every nuclear weapon that is based in Europe brings the danger of nuclear war ever nearer.

Mr. Stanley: The hon. Gentleman has got it comprehensively wrong. The Government remain committed, as do the American Administration, to a zero-zero solution to the INF problem based on a zero-zero which must be expressed in global terms. The possibility of a zero-zero solution based solely on European long-range INF weapons is certainly not satisfactory. The hon. Member seems to forget that SS20s are highly mobile.

Sir Anthony Buck: Does my right hon. Friend agree that if we were to cancel our involvement with Trident it would have a disastrous effect on the various peace initiatives?

Mr. Stanley: I entirely agree with my hon. and learned Friend.

Mr. Strang: Will the Minister acknowledge that what was encouraging in the Gorbachev proposals of 15 January was that, for the first time, he was proposing the removal of all Soviet and American intermediate range missiles from Europe, while allowing France and Britain to retain their existing nulear missiles provided that they did not modernise them? Is it not a scandal that the Government have vetoed that proposal by rejecting out of hand the suggestion that we should not go ahead with Trident?

Mr. Stanley: I entirely disagree with the hon. Member. There is no possible basis for making prohibition of the modernisation of British and French systems a pre-condition of an INF agreement when the Soviet Union is taking no steps to make prohibition of the modernisation of its strategic forces a pre-conditon of an INF agreement.

Mr. Wilkinson: Does my right hon. Friend agree that if there were to be an agreed reduction in intermediate range nuclear forces, the importance of modern and effective strategic deterrents in France and the United Kingdom would be enhanced in the defence of Europe?

Mr. Stanley: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend.

Mr. Wallace: Is not the Prime Minister's wholly negative response to the initiative—the first constructive, far-reaching initiative to come out of the Soviet Union for almost over a generation — profoundly disappointing? It makes the Government's claim to support multilateral disarmament somewhat threadbare. Are we not approaching the situation where the Government's obsession with Trident will make us losers twice over: first, the extent to which Trident will crowd out other new defence equipment expenditure; and, secondly, the possibility of Trident becoming an effective hurdle to proper disarmament talks at Geneva?

Mr. Stanley: The hon. Gentleman is not correct. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has made a thoroughly positive and constructive response in correspondence with Premier Gorbachev. My right hon. Friend is entirely right to rest on the basic principle, which NATO has followed, of a zero-zero global based INF agreement. If the Soviets want a long-range INF agreement, based on equal numbers of like systems, they most certainly can have it. It is for them to accept that fundamentally fair principle in such negotiations.

Mr. Bill Walker: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Trident programme is merely a modernisation and updating of the Polaris programme, which has contributed handsomely to the peace of the West? If Opposition Members do not recognise that, at least the Leader of the Opposition recognises that Rosyth is important to the Trident programme, because he deliberately leaves out any comment about Trident in letters which are critical of the Government's plans as he knows of Trident's importance to Scottish workers.

Mr. Stanley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. We have noticed a certain inconsistency between what the Leader of the Opposition says in the Devonport area and what he says in the Rosyth area. I agree with my hon. Friend that we are modernising the British strategic deterrent. Many of us find it difficult to understand why the Opposition, having set in hand a major modernisation of our existing deterrent, should not be prepared to accept a continuance of that policy with a successor system.

Mr. Denzil Davies: Is it not a fact that the Prime Minister's rejection—for it was that—of a multilateral attempt to freeze the development of nuclear weapons demonstrates the hollowness of the Government's repeated claim that they believe in multilateral nuclear disarmament? Is not the right hon. Gentleman's determination to go ahead with Trident, despite the fact that it will affect arms talks between the United States and

the Soviet Union and mean cuts in conventional forces, a major stumbling block to any agreement on arms control in Europe?

Mr. Stanley: The right hon. Gentleman is wholly incorrect. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has made a positive response in an INF context. It must be fundamental to an INF agreement that we deal with equal numbers of like systems. As for Trident, I do not understand the Opposition Front Bench's stance. It seems that they want to rest on wholly conventional defence. I suppose that means that they are prepared to rest behind American nuclear strategic weapons. If so, why do the Opposition continue to propagate their highly irresponsible policy of kicking the Americans out of their nuclear bases in Britain?

Strategic Defence Programme (Soviet Union)

2. **Mr. Merchant** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what action his Department is taking to draw the attention of the public to the Soviet Union's stategic defence programme.

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. George Younger): A paper on this subject was placed in the Library on 26 November 1985, and is made available on request to members of the public. The Government have also published a pamphlet entitled "Outer Space and Defences against Ballistic Missiles", which includes a section describing Soviet ballistic missile defence activities. These publications are kept under review, so that updated information can be issued as necessary.

Mr. Merchant: Does my right hon. Friend agree that more attention should be drawn to the Soviet star wars programme to demonstrate the need for more research into SDI in Britain? Does he further agree that knowledge of Soviet plans would justify in the public mind the need to speed up Britain's SDI programme? Is he aware that delays in SDI contracts have resulted partly in 42 jobs being lost in Newcastle at International Research and Development?

Mr. Younger: I am grateful to and agree with my hon. Friend. Some people's attitude to the balance of these systems seems amazing. The Soviets have been engaged in such activities since the 1960s, and since the early 1980s they have been modernising their anti-ballistic missile system around Moscow.

Mr. Dalyell: Was the Secretary of State consulted about the visit of Mr. Clarance Robinson? Why did he leave the country without seeing——

Mr. Younger: I am sorry, but the hon. Gentleman's last few words were lost in the noise. Could he repeat his question?

Mr. Dalyell: Was the Secretary of State consulted about the visit of Mr. Clarance Robinson, and for what reasons did he go back to the United States without having talked to British industry?

Mr. Younger: I was not consulted about the visit of Mr. Clarance Robinson. It was therefore entirely up to him whether he came or went.

Land Rover

3. **Mr. John Mark Taylor** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about purchases by his Department of military equipment from Land Rover and about exports by Land Rover for military applications.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. John Lee): Land Rover is a major supplier of vehicles to the services. Current Ministry of Defence orders on the company are for 4,500 of the new 110 model. A substantial order for military versions of the shorter wheelbase 90 model is expected in the near future. For many years Land Rover has been very successful in exporting its range of vehicles to defence customers. I am confident that the military versions of its latest 90 and 110 models will prove even more attractive than their predecessors in the overseas defence market.

Mr. Taylor: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. Does he think that any of those exports would be put at risk if the ownership of Land Rover passed out of British hands? For example, has not General Motors said that it would discriminate as to the countries to which it would sell?

Mr. Lee: The future ownership of Land Rover is a matter for the Department of Trade and Industry. The Ministry of Defence has more than 20,000 Land Rovers in service. We look to the company to honour existing and planned orders, to provide adequate customer support in terms of spares and components and also to continue United Kingdom research and development and manufacture.

Mr. McNamara: The House will be interested to hear that the Department of Trade and Industry will decide who will be Britain's main defence suppliers. In view of the figures that the hon. Gentleman has given, would it not be correct and better to keep Land Rover under the control of a British company in Britain, able to meet Britain's defence needs, and not be at the whim of Detroit?

Mr. Lee: We all heard what the hon. Gentleman said. I have nothing to add to the answer that I gave to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Stokes: Does my hon. Friend agree that the purchases by his Department and the military exports of Land Rover would not be affected if part of the company were owned by a foreign concern? Are not many suppliers to the Ministry of Defence also not entirely British?

Mr. Lee: My hon. Friend is right on the latter point. In fact, the Bedford subsidiary of General Motors is a substantial supplier of medium tracks. We have about 21,000 of its medium tracks in our fleet. As a point of interest, in 1985 the Ministry of Defence took 6 per cent. of the total output of Land Rover, Solihull.

North American Air Defence (Command and Control Systems)

4. **Mr. Meadowcroft** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what research he has instituted into the safety and effectiveness of North American air defence command and control systems.

Mr. Stanley: NORAD's safety and effectiveness is a matter for the United States and Canadian Governments. The British Government's involvement is limited to the component of NORAD at RAF Fylingdales.

Mr. Meadowcroft: What evaluation has the Minister made of the work of Mr. Daniel Ford, who made a detailed

investigation of the subject, which was published in the *New Yorker* and later in a book, and which drew attention to the highly dangerous aspect of relying on apparently sophisticated machinery?

Mr. Stanley: I have not made a study of that publication, but I shall certainly inquire about it. As the hon. Gentleman well knows, NORAD is an early warning system which has been in existence over the lifetime of successive Governments. I am sure that if the hon. Gentleman had any anxiety about safety he would have pursued that with the leader of his party during the currency of the Lib-Lab pact.

Mr. Wilkinson: In the course of Ministry of Defence research into the effectiveness of North American air defence command, will my right hon. Friend study the key role played by the National Guard and the United States Air Force reserve squadrons which constitute well over half of the front line and operate highly effectively?

Mr. Stanley: I am aware of the point that my hon. Friend makes. Undoubtedly, in the North American and United States context a very important role is played by the National Guard in the air defence of North America. As the hon. Gentleman knows, in the context of the RAF Reserve, we have been trying to make increased use of our own reservists and volunteers for air defence purposes.

Mr. Corbyn: In the context of the safety of American air defence, will the Minister tell us whether he is satisfied with the safety of the 16 cruise missiles which are currently circulating on Salisbury plain and the 45 support vehicles which are associated with them? Will he tell us if all those 60 missiles are live and what would be the number of people killed as a result of an attack on those missiles by anybody else?

Mr. Stanley: We are satisfied with their safety. As we have said to the House on many occasions, no live missiles are used during training exercises.

Defence Programme (Costings)

6. **Mr. James Lamond** asked the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to conclude his long-term costing of the defence programme.

15. **Mr. Allen McKay** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the long-term costings of the defence programme.

Mr. Younger: In the normal way I shall be considering the long-term costing over the next few months.

Mr. Lamond: As the Secretary of State is obviously having some trouble finding the money to finance even the conventional defence of this country, should he not have been exerting a little more pressure on the Prime Minister so that she would not give such a strident reply to the Soviet Union when it made a proposal which would have enabled us to abandon Trident and save £10,000 million by doing so?

Mr. Younger: I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman. I thoroughly support my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's constructive response to Mr. Gorbachev. The long-term costing takes place every year.

Mr. McKay: Does the Secretary of State accept that a close analysis of the long-term costing would show that the cost of Trident is such that we shall finish up with the most expensive defence force in the whole of Europe, but probably the worst equipped and trained conventional forces?

Mr. Younger: I disagree with the hon. Gentleman. As he probably knows, there is a question down later on the Order Paper about the latest costing of Trident. In general, it takes on average only 3 per cent. of the defence budget, and by no stretch of the imagination could it be said to be a major inroad into the conventional programme.

Mr. Latham: Will my right hon. Friend tell Lord Trefgarne to keep his hands off RAF North Luffenham in my constituency? If my noble Friend carries on talking about this, while today's question might be a Sidewinder near him, the next one will be effectively aimed.

Mr. Younger: I appreciate my hon. Friend's great concern about the RAF station in his constituency. My noble Friend will be looking at this matter closely.

Mr. Favell: If, as we all hope, the GEC system for Nimrod is perfected, will the Exchequer be rewarded for its investment if subsequently the system is sold to Lockheed?

Mr. Younger: That is another question, but I can say that if the Nimrod system, as it has been designed, is accepted, it will be against competition from other possible suppliers and will give the best possible value for money.

Mr. Cartwright: What effects will the coinciding of the Tornado programme with the first years of the Trident programme have on the planned re-equipment of the British Army of the Rhine, given the 7 per cent. real terms cuts in defence spending after the current year? Is it not a fact that any incoming Government after the next general election will have to undertake a major defence programme?

Mr. Younger: That is not the case. Every year there is a long-term costings review, and this year will be no exception. Defence expenditure in real terms is between 20 and 30 per cent. above what it was in 1979. Therefore, the position is better than it was when the Government came to power.

Mr. Bill Walker: Does my right hon. Friend agree that in peacetime there has never been a period during which long-term defence expenditure has not been looked at in depth, so that there is nothing new or novel in what is happening now?

Mr. Younger: My hon. Friend is right. There has to be a continuing look at all the plans for defence expenditure if proper value is to be got for money. That is the principal objective in my Department.

Mr. Denzil Davies: Will the Secretary of State confirm that the defence White Paper for the next financial year is not likely to appear much before the end of May? If so, does it not follow that the House will not be able to debate it until at least three months of the next financial year, to which the White Paper relates, have gone by?

Mr. Younger: No final decision has yet been taken as to the precise date of publication of the defence White Paper this year. However, I can tell the right hon. Gentleman that it will not ve very different from the date on which it was published last year.

Strategic Defence Initiative

7. **Mr. Livsey** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the number of orders to date won by United Kingdom firms to participate in the strategic defence initiative research and development programme.

The Minister of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. Norman Lamont): Seven contracts have so far been publicly announced by British companies for participation in the United States SDI research programme.

Mr. Livsey: Will the Minister comment on the fact that there are difficulties in negotiations between West Germany and America on the number of contracts being secured, and the fact that the former Secretary of State for Defence promised £1·5 billion of the so-called star wars crock of gold, but it looks now as if there will be only £300 million available out of a total of £26 billion?

Mr. Lamont: On the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question, if I heard the hon. Gentleman aright—I can hardly believe that I did—what happens in Germany is a matter for the German Government.

On the second part of his question, it was made clear that there is no set-aside, but there is a marvellous competitive opportunity for British industry. We are the first Government to sign such an agreement with the United States Government, and it opens up tremendous opportunities for the technology of this country.

Mr. Duffy: The House wants not fine words but evidence from the Minister. Will he confirm that late last year there was pessimism among United Kingdom firms, which was justified in the light of the problems with the Trident programme? Will the hon. Gentleman conduct a survey of firms so that we can have evidence, because the House shares such pessimism?

Mr. Lamont: I see no reason to be pessimistic. The agreement was signed at the beginning of December, and already seven contracts have been signed. They are highly important, and the hon. Gentleman ought to be encouraging British firms to go out and sell their technology in the United States. We have an enormous amount to offer. There is no reason to think that British companies, which lead in defence technology in so many areas, cannot capture a significant part of that market.

Mr. Dickens: Is it not a fact that the SDI programme, whatever the cost and whatever the orders at present, will create thousands of jobs in the United Kingdom? That being so, is it not wrong for the Opposition to attack arrangements which will yield so many jobs for our people?

Mr. Lamont: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. There is, of course, something nonsensical and inconsistent in the Opposition's attitude. They suggest that if there is an agreement with the United States, our scientists will emigrate. Somehow they believe that if there is no agreement, our scientists will stay at home. That is nonsense.

Trident

8. **Dr. Marek** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what recent discussions he has had with the United States Secretary of State for Defence on the Trident programme.

Mr. Stanley: My right hon. Friend will be having his first meetings with the United States Defence Secretary for both bilateral and NATO discussions later this month.

Dr. Marek: Will the Minister make sure, when he has these discussions, that they are concerned solely with helping British technology to remain in Britain, not exporting British technology to be taken over by the Americans? I mean that not in an anti-American way, but in a pro-British way.

Mr. Stanley: My hon. Friend's question arises in connection with the Trident programme. In so far as we can manufacture the main elements of the Trident programme in this country, we are doing so. As the hon. Gentleman knows, over half the procurement of the Trident programme will fall to this country, including much high technology equipment.

Dr. Glyn: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that most of the contracts for the Trident programme have been agreed in substance between the two countries and that the programme will go ahead as it should?

Mr. Stanley: The programme will certainly go ahead as scheduled. We believe that the British people, in their wisdom, will ensure the continuation of a Government committed to maintaining that vital element of our security.

Mr. Canavan: Instead of discussing the Trident programme with representatives of a foreign power, would it not be more appropriate to discuss it with the people of Scotland, where the Government plan to locate the Trident base? If the Minister did that, does he realise that he would find virtually no support for Trident among the Scottish people, with the exception of the Secretary of State, who is out on a limb and completely out of touch with Scottish public opinion on this as on so many other matters?

Mr. Stanley: When it comes to the next election, we will see what view those living in the Rosyth area and in Clydeside take of the Government's defence policies compared with the views expressed by the hon. Gentleman.

NATO (Expenditure)

9. **Mr. David Atkinson** asked the Secretary of State for Defence when he next plans to meet North Atlantic Treaty Organisation counterparts to discuss the defence expenditure of member states.

Mr. Younger: Defence expenditure is the responsibility of national Governments. My NATO colleagues and I will discuss allied defence planning matters at the spring meeting of the Defence Planning Committee.

Mr. Atkinson: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the majority of NATO member states have failed to honour their 1978 commitments to increase defence expenditures by 3 per cent. in real terms to prevent NATO from falling further behind the Warsaw Pact? How is it planned to hold those member states to account?

Mr. Younger: My hon. Friend is correct in saying that many of our NATO colleagues have not succeeded in fulfilling their commitment to a 3 per cent. real terms increase in defence spending over the past six years. That will certainly be a topic for discussion between my colleagues and I when we next meet. I note what my hon. Friend says.

Mr. Dalyell: Could we be clear? Is the Secretary of State saying that he heard nothing from the British embassy in Washington about the visit of Mr. Clarance Robinson and that Mr. Clarance Robinson never asked for security clearance?

Mr. Speaker: Order. Has this anything to do with NATO?

Mr. Younger: I can confirm that we heard nothing of the visit of that gentleman, but we have asked for a report about it.

Mr. Robert Atkins: Has my right hon. Friend given any consideration to the effects on our NATO colleagues involved with the potential manufacture of the European fighter aircraft if Spain votes to withdraw from NATO and therefore feels constrained to pull out of the European fighter aircraft project?

Mr. Younger: I share my hon. Friend's concern. It will be up to the Spanish people to make the extremely important decision whether to remain within NATO. The question whether Spain would, or would not, continue as a partner in the European fighter aircraft project would have to be addressed if the vote this week were to go the wrong way.

Vickers Shipbuilding Yards

10. **Mr. Franks** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will pay an official visit to Vickers shipbuilding yards.

Mr. Norman Lamont: My right hon. Friend hopes to do so when it can be fitted into his programme.

Mr. Franks: Will my hon. Friend note that, when he and/or my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State pay a visit to the shipyards in Barrow, they can be assured of a warm welcome from a company which has been returned to the private sector, with local management and local employees? Will my hon. Friend note that the welcome will be that much the warmer if my colleagues take the opportunity when they visit to announce the signing of the first contract for Trident submarines?

Mr. Lamont: I note what my hon. Friend says. I know that he very much welcomed the announcement by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. My hon. Friend may recall the 1974 Labour manifesto, which referred to an irreversible shift of wealth and power to working people. That is what is happening at the Barrow shipyards.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Would not jobs in Barrow and in Cumbria as a whole have been much better safeguarded if Vickers had been retained in the public sector? What assurances can the hon. Gentleman give the House that thousands of jobs will not be lost in Barrow as a direct result of this privatisation?

Mr. Lamont: It is for the hon. Gentleman to give assurances about jobs, because everyone in Barrow wants to know how the Labour party will maintain employment in Barrow if it is going to cancel Trident and if, at the same time, it says that it will not increase spending on conventional defence.

Mr. O'Neill: Before the hon. Gentleman goes to Barrow will he look again at Friday's statement by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry? Will the money which is supposed to be saved by this profit-sharing deal, which is an integral part of the management buy-out, go to the Treasury, or to the Ministry of Defence?

Mr. Lamont: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is to answer another written question, when he will amplify what he said in his statement on Friday. As the hon. Gentleman knows, matters relating to the privatisation of Vickers are for the Department of Trade and Industry.

Trident

11. **Mr. Ashdown** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he is satisfied with the performance to date of the Trident D5 guidance system.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Ashdown: Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that, in order to achieve the planned accuracy, the Trident D5 warhead will require in-flight mid-course correction from an American satellite? Will the British Trident warhead require a similar facility? What steps has the hon. Gentleman taken to ensure that we shall have independence of operation?

Mr. Lamont: The guidance sub-system in the missile is of United States' design and supply. What the hon. Gentleman has just said, and what he said in his article in *The Guardian,* which I read carefully, is not correct. All the facilities with respect to information for targeting and to guidance, which are essential to the effective operation of the Trident force, are under our operational control.

Mr. Adley: Is my hon. Friend aware that it was reported that Secretary Weinberger was mystified by the defence policy of the so-called alliance in so far as it relates to Trident? Will my hon. Friend therefore explain to Mr. Weinberger that the reason why the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) trots around after the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen) contradicting him is that on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays the alliance's policies follow the Liberal party, on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays they follow the SDP, and on Sunday the defence policy of the alliance is closed?

Mr. Lamont: I note what my hon. Friend said. Today's allegation by the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) which is a new twist to the alliance's allegation about Trident, is totally incorrect.

Mr. Carter-Jones: What is the accuracy of the guidance system for cruise and Trident?

Mr. Lamont: Obviously that is not a matter on which I can comment publicly.

12. **Mr. Yeo** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the latest estimate of the cost of the Trident missile programme.

Mr. Younger: The Trident programme has been re-costed as part of the annual long-term costing of the defence programme. By convention, that costing assumes exchange rates prevailing last June, which for the dollar gives a rate of £1 equalling $1·28. On that basis, the revised estimate for Trident is £9,869 million at average 1985-86 prices, an increase of £584 million over last year's estimate. Of this increase, £324 million reflects a lower

exchange rate than was assumed last year. The remaining increase of £260 million, or only 2·8 per cent., reflects inflation offest by real cost reductions arising from better definition as the programme progresses. Costs, therefore, are firmly under control and I am glad to say that the programme remains on time for an in-service date of the mid-1990s.

I am making available to the Public Accounts and Defence Committees a more detailed report on the state of the project as a whole; a copy of this report is also being placed in the Library.

Mr. Yeo: I am very grateful to my right hon. Friend for that detailed answer. Although the rise in the pound against the dollar since the date quoted will further reduce the cost of Trident, is he aware that many people remain concerned about the way in which expenditure on Trident may curtail spending on other important defence programmes?

Mr. Younger: I appreciate what my hon. Friend said. As he has indicated, the calculation of costing has been done deliberately by me on exactly the same basis on which, by convention, it is done every year, that is, basing the dollar at the rate it was in June of the previous year. On the weight of the Trident programme as a whole, I can confirm that this leaves it still as averaging only 3 per cent. of the defence programme, or about 6 per cent. of the equipment programme. That is well within our means for such an important system to our defence.

Dr. Owen: Does the Secretary of State not accept that last year when the costing was given it was the Government's intention to keep level funding in the defence budget, but now the increased cost of Trident has to be borne on a defence budget that is being cut by 7 per cent. over the next three years in real terms? Can he really go on claiming that he can support the conventional defence effort that is currently planned?

Mr. Younger: Very much so, particularly as the right hon. Gentleman may notice in the publication that I am putting in the Library that the rate of inflation in the Trident programme this year is very much lower than that of the defence programme as a whole, because of the offset of other savings that we have made. In that way, it is well within what we can afford.

Mr. Marlow: As totally conventional defence, however much it costs, would not in the last resort be able to deter a nuclear power bent on the conquest of the United Kingdom, is not Trident cheap at the price and jolly good value?

Mr. Younger: My hon. Friend is right. There is no other way at a comparable price that we can so secure peace for the future.

Mr. Denzil Davies: Is it not the case that the increased cost of Trident announced today is bound to come out of the budget for conventional defence spending, since, with the conventional defence budget static or falling in real terms and the cost of Trident increasing, there is no other place from which the expenditure on Trident can come? Can the right hon. Gentleman confirm that the American end of the cost is almost totally out of the control of the British Government, because it is dependent on the exchange rate and on the cost charged by American armaments manufacturers?

Mr. Younger: As the right hon. Gentleman will notice, I have deliberately kept the calculation on costing within the normal convention of the exchange rate, which is not, as it happens, altogether favourable to the case I wish to put. I hope he will regard that as fair. On the balance of the programme, the key factor is that the total weight of Trident in the defence budget is very small; for instance, smaller than the Tornado programme. As it secures our safety and defence for the future, I should have thought that most people would regard it as an extremely good bargain.

Mr. Wigley: Does the Secretary of State not accept that to spend money on nuclear weapons to this extent has the effect of squeezing conventional forces out of meaningful existence in many roles? Would it not be much better for Britain to have meaningful conventional defence rather than to go on with the nuclear pretence?

Mr. Younger: With respect, the hon. Gentleman has lost touch with reality. We are looking at a defence budget which is already well over 20 per cent. higher in real terms than it was in 1979 when the Government took office. To talk about that sort of effect on the conventional forces is unrealistic. If any attempt were made to produce a comparable effect for our defences by conventional means only, it would cost vastly more than the Trident programme.

Defence Establishments (Relocation)

13. **Mr. Thurnham** asked the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to be in a position to put forward specific proposals for moving defence establishments to the north of England; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lee: This is a matter for continuing review as opportunities arise, such as when major investment is required, but as I said in answer to my hon. Friend on 11 February at column *440* of the *Official Report*, all proposals will need to stand on their economic and operational merits.

Mr. Thurnham: Will my hon. Friend comment on the imbalance between the north and south of Britain in the number of jobs for service men and civilians, and will he ask our right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer for funds to correct that topsy-turvy imbalance?

Mr. Lee: It is for my hon. Friend to approach the Treasury for extra funds. Seventy per cent. of service personnel and 64 per cent. of civilians whom we employ are based in the south-east and south-west regions combined.

Mr. Beith: As there is little prospect of a defence establishment moving to the north-east of England in the next year or so, will the Minister at least think in terms of our high unemployment level when he considers contracts such as that for an auxiliary oiler replacement vessel, which could well be placed at the Swan Hunter yard on Tyneside?

Mr. Lee: The hon. Gentleman is being clever in moving to a completely different topic. Tenders for the AOR vessels are being evaluated. Tenders are in from Swan Hunter and Harland and Wolff.

Mr. Holt: Will my hon. Friend also take into consideration the fact that ex-service men who have served

their country and enjoy a pension are banned from jobs by Cleveland county council and so their employment prospects are even further reduced? Will he bear that in mind when seeking somewhere to establish a place where ex-service men can work?

Mr. Lee: I am appalled to hear what my hon. Friend says. The behaviour of Cleveland county council sounds appalling.

Nuclear Weapons

14. **Mr. Cohen** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will estimate, for the latest date for which figures are available, the total annual costs of all British nuclear weapons currently in deployment.

Mr. Stanley : It is not the practice to make available details of year-by-year expenditure on nuclear weapons. However, estimated expenditure on the nuclear strategic force in 1985-86 is shown in table 2·3 of volume 2 of the "Statement on the Defence Estimates 1985".

Mr. Cohen: Is not that a chronic and enormous waste of money, which would be better spent on social provision and jobs in peaceful manufacture? Will not the billions of pounds spent on Trident be a further appalling imposition, which will not make the British people any safer? Should we not be seriously negotiating on the Gorbachev proposals for nuclear disarmament?

Mr. Stanley: Our expenditure on deterrence is a fraction of what we would have to spend if deterrence broke down.

Mr. Leigh: Is my right hon. Friend aware that spending on nuclear weapons as a proportion of a total defence budget has remained remarkably constant under Labour and Conservative Governments in recent years, never dipping below 1 per cent. or rising above 3 per cent.? Does he agree that if spending on nuclear weapons represents just 2·8 per cent. of our total defence budget, that is a remarkably good investment for the British public to maintain their peace and security?

Mr. Stanley: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. It is an extremely cost-effective and relatively cheap insurance policy.

Mr. Skinner: How can the Government claim that the money is well spent, especially in view of the announcement of the £9·8 billion that is spent on Trident, when the same Government could not find more than 40p for the old-age pensioners a few days ago and yesterday came to the Dispatch Box and announced that prescription charges will go up by 1,000 per cent.? Do the Government not have a strange language of priorities?

Mr. Stanley: The Government can justify the good sense of the expenditure on the modernisation of our strategic deterrents in exactly the same way as the Government whom the hon. Gentleman supported no doubt justified their expenditure on the modernisation of the Chevaline deterrent.

Trident

18. **Mr. Hirst** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will estimate the value of work and jobs which are likely to accrue to Scottish-based contractors and professional firms from the Trident programme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norman Lamont: It is not possible to break down estimates of work and jobs in terms of geographical area, firms or constituencies. However, it is currently predicted that on average 8,500 direct and 6,500 indirect job opportunities will be created throughout the procurement period. The number of jobs will run at 15,000 direct and 12,000 indirect during the peak years.

Mr. Hirst: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his reply. Can he assure me that, where appropriate professional and contracting expertise exists in Scottish firms, they will at least receive due consideration when tendering?

Mr. Lamont: I can give my hon. Friend that absolute assurance.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Penhaligon** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 11 March.

The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher): This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Penhaligon: Now that the Government's efforts to save the tin dealers seems finally to have failed, can my Cornish miners assume that the £50 million offered and now saved can instead be used to save the Cornish tin mines? If the answer to that question is no, can the Prime Minister tell us about the priorities that offer help to the dealers but not to the miners?

The Prime Minister: The £50 million was offered provided that other countries of the 22 agreed with us on a scheme to secure a return to orderly trading in the tin market. They did not, so the £50 million, of course, is withdrawn. With regard to the specific question the hon. Gentleman asks, it is too early to say. Cornish mining companies will be better able to assess their commercial prospects once a market price for tin has been re-established. The Department of Trade and Industry is willing to consider grants towards projects to make the mines competitive in the new market situation. However, no decisions can be taken until a realistic assessment of viability can be made.

Mr. Harris: Can I press my right hon. Friend further on this matter? While I recognise that the Government did take the lead in putting forward the £50 million to try to save the international aspects, can she please treat as a matter of utmost urgency the plight of the Cornish tin mining industry, particularly Geevor mine in my own constituency?

The Prime Minister: I am aware of all the mines and of the importance of securing employment in Cornwall. We shall be in a better position to judge when we know the price of tin, once the markets have reopened. As I indicated, we shall be willing to consider grants towards projects to make the mines competitive in the new market situation.

Mr. Kinnock: May I ask the Prime Minister whether she agrees that her important exchange of letters with Mr. Gorbachev should be published in the public interest, and

may I ask whether she will seek to ensure that that publication can take place? Meanwhile, may I ask her whether she recalls saying in November 1983 that the best Christmas present that President Yuri Andropov could give the West would be to dismantle the SS20 missiles and accept the zero option? Now that General Secretary Gorbachev has publicly made exactly that offer in his 15 January statement, why will she not at least pursue discussions based on the proposal to get SS20s out of Europe altogether?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman is mistaken in thinking that that is the offer that Mr. Gorbachev has made. He has not made a total zero-zero offer. He has made an offer which would mean that a number of the missiles went to the far east of the country and could, of course, be moved back. That is totally different from a zero-zero option.

Mr. Kinnock: Is the Prime Minister really saying that she has moved the goalposts so far as to inhibit the removal of all intermediate weapons from the east and west of Europe because of the problems relating to Asia? Will she, I repeat, pursue the question of the dismantling of SS20s, so that not only the menace in Europe is removed, but there is a possibility of ensuring that no additional menace arises even in the far east?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman should be aware that there is no point in merely moving weapons to a place from which they could be moved back to be a menace to this country. I remind the right hon. Gentleman of what Mr. Andropov said when dealing with certain proposals. He said, "We are not a naive people." What a pity that the right hon. Gentleman does not take that advice to heart.

Mr. Kinnock: On such an important issue that affects the fate of all of us and, indeed, future generations, I hope that the Prime Minister will be a little more rational in her approach and will not simply resort to party political bickering. The right hon. Lady says that she wants to concentrate on achieving realistic, balanced and verifiable arms control measures. Why does she not pursue the possibility of securing a freeze in nuclear arms deployment, since plainly that is the most realistic, the most balanced and the most verifiable of all arms control measures?

The Prime Minister: There are very good reasons why one should not have a freeze. First, one freezes in imbalances. Secondly, unless one modernises the strategic deterrent it soon ceases to be a deterrent. That, presumably, is why the right hon. Gentleman's party modernised the Chevaline.

Q2. **Mr. Cash** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 11 March.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Cash: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Left-wing councillors in Lambeth and Liverpool deserve what they are getting at the moment for their wilful misconduct towards their ratepayers? Does my right hon. Friend also agree that to see the Leader of the Opposition trying to get off this hook is a pathetic sight? Will she confirm that this Government will maintain the laws on surcharge and disqualification as the only reasonable remedy for making sure that Left-wing councillors throughout the country do not continue, wantonly and extravagantly, to use ratepayers' money?

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend. Local councillors have a duty to set a legal rate by the appropriate time. It is vital to maintain the sanctions of law to ensure that they carry out their duties properly. That we shall continue to do.

Mr. Steel: As the Governments of both the Soviet Union and the United States are keen to secure an arms control agreement in Europe, why does the Prime Minister insist on going ahead with the escalation that is caused by the Trident programme when those Governments are content to leave the British and French deterrents out of the count as things stand at present? Does the Prime Minister not accept that the Trident missile is becoming a two-time loser; first, because of its effect upon our defence equipment programme, and, secondly, because it is becoming an obstacle to an arms control agreement?

The Prime Minister: As the right hon. Gentleman is aware, Trident is not an intermediate weapon but a strategic weapon. It is vital that we keep our independent nuclear deterrent, and it is not a deterrent unless it is modernised. Therefore, we shall go ahead with the modernisation.

Mr. Shersby: Will my right hon. Friend take time today to consider abolishing the Property Services Agency and putting the work for which it is responsible out to private enterprise, in the interests of greater efficiency? Is it not a paradox that although the Government are urging the abolition of direct labour departments the Property Services Agency is being retained?

The Prime Minister: Quite a lot of the work that the Property Services Agency manages is already put out to private enterprise. At the moment we have no plans to privatise the entire agency.

Q3. **Mr. Fisher** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 11 March.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Fisher: Is the Prime Minister aware that if prescription charges had risen in line with the retail prices index since 1979, they would rise in April from 35p to 37p, not from £2 to £2·20? Does she not understand that this is nothing but a tax on those who are sick?

The Prime Minister: No. The hon. Gentleman is aware of the enormous exemptions from prescription charges. He knows that these will remain and that they will remain the same. Moreover, the proportion of the family practitioners service that is financed by charges is lower now—at under 10 per cent.—than it was 10 or 20 years ago. The income received from charges provides about £500 million for the National Health Service. That is equal to 20,000 doctors, 65,000 nurses or 500,000 operations. Without the charges, what would the hon. Gentleman do about that?

Mr. John Townend: In view of the rise in violent crime and, in particular, the number of appallingly brutal cases of rape, would it not be appropriate for the courts to impose savage sentences as a deterrent? Is it not time that hon. Members re-examined their consciences to see

whether they were right—against the wishes of their constituents—to take away from the courts the right to impose sentences of corporal or capital punishment?

The Prime Minister: As my hon. Friend is aware, the Lord Chief Justice has set out a very clear and firm position for the courts in rape cases, and the sentences which should be imposed. I have no doubt that they will follow that. His guideline judgment was, in general, very well received. As my hon. Friend also knows, legislation restoring capital punishment would have to get through this House and the other place. We have already had one debate on that subject. My hon. Friend knows my views, but it is a matter for the House to decide according to its vote.

Mr. Sheldon: Has the Prime Minister read the third report of the Public Accounts Committee, which clearly shows that the British Telecom issue was hopelessly underpriced? Is she aware that a number of people in the City have made vast sums out of that underpricing? If she must continue the privatisation programme, will she at least compare the method of selling such public assets with the way in which Government stock is sold through the Government Broker, getting a very fine rate by releasing it at suitable intervals, at prime prices?

The Prime Minister: I have not read the report. However, the privatisation of British Telecom was a huge success, and enabled enormous numbers—*[Interruption.]*—of people who worked for British Telecom, as well as small savers, to obtain shares which they would never have obtained under a Labour Government.

Mr. Fairbairn: While the Government are contemplating some considerable alterations to the criminal law of England, will they bear in mind a slightly more modest alteration to the law of England, which is already part of the law of Scotland, and to which objection has never been taken? I refer to the fact that pleas are not taken until after the jury, which is to try the case, is sworn. In that way, the outrage over the Patrick Reilly case would never have arisen.

The Prime Minister: I shall, of course, pass on my hon. and learned Friend's comments to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary. On that particular case, it is not open to me or to the House to suggest that the defendant was guilty of an offence of which he was acquitted. Obviously I can say nothing more than that.

Q4. **Mr. Chris Smith** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 11 March.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Smith: If the Prime Minister is so proud of her Government's record on the Health Service——

Mr. Dickens: Rightly so.

Mr. Smith: If the Prime Minister is so wrongly proud of her Government's record on the Health Service, can she tell the House and the people of London why St. Thomas' hospital announced last night that it would be able to take only emergency cases from August, why Bloomsbury health authority is having to make major cuts in provision for my constituents and why 221 hospitals have closed in the past five years? Is that not the reality behind the misleading statistics she always uses?

The Prime Minister: On overall expenditure, as the hon. Gentleman is aware, this Government have an excellent record on the Health Service, the best record of any Government since the Health Service began. Being a London Member, the hon. Gentleman is aware that we who represent London constituencies have sometimes seen resources transferred from London to the north to increase facilities there. Does he object to such equality between the north and the south?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Has my right hon. Friend had time to consider the impending request by the European Commission for a £1 billion supplementary budget for 1986? Will she be sure to turn down such a request, as it breaches the financial discipline pledged to this House in return for the increase in VAT contributions?

The Prime Minister: We shall fight it hard, as we usually do. I agree with my hon. Friend that it is outside what we would expect and that we should not be expected to contribute even more to the European Community.

Q5. **Mr. Ewing** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 11 March 1985.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Ewing: Is the Prime Minister aware that over the past few years a great many people on all sides of the print and newspaper industry in Scotland have worked a great many hours to create good trade union-management relations, so that the Scottish newspaper industry has one of the best no strike records in Europe? In view of her readiness to condemn bad union practices, will she now condemn the absolutely suicidal management policies of Robert Maxwell, which have resulted in the removal of the Scottish *Daily Record* from the news stands today?

The Prime Minister: It is vital that the newspaper industry uses the latest technology. I remember visiting the offices of the *Glasgow Herald* on the paper's 200th anniversary, where the latest technology was being used without problems. I hope that the same will be true for the *Daily Record* after negotiations.

Written Answers

3.33 pm

Mr. Giles Radice (Durham, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I seek your guidance and protection against what I believe to be a deliberate misuse by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury of the system of written questions and answers to spread inaccurate information about the Labour party's spending proposals and about Labour's education plans, in particular.

In a written answer on 3 March, which appears in column 29 of *Hansard*, the Chief Secretary gave a calculation of the cost of the Labour party's spending proposals for schools. According to footnotes 17 and 18, he purported to be quoting from a press conference which I had given on 16 April 1985 and which was reported in *The Guardian* of the following day. I did not make the estimate contained in the Chief Secretary's written answer, nor did *The Guardian* report me as making that estimate. I should add that the Chief Secretary's estimate was five times greater than the proposals for increased spending which I actually made.

Could you advise me, Mr. Speaker, on how we can prevent the system of written questions and answers from being deliberately misused in this way?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member gave me notice of his intention to raise this matter on a point of order, and this has enabled me to look into it. I have already received a letter from the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) on the same subject, and have replied to it. What I wrote then to the right hon. Member I now say to the hon. Member.

The costing of a party's political programme and the accuracy or otherwise of that costing are matters for public debate. As Speaker, I have no place in that. The hon. Member has complained specifically about the Chief Secretary's costing of the official Opposition's proposals being published in *Hansard* which, he has said, gives authority to much erroneous matter. There are ample precedents for the policies of Opposition parties to be so costed. I can only advise the hon. Gentleman to make use of the ordinary procedures of the House to call Ministers to account.

Mr. Robin Maxwell-Hyslop (Tiverton): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Do I understand from your reply that, although you told the hon. Gentleman clearly that this matter was not a point of order, he insisted on raising it as a point of order?

Mr. Speaker: Not at all. I received a letter from the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook, who has not risen on this point of order.

Mr. Stuart Holland (Vauxhall): Accustomed as we are to Tory inflation, in that same parliamentary reply the Chief Secretary to the Treasury inflated the Labour party's commitment to the aid programme by 300 per cent. Surely there must be some redress to correct *Hansard* and to deny the impression given by the Government that the Labour party's programme is inflationary. We are delighted to increase the aid programme, but not on terms dictated by Ministers.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. We can complete this matter. There are ample parliamentary opportunities to deal with it—for example, during the Consolidated Fund debate later this week. These are not points of order for me.

Mr. Reg Freeson (Brent, East): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Although we accept your ruling about debates and exchanges on the costing of Opposition programmes, can you advise us what we can do, not about the costings as such, but about the publication of facts and figures attributed to documents which do not exist? I refer to item 13 in the answer concerned, in which it is stated, for example, that, according to a document published by the TUC, 125,000 new starts will be made in housing, although that figure does not appear in the document.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. These are not matters for me. I am in no way responsible for the answers that Ministers give.

Mr. Ian Gow (Eastbourne): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is it not clear that, in so far as my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary may have sinned, he may have underestimated the cost of the prolifigate policies of the Labour party?

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. In view of the fact that the Minister is not accountable for the Labour party's programme, costings or otherwise, was it not an abuse of the House to use the facility of written questions and answers? As for the cost of producing that answer, will the Minister now be surcharged and disqualified?

Mr. Speaker: As I said in my reply to the original point of order, there are ample precedents for Opposition programmes to be costed.

Dr. Oonagh McDonald (Thurrock): May I ask a question to clarify my mind about the nature and implications of your ruling, Mr. Speaker? Does your ruling imply that Ministers may use the columns of *Hansard* to give information which is known to be misleading, to both Parliament and the public? Is it not the case that written answers have a certain authority and are used by us in the House as the basis for our arguments and debates, as, indeed, they are used outside the House? What are the implications of your ruling?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Lady is asking me to adjudicate on whether the answer is correct. I have no knowledge of that. I cannot be held responsible, among my many other responsibilities, for answers that are given to questions.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I will take only two more points of order, one from each side of the House.

Mr. Michael Fallon (Darlington): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I wonder, without questioning your judgment, whether you are being sufficiently tolerant to the Opposition. At the time of the last Budget the shadow Chancellor called for an increase in public spending of £5 billion and his colleagues have subsequently called for an increase of £24 billion. Is it not inevitable that the dispute should have spread outside the shadow Cabinet across to these Benches?

Mr. Speaker: That is not a matter for me.

Mr. Willie W. Hamilton (Fife, Central): How can you, Mr. Speaker, or anybody else prevent the Government from telling lies?

Mr. Speaker: I will take the hon. Gentleman on a final point of order, but I cannot be held responsible for answers given in written answers to questions.

Mr. Roy Hattersley (Birmingham, Sparkbrook): I rise, Mr. Speaker, on a point of order to offer some sort of defence for the Chief Secretary. It is only fair to point out that, out of his 28 items, two are accurate—we propose to increase child benefit, and we propose to help the long-term unemployed.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow) *rose*——

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) *rose*——

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Ordered,

That European Community Document No. 6893/79, a proposal for a Council Directive on the approximation of the laws of the member States relating to self-propelled industrial trucks, be referred to a Standing Committee on European Community Documents.

That European Community Document No. 11387/84, a proposal for a Directive on making specific training for general medical practice mandatory in all member States of the Community, be referred to a Standing Committee on European Community Documents.—*[Mr. Archie Hamilton.]*

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Ordered,

That the draft Dental Auxiliaries Regulations 1986 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the Plant Breeders' Rights (Fees) (Amendment) Regulations 1986 (S.I., 1986, No. 339) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the Seeds (National Lists of Varieties) (Fees) (Amendment) Regulations 1986 (S.I., 1986, No. 338) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c. —*[Mr. Archie Hamilton.]*

Questions to Ministers

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. It arises out of defence questions. In your good judgment, Mr. Speaker, you called me twice to ask the same question concerning the visit of a most senior United States official to this country to obtain most sensitive information from British companies in relation to strategic defence initiative research. On the first question the answer from the Ministry of Defence was, more or less—I do not think I do it an injustice—that it had nothing to do with the visit and that it was not a matter for the Ministry. When, fortunately, you called me a second time to ask the same question, the Secretary of State for Defence said, yes, the Ministry was now asking for a report on the visit of Mr. Clarence Robinson. A very serious issue arises——

Mr. Speaker: Order. It appears to me that this is an extension of Question Time. The hon. Gentleman has put a point of order to me, but I have no knowledge of the gentleman.

Mr. Dalyell: This is a substantial issue. The point of order is whether Ministers should reveal the whole truth in answer to direct questions. For example, was Mr. Kenneth Hambledon sacked——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I do not know Mr. Kenneth Hambledon either. The answers to questions are not a matter for the Chair. The hon. Gentleman must not seek to embroil me in the answers to questions. Points of order must be on matters over which I have authority. I have no authority over whether this gentleman was invited to this country.

Mr. Dalyell: Is it within your recollection, Mr. Speaker, that you said on a previous occasion that you knew nothing of Miss Colette Bowe? Simply because you do not know that Mr. Kenneth Hambledon was sacked and removed as head of the SDI office does not mean that it is something which should not be explained to the House. Otherwise we will go ahead with the militarisation of space without elected Members of Parliament knowing what is going on.

Mr. Speaker: I think that the hon. Gentleman's points would make a very interesting debate under the Consolidated Fund. I will, try to be here then.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On a point of order——

Mr. Speaker: Is it a point of order on which I can rule?

Mr. Skinner: Yes, it is absolutely genuine. Now that your ruling has been made, Mr. Speaker, about the previous business, which I shall not speak about, as different points of view have been expressed, may I take it that it will now be in order for Labour Members to table questions to the Government asking for costings of the programmes of separate sections of the Tory party, the Liberal programme, the SDP programme, those sewn up between them, and of all other groups in Parliament? If, as you have said, it is in order to do what has already been done, it must be in order for us to expose the SDP, the Liberals and every wing of the Tory party.

Mr. Speaker: That is a hypothetical matter, but if questions are tabled about programmes, and the Government have had them costed, they would be perfectly in order.

Redundant Churches and other Religious Buildings (Amendment)

3.45 pm

Mr. Roger Freeman (Kettering): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to repeal section 2 of the Redundant Churches and other Religious Buildings Act 1969, to prevent the demolition of redundant Anglican churches without listed building consent.

As the law stands at present, it is possible for an Anglican church which is no longer required for ecclesiastical purposes to be demolished without listed building consent, provided, of course, that the demolition is following a scheme under the Pastoral Measure 1983. The purpose of my Bill is to change this procedure.

The exemption from the need for consent is a privilege that is enjoyed solely by the Church of England. All other church denominations must obtain listed building consent before they may demolish their churches. This is an anomaly that should not be allowed to continue. May I make it plain that my Bill proposes no changes to the procedure in regard to churches that are in use; it is addressed only to churches that have been declared redundant by the church authorities.

In the 1984 report of the Anglican Churches Faculty Jurisdiction Commission entitled "The Continuing Care of Churches and Cathedrals" it is stated:

"it does appear to us that there could be advantage to the Church as a whole if at the final stage after all the possibilities under the Pastoral Measure had been exhausted, and when the Commissioners had decided that there was no alternative but to demolish, the exemption were lifted and the building in question brought under the normal Listed Building Control".

I agree with the commission, and my Bill would implement its conclusions.

Under the present law, an objection to a proposed demolition can be lodged, but the Church Commissioners' statutory obligation to consult relates solely to the advisory board for redundant churches, which is a Church organisation. Therefore, if the Church Commissioners wish to demolish, there is nothing that the secular authorities can do.

The church of Holy Trinity in Rugby was a listed church which was recently demolished. Bowing to opposition to the proposed demolition of that grade I listed building, the Church Commissioners agreed to hold a non-statutory public inquiry. The inspector's report said that the church should not be demolished until all of the possibilities for re-use had been more extensively explored. My right hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine), then the Secretary of State for the Environment, went even further and said bluntly that Holy Trinity should not be demolished. Nevertheless, the Church Commissioners decided to ignore the recommendations—the inquiry was non-statutory, after all—and the church was demolished in June 1983.

Other examples of listed Anglican churches demolished include St. Edward Holbeck in Leeds, St. James's in Pentonville, London, and the Church of the Saviour in Bolton. I estimate that since Parliament passed the Redundant Churches and other Religious Buildings Act 1969, some 70 listed Anglican churches have been demolished.

There is a multitude of possibilities for the re-use of redundant churches. The redundant mediaeval churches at Orton and Little Oakley in my constituency of Kettering

are now used as training centres for stonemasons. The church at Newton, also in my constituency, is now used as an educational field centre for the training of schoolchildren. The example that hon. Members are probably most familiar with is the outstanding baroque church of St. John's in Smith Square, which is now a concert hall.

Re-use schemes such as those serve to preserve important church buildings while making them useful for the community. I believe that more churches would be thus treated if listed building consent were required before an Anglican church could be demolished. That is not to say that the statutory system for secular listed building control is perfect, but it has many strengths. Relying upon advocacy and public protest, the secular system allows the local authority, the amenity societies and the general public to challenge in an open inquiry anyone who wishes to demolish a listed building. Naturally, if the case for demolition is weak, the weaknesses will be revealed at the inquiry.

I believe that my Bill need have few, if any, financial implications for the taxpayer or for the Church. Of course, if we are to preserve more churches for the sake of architectural interest, the resources of the redundant churches fund which was set up by the Redundant Churches and other Religious Buildings Act 1969 will have to be increased. I believe that it could be increased through an appeal for public donations and not by an additional burden on the taxpayer, who already pays two thirds of the annual cost of replenishing the redundant churches fund, or, for that matter, by the Church which provides the balance. The redundant churches fund has hardly exploited its ability to raise money by public subscription and donations and should do so in future in order to maintain more redundant churches.

There is no reason today why redundant Anglican churches should continue to be treated differently from any other listed church or listed building because, after all, once redundant, the building is effectively secular. The present exemption from listed building control for redundant Anglican churches must be withdrawn to help to preserve those churches of England which constitute such an important part of our heritage. I believe that my Bill would go some way towards doing that.

My Bill is supported by all the national amenity societies: the Ancient Monuments Society, the Civic Trust, the Victorian Society, the Georgian Group, the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings and SAVE Britain's Heritage. It is also supported by the Association of District Councils and the Association of County Councils and by other bodies concerned with the care of churches, including Friends of Friendless Churches, the Royal Town Planning Institute, the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, the Council for the Care of Churches and the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England.

3.54 pm

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham) *rose——*

Mr. Speaker: Does the hon. Gentleman seek to oppose the motion?

Mr. Jessel: Please. I think that it should be put on record that there are some arguments against the Bill of my hon. Friend the Member for Kettering (Mr. Freeman), although I know that he means well.

In my constituency there is a redundant church, the church of St. Albans at Teddington. If my hon. Friend's Bill were to go on the statute book, the Church of England may be forced to find about £1 million to maintain the fabric of a redundant church for which it has no use when the living church has moved across the road to St. Mary's, Teddington. St. Mary's is an old and beautiful church with a flourishing congregation.

It does not seem right that the Church of England, which is in an exceptional position because it happens to have an exceptionally large number of churches through its heritage of church buildings—many of which are of architectural interest, but many of which are not — should be forced to provide such large sums instead of being able to devote all of its resources to the purposes of its ministry. Its purpose is not to serve as a public museum organisation, and if society and the community at large want redundant churches to be preserved they should find the resources through their own organisations — Parliament, Government, the ministries and local government—and not expect the Church of England to deplete the funds that might be used for missions, pensions for clergymen's widows and so on.

Therefore, I feel that my hon. Friend's Bill is not entirely reasonable, and I cannot support it.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Roger Freeman, Mr. Gerald Bowden, Mr. Andrew Faulds, Mr. Neil Hamilton, Mr. Simon Hughes, Mr. Roy Jenkins, Mr. Robert Rhodes James and Mr. Richard Wainwright.

REDUNDANT CHURCHES AND OTHER RELIGIOUS BUILDINGS (AMENDMENT)

Mr. Roger Freeman accordingly presented a Bill to repeal section 2 of the Redundant Churches and other Religious Buildings Act 1969, to prevent the demolition of redundant Anglican churches without listed building consent: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 18 April and to be printed. [Bill 103.]

European Community Shipping Policy

3.57 pm

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Nicholas Ridley): I beg to move,

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 5635/85, Communication by the Commission to the Council on progress towards a common transport policy in maritime transport; endorses the view that the instruments are necessary; and welcomes the United Kingdom's endeavours to encourage the adoption and implementation of these measures which will provide for a freely competitive shipping policy for the Community and the necessary powers to combat the growth of third country protectionism which damages or threatens to damage Community trade and the trading position of Community fleets.

This debate is both important and opportune. The package of measures attached to the Commission's communication 5635/85 represent the first steps towards a common European shipping policy. I shall be attending a Transport Council in Brussels on Friday to debate these measures and to try to conclude the negotiations on them. The Commission's memorandum covers a great deal of ground and the four draft regulations on countermeasures, freedom to provide services, competition, and unfair pricing practices together provide the essential tools for dealing with some, though not all, of the problems facing our own and other Community fleets.

In opening this debate, I shall concentrate on these four draft regulations, but I recognise that hon. Members will want to range wider than the regulations. The House will want to debate the whole question of the shipping industry, and I do not suggest that that would be out of order. With the leave of the House, therefore, Mr. Speaker, I shall reply both on these regulations and on the wider debate, if I have the good fortune to catch your eye again at the end of the debate.

I am sure that hon. Members will understand that this is not a good time for me to debate the shipping industry's taxation regime. We are only a week away from the Budget, and I am sure that I shall be forgiven if I avoid such matters.

However, before starting on the Community's shipping policy, I must refer to the question of British Ferries Sealink's access to Belgian ports, which has been mentioned in the House on more than one occasion. As this issue has not yet been resolved, my officials yesterday issued letters of consultation about the possible use of section 14 of the Merchant Shipping Act 1974 to restrict the access of the Belgian state ferry company—RMT—to United Kingdom ports. I am sure that this makes it clear how seriously I am taking this problem. I hope that BFS will now very quickly receive approval for the service which it wishes to operate.

Mr. Peter Rees (Dover): I apologise to my right hon. Friend for intervening so early in his speech. I welcome the news that a letter of consultation will be issued. May I take it that my right hon. Friend envisages at least the possibility of a comparable restriction on Belgian ferries to that imposed on all British ferries at the port of Zeebrugge to ensure a rough measure of reciprocity unless he receives a favourable reply from the Belgian authorities?

Mr. Ridley: The Merchant Shipping Act 1974 requires me to have a fortnight's consultation and I am embarking on that from today. I very much hope and believe that it will be possible to settle this matter quickly, and I strongly hope that it will not be necessary to make a restriction. I am sure that the Belgians will feel that it is more opportune that we should come to an agreement amicably and I will try to achieve that.

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the many friends of Belgium in this country will echo his last sentiment and hope that he is successful in his efforts. Is there not, however, a risk that if we ban Belgian ships from ports in this country they will retaliate by banning Townsend Thoresen ships from docking at ports in Belgium?

Mr. Ridley: I regard myself as being as good a friend of Belgium as anybody in the House. I hope and believe that it will now be possible to resolve the matter in a short time.

In Europe, we need to achieve two things. First, we need the Community to set its own house in order and to do away with restrictive laws which deny shipowners from one member state the opportunity to compete with shipowners from other member states on an equal footing. Secondly, the Community needs to arm itself with appropriate powers to deal with problems that arise as a result of protectionism or unfair practices in non-Community states. The draft regulations help a great deal in solving both problems. I shall discuss each in turn.

The first, annex II-1, is a draft regulation which provides for co-ordinated Community action, covering both diplomatic initiatives and counter-measures to deal with moves by third countries to restrict competitive access to ocean trades. The second, annex II-2, is a draft regulation creating a freedom to provide shipping services to, from, between and within member states. That regulation would open up Community cabotage trades—coastal trades—and deny member states the ability to operate bilateral cargo sharing agreements with third countries and to maintain cargo reservation laws.

The third, annex II-5, is a draft competition regulation that will give effect to the treaty of Rome's competition articles, and will provide the basis on which liner conferences will be exempted from the anti-cartel provisions of the treaty and the conditions which must be complied with if the exemption is to be enjoyed. The fourth, annex II-6, is a draft regulation providing for the imposition of a Community levy in cases where third country carriers are engaged in unfair pricing practices and thereby doing material damage to Community carriers.

I shall elaborate on each of the regulations.

Mr. Donald Stewart (Western Isles): Is the Secretary of State aware that there is something slightly unrealistic about this debate, and that if he was making his speech in two years' time there might not be any British mercantile marine to discuss? Have the Government addressed themselves to the serious erosion of the British merchant marine which has been going on for the past five years? In two years, we may have nothing to bargain with in the EEC.

Mr. Ridley: I do not think that the right hon. Gentleman heard what I said at the beginning of my speech. I said that I would be happy to respond to wider questions, but the right hon. Gentleman must now address himself to the full regulations which are before the House. The regulations are of material significance, and could greatly benefit the British merchant marine.

First, there is now a broad measure of agreement on the co-ordinated action regulation, with only a few detailed points still to be resolved. One of the points that concerned us originally was that a single member state could prevent action under the regulation if a unanimous decision of the Council was needed in order to instigate the joint action envisaged. However, one of the amendments to the treaty of Rome agreed at the Luxembourg summit last December was that the qualified majority voting procedures should apply to provisions for shipping. Although the summit decisions have still to be formally ratified by Parliaments of all member states, when they are, it will be possible for co-ordinated action under this draft regulation to be decided by qualified majority voting procedures, thus giving more flexibility and reducing the possibility of blocking by one member state.

The second regulation is the draft competition regulation—annex II-5. This has been under negotiation in Brussels for over three years. It is common ground both within the United Kingdom and throughout the Community that a regulation in this area is necessary, if only to resolve the legal uncertainty which currently surrounds international liner shipping, particularly liner conferences. The regulation vitally affects both shipowners and shippers and in recent weeks a number of changes have been negotiated to deal with points raised on both sides. I think that the balance struck between their disparate interests is now about right. We are a major shipping nation and an island that is more dependent on trade than on any other major industrial nation, and I am glad that the regulation upholds the conference system in a competitive environment, while adequately protecting the interests of shippers. There is now a broad measure of agreement on this draft regulation, although, as with the co-ordinated action regulation, there are still a few detailed points outstanding.

The third regulation — annex II-6 — to the memorandum is the unfair pricing practices regulation. Negotiations on this too have gone well. This is the instrument which will enable the Community to deal with the unfair competition and distortions of the market by the Soviet and other state trading shipping lines whose subsidised operations unfairly undercut the rates of the commercial Community lines. This regulation is in fact an anti-dumping regulation.

Incidentally, annexes II-3 and II-4 — the draft consultation decision and the draft directive on definition of "national shipping line"—need only a brief mention. Although we could support the draft consultation decision as it stands and the idea of a "national line" directive, neither we nor our European colleagues attach the same importance to these instruments as to the four draft regulations. So these two draft instruments are being laid on one side for the time being.

These three regulations are in an advanced state of negotiation. I believe that it will be possible for these to be approved by the Council within the next month or two. We have, however, made it clear to our Community partners that we want to see all four of the regulations brought into force together. This brings me to the fourth — the freedom to provide shipping services. Here negotiations are proving altogether more difficult.

We are particularly anxious to see the cabotage markets of all our European partners opened up to ships of all member states. The United Kingdom cabotage market is already open, but our shipowners have no access to the considerable trading opportunities along the coastlines of Italy, Greece and the Greek islands. Nor can a British ship delivering goods to Bordeaux and, going into Rotterdam, take on cargo from Bordeaux to Cherbourg en route as a French vessel can. This is a particularly wasteful loss of opportunity. I regret that there is still opposition to the principle of liberalisation of cabotage within the Community, particularly from Greece and Italy.

We have succeeded in coming to an informal bilateral agreement with the Federal Republic of Germany to enable our ships to participate in German cabotage, but we have been unable to interest Greece or France in a similar arrangement. There is also pressure for a long transitional period—as proposed in the Commission's draft—from Spain, Portugal, and France. Some member states are also trying to protect existing unilateral cargo reservation laws and bilateral cargo-sharing agreements. We are trying to get these phased out, or, at the least, to ensure that any that are allowed to continue should be specifically agreed by the Council. These are important issues. It is particularly intolerable that our cabotage should be open to all, whereas half the Community close their cabotage to us.

Soon we will have to decide whether to continue to fight for this regulation against such substantial opposition. We have three options. First, we might succeed in getting the principle of open cabotage and no cargo reservation accepted but with so many derogations that the concession would be worth little to our shipping industry. Second, we could seek a ruling from the European Court of Justice on the principle of closed cabotage and cargo reservation, which seems to us to be in direct conflict with the right of establishment firmly embodied in the treaty. Thirdly, we could abandon the campaign for open trading within Europe and ask Parliament to give us powers to close our own coastline.

We must make our decision against the background that all the member states, including ourselves, want to agree the other three regulations and get this urgently needed Community shipping policy off the ground. There is much of value in those regulations, particularly in the ability they will give the Community to stand together to resist protectionism and unfair practices.

Mr. Bruce Millan (Glasgow, Govan): Why do all four regulations have to stand together?

Mr. Ridley: The other nine member states very much want the first three regulations to be adopted.

Mr. Millan: What do we want?

Mr. Ridley: We want all four regulations to be adopted. If we continue to insist on the fourth regulation, we may not get the first three. That is the dilemma.

On the other hand, to depart from the principle that all four measures should be introduced together would in itself be a major shift in our position. The General Council of British Shipping has already said to me, keen though it is on the freedom to provide services regulations, that we should not drag out the negotiations on them indefinitely, thereby losing the advantage of the other three regulations. I shall, of course, consult the council closely in the weeks ahead.

The four regulations are all directed towards ensuring the fullest possible competition on trades within, to and from the Community. In the future, with the regulations in force, we should be in a much stronger position, on a Community-wide basis, to defend our shipping interests.

4.11 pm

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): I was disappointed when the Secretary of State said that he would concentrate on the regulations and then said that he would be glad to respond at the end of his speech to the wider issues which were bound to be canvassed in the debate. That was a negative approach. Instead of asking us for questions to which he could respond, the right hon. Gentleman should have stated the Government's policy on merchant shipping. We could then have decided for ourselves whether that policy was adequate and whether there were deficiencies or gaps. We could have constructively criticised the Government's policies. However, the right hon. Gentleman ducked the issue by saying that he would respond to questions. The truth is that the Secretary of State has no shipping policy. That is why he has left the answers until the end of the debate. He hopes that our constructive debate will give him some clues on how to proceed. The problem is that the shipping policy of the Secretary of State is basically to leave everything to free market forces. The Government do not intervene. That is the same as not having a shipping policy.

As the Secretary of State referred at the beginning of his speech to his action on Sealink, I shall refer to Sealink now rather than later as I had intended. The Secretary of State has said that he has now taken preliminary steps under section 14 of the Merchant Shipping Act 1974 to take reciprocal action against the Belgian state ferry company—RMT—based on the fact that there have been restrictions against our rightful shipping interests. I was astonished to hear the hon. Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel) ask whether, if we took this action, there was a danger that the Belgians would reciprocate. It is precisely because the Belgians have taken this action against us that we have taken reciprocal action against them.

Sealink British Ferries got in touch with the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers, of which I am a member, and asked the unions to have a discussion with me on the problems faced by Sealink. Effectively, the Belgian port authorities are trying to freeze Sealink—first, freezing Sealink out of Ostend and then refusing to give Sealink right of access to Zeebrugge.

I should like to put on record my appreciation to the Secretary of State for his responses both in writing and when I took a deputation of trade unions to see him. I pay tribute to the way in which he has taken the matter extremely seriously. The right hon. Gentleman and his staff in the Department of Transport have done a lot of work trying to resolve this problem without resorting to this action. I think that at times the right hon. Gentleman may have been irritated by the way in which I constantly pressed him to take action under sections 14 and 15 of the Merchant Shipping Act. I think that he is as irritated as I am with the way in which the case which we have been jointly prosecuting has not been helped by Sealink's apparent prevarication about its needs.

I found it difficult to accept that, when the Belgian port authorities asked for an operating plan, Sealink said that it would take between a week and a fortnight to produce such a plan. I began to form the conclusion that Sealink was not serious about serving Zeebrugge. I was so concerned about that possibility that I wrote directly to Mr. Sherwood asking for an assurance that he intended to maintain passenger services. The Secretary of State had already told me in answer to a private notice question that there was a possibility that Sealink would change its mind. Last week, I wrote again to Mr. Sherwood saying that the threat of redundancies due at the end of this week would have to be withdrawn before we could give any further support to taking reciprocal action.

I am not sure whether the Secretary of State will make use of a section 14 order or of a section 15 order. I think that a section 15 order would allow him to prevent RMT from serving British ports for 90 days without reference to the authority of Parliament. The advantage of using that provision is that we would not have to extend the parliamentary process before the application. I understand that a section 14 order would require parliamentary approval before coming into effect. I hope that the Secretary of State will tell us which order he will use. I would prefer the immediate measure. I normally do not ask for orders to be brought into effect without Parliament first having discussed them but, in these circumstances, it may be necessary to take this action to concentrate the minds of Sealink and of the Belgian port authorities. Hon. Members should remember that 60 per cent. of the port of Zeebrugge is owned by the Belgian Government, which is why we can use sections 14 and 15 of the Merchant Shipping Act.

On Thursday, the Secretary of State will meet the Belgian Minister of Transport. I am not sure whether that will be a wholly convivial occasion or whether some work will be done beforehand. I invite the right hon. Gentleman to raise this issue sharply with the Belgian Minister. The right hon. Gentleman can say without any equivocation that he has the backing of the whole House in taking this action, if necessary.

I hope that it will not be necessary to take this action. I should prefer it if the matter were resolved, if Sealink could start operating its services and if the threat to seafarers' jobs were removed without coercion. If there is coercion, wider co-operation may be made more difficult in the future. I hope that the saga involving Sealink and Belgium which has haunted me for the past three months will soon end.

Mr. Peter Rees: The hon. Gentleman has referred to the way in which Sealink has conducted negotiations. Does the hon. Gentleman recognise that, although the St. David has been switched to the Stranraer route, another ferry, the Votigern, could easily operate in and out of Zeebrugge, apart from any freight services that Sealink operates from Dunkirk?

Mr. Hughes: It is true that Sealink wishes to operate the Vortigern, which is a combined freight and passenger vessel.

I come to the substantive point of the debate. I apologise if I have commented on Sealink for too long. In examining these European Commission documents, we should look at the background. There is no doubt that the background is the disastrous decline in the British shipping fleet. In 1975, just a decade ago, there were 1,833 ships registered in the United Kingdom, representing 32·1 million gross registered tons. By 1980 the total had gone down to 1,358. At the end of 1985 it had reduced to 600. It is estimated by trade union sources that by the end of this year the fleet will have gone down to 300, half its present size. That means that since 1975 there will have been a reduction from 1,833 to 300.

That dire forecast of only 300 ships is not fully accepted by some analysts. However, even the General Council of British Shipping, the organisation representing owners, forecasts the size of the fleet at the end of this year as 400. Whichever figures one accepts — and trade union forecasts have proved extremely reliable in the past— for a maritime nation so dependent on international trade such figures must cause everyone to be concerned. Even the Government, who seem to accept with equanimity the decline in manufacturing industry, must be concerned at the peril which faces us as an island trading nation.

The defence capacity of the nation is severely threatened. The Government could not mount another Falklands campaign with the projected or even the present size of the fleet, not that I want to see another Falklands exercise. Very few hon. Members want that; I do not think that even the Prime Minister wants it. Nevertheless, the fleet has fallen to such a small number that should such a need arise again, there is no possibility of mounting such an exercise. I find it hard to accept that from time to time Government Ministers accuse us of being unpatriotic when, by their actions, they have been much more unpatriotic than we have ever been in anything we have said or done.

Mr. Richard Ottaway (Nottingham, North): I share the hon. Gentleman's concern about the defence of the nation. No doubt he will be interested to know, despite the Secretary of State's public statements inside and outside the House, that when there was a naval exercise off Norway last week it was necessary to charter Danish vessels to move British troops and stores to Norway. That happened despite the assurances that we could mount another Falklands campaign.

Mr. Hughes: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. That disproves the old adage that one should never give way. I was not aware of what the hon. Gentleman has told us; I am grateful to him for drawing it to the attention of the House. That shows that hon. Members in all parts of the House are concerned about the size of the British fleet. The right hon. Member for Taunton (Sir E. du Cann), whom I am glad to see in his place, raised the issue with the Prime Minister on 4 March. He asked:

"Will my right hon. Friend look again at the figures for the appalling decline in Britain's merchant fleet? Is she aware that hon. Members in all parts of the House are now desperately concerned about this matter and its implications, both for our defence policy and economically?"

He pointed out:

"More than 80 per cent. of British trade is now carried in ships with foreign flags."

He asked the Prime Minister to do something about it. The Prime Minister's response was woefully inadequate. Indeed, my hon. Friend the Member for Wigan (Mr. Stott) wrote to her the next day to point out the full facts and to advise her that she was excessively naive. That was not overstressing it.

The other issue that concerns us as much as the economic effect of the fall in fleet capacity is the job losses for seafarers. Many thousands of seafarers have been beached because of the number of ships laid up. The threat to seafarers' jobs is compounded by the growth of the pernicious practice of registering under flags of convenience. When that happens, inevitably there is pressure to reduce manning levels and wages, to reduce or extinguish trade union rights and to replace British crews by Third world crews with much reduced wages and conditions. I do not know whether the Secretary of State approves of the practice but perhaps we can find a clue to the Government's attitude if we read the Prime Minister's answer on 4 March; I shall quote part of it:

"the important thing for the future of our merchant marine is to ensure that British shipping can compete with the fleets of other nations on costs. That is one of the problems." — [*Official Report*, 4 March 1986; Vol. 93, c. 151-52.]

That says simply that it does not matter under what flag British shipping is registered, what conditions the crews have or whether they have trade union rights; it does not matter whether Third world crews are exploited so long as the merchant fleet can make money. In the Prime Minister's view, that is the beginning and end of the matter.

The Government will claim that many of the problems have arisen because of the recession in world trade. I do not deny that. We cannot consider a merchant shipping policy seriously without accepting that there has been a decline in world trade. The oft-repeated refrain from the Government in reply to charges about their failure to have any economic objective for the protection of any part of British industry is that it is not their fault. Their excuse is that the problem is caused by external forces and that they have had nothing to do with it. They say that they have to sit back passively and accept the position.

One of the major causes of the decline in the British fleet and its aging nature is that the Government have reduced and extinguished tax incentives for the depreciation of write-offs. The fleet of the EEC is also aging; only Italy and Greece have older ships than Britain. The General Council of British Shipping is seeking help from the Government in the Budget. The Secretary of State said that he would not answer any questions about fiscal policy when we are only a week away from the Budget. Nevertheless, I ask him to take seriously the cry for help and to use the new cloak of Cabinet responsibility, which has suddenly returned to the British political scene, to make an input into the Cabinet about assistance for British shipowners.

I want to enter one or two caveats about my support for the British merchant fleet. Any incentive given to British shipowners should be to build new vessels. Shipbuilding is going through a very difficult period. If I may be parochial for a moment, there is a shipyard in my constituency, not a big one in British terms or in world terms. It employs 650 people whereas about a year ago it employed 1,000. It is facing a great threat to its existence directly because of Government policy over privatisation. In their anxiety to privatise profitable yards, the Government said that they would privatise naval yards. Because of that, naval yards can no longer have access to the intervention fund for merchant shipbuilding even if they can get orders. The Minister should take note of that. We have pressed hard to get ships built in Britain. We need a full programme spread over several years.

Mr. Don Dixon (Jarrow): Does my hon. Friend not agree that it should be a condition of any incentive that ships should be built in this country? Should we not take note of what Japanese shipowners have done? No Japanese shipowner has built a ship outside Japan since 1947.

Mr. Hughes: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. He has anticipated me by about one sentence, but I am none the less grateful for that because it reinforces the point that I was making, which is that we need a full programme,

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spread over a number of years, to replace the fleet. But I want to see those ships built in the United Kingdom, not abroad. I want it to be made a condition of any assistance that is given to the building of ships that those ships should be built in Britain.

I know that the Minister will say that to tie aid to British shipyards would be contrary to EEC rules, because that is what he and his predecessors, whether in his Department or the Department of Trade and Industry, have said before. Sometimes I despair of the Government. They are busily playing cricket by the old rules, but we know perfectly well that our European partners in shipbuilding are bypassing them with hidden subsidies in the form of generous tax relief of one kind or another. No Labour Member, and I suspect few Conservative Members, will lend their support to taxpayers' money going to buy ships built abroad.

Dr. M. S. Miller (East Kilbride): Is it not also important that ships should be manned by British crews?

Mr. Hughes: If we go on like this, the House may be under some delusion that my hon. Friends have written my speech for me, because that is another point to which I am coming.

I would not lend my support to the case which has been put forward by the General Council of British Shipping that taxpayers' money should be used to buy second-hand ships laid up abroad at distress prices. That is unacceptable. We should also be certain that any tax incentives for shipowners should not only apply to shipbuilding in Britain but should ensure that the ships are crewed by British subjects under proper conditions with full trade union rights and participation.

We need a fully thought-out shipping policy and the EEC regulations go nowhere near to matching that need. The regulations have clearly been under discussion for a long time and the Government, and indeed the Commission, have still not got them right. However, having said that, I had better say—not simply because it will be read in *Hansard*, but because I believe it—that I am making no criticism of the EEC commissioner who deals with these matters. He was a distinguished Minister in the Department of Industry and in that office did a lot for British shipping. He has a clear concern for shipping matters and for the people who sail our ships, but I know that he and the Commission are under constraints, not the least of which is the Government's approach to the matters.

Annex II-2 clearly states that

"Restrictions on freedom to provide sea transport services within the Community shall be abolished by 1 July 1986".

The Minister said that there were a number of different way in which we might proceed. We might proceed down the road laid out in the document, which is that for certain classes of trade there is to be a derogation—a phasing-out for five years. But, more importantly, cabotage shall end 10 years from 1 July 1986. But even that is qualified. Each time we look at the document we see further and further qualifications. If any member state for whom that applied found that it created particular difficulties, the matter might then extend beyond 10 years. In a delightfully elegant and vague phrase, it says that the phasing-out period

"shall not apply where its application would cause particular difficulties."

That completely negates the purpose of the regulation. I happen to agree with the Minister on this. There is a case for ending cabotage and there is a case for increasing cabotage, but there is no case for continuing the existing rules and for phasing-out over 10 years because while that is going on our merchant fleet will decline further. We shall still be refused access to those countries which operate cabotage rules and at the end of the 10 years nothing will be left.

Cabotage is necessary and I would much rather go down the road of saying that we should apply cabotage in the United Kingdom. There is no doubt that cabotage is necessary to stabilise the already too narrow base of our fleet. Once it is stabilised we must use cabotage and many other methods to broaden the base of our fleet.

The problem with the regulation—I hope that I have misread it but I suspect that I have not—is that it will make it difficult for us, or indeed any other EC maritime nation not using cabotage, to erect new cabotage rules after 1 July this year. Not only does the regulation make it more difficult for our fleet in the next 10 years, but it removes our right to bring in cabotage rules for our country and that is something that we cannot possibly accept. I should tell the House that the next Labour Government firmly intend to use cabotage for the British fleet.

Annex II-4 seeks to define a national shipping line. As I read it, there are three criteria. Article 1, paragraph 2, says:

"(a) the management head office must be situated and the effective control exercised in a Member State;
(b) the executive board must consist of persons the majority of whom are nationals of Member States;
(c) the company shares must effectively be controlled through a majority shareholding by nationals of Member States who have their domicile or registered office in one of the Member States."

That almost reads as though there would be total control within a member state of the EC. But there is nothing in the document so far as I can see about the use of nominee shareholders, which would certainly be a way of getting round paragraph (c). There is nothing at all about a ship being registered in the member state. Therefore, the vessels and the crews will not be subject to EC safety standards. That will not help the EC fleet and it will certainly not help our fleet.

Annex II-6 deals with unfair competition. Under the regulations as they are published, only the shipowner may complain about unfair trading practices. Why should not the trade unions involved in shipping matters be allowed to complain to the Commission about unfair trading practices? After all, they have a much more personal and direct interest in unfair trading practices than the owners.

I want to refer briefly to safety, which is a matter of great importance. The most recent figures show that British ships have serious accident rates. The incidence of fatal accidents for personnel in British ships is 35 times that of manufacturing, six times that of construction, and four times that of coal mining. In other words, there is still a great need for safety on ships, for training, and for care of the people who sail in the ships.

In addition, we must be concerned about the total loss of ships through accidents. From 1970 to 1974, 355 ships were lost in the world. From 1975 to 1979, 391 ships were lost. From 1980 to 1983, 237 ships were lost. That is a serious matter, about which we should be concerned. There is clearly a relationship between the age of the vessels and their loss. In fact, 22 per cent. of vessels lost

were over 25 years old in 1983, but only 5 per cent. were less than five years old. While there is that direct link, that is not the only issue. It is not a simple straightforward matter of the age of the ships and their loss, because old ships are running about the seas perfectly well managed causing no safety hazard, but there is a clear correlation between the way in which ships are managed and the risks which are being taken.

It is a matter of serious concern that the record of losses in world fleets has shown no real improvement in the last 20 years. Given that there has been a massive explosion of technology and of available information and so on, all this must make us wonder what is happening.

This leads us to ask how many ships are being lost because of fraud, how many are being deliberately sunk to get the insurance money from them. I believe that this is causing a great deal of concern not only in this country but throughout the EEC, and I am sure that the Commission is worried. I wish to ask the Government what they are doing about it, what investigations they are undertaking, and what pressure they are applying to ensure that the issue of fraud is taken much more seriously.

One matter not mentioned in the documents which we need to consider seriously is the problem of world-wide services, that is, the issue of ships carrying such large containers that they can undercut prices and sail all over the world carrying container traffic. Two shipping lines are causing concern, Evergreen Shipping, which is sailing out of Taiwan, and United States Lines, sailing out of the United States. There are grounds for at least suspicion that the kind of rates being charged suggest that a very heavy subsidy is being paid on the operations by Taiwan. This needs to be examined closely.

The Minister has said that the regulations deal with the threat from the Russian fleet. He is apparently prepared to act against the Russians and to say openly—I am not sure that he is on firm ground, but there is certainly cause for concern—that the Russians are dumping, but he is not prepared to say that the Taiwanese and the Japanese are dumping in regard to their shipping practices. I think the Minister should look at that closely. He should tell us what he is going to do. He should not rest behind the fact that there exists a series of regulations which it has taken a long time to bring together.

The regulations represent not the maximum but the lowest common denominator of what can be wholly agreed by the member states, even bringing into play the fact that the most recent changes in community law make it possible to decide these things by majority vote instead of unanimously.

Mr. Dixon: With regard to the Japanese, I have a letter from the managing director of Stephenson Clarke Shipping in which he says:

"The British Merchant Navy is competitive in crew costs with most Western fleets and the Japanese."

Mr. Hughes: The problem is that different voices say different things. When the National Union of Seamen asks for better pay, it is constantly told that its members are not competitive. I believe that we are competitive and that we give a first-class service.

The Minister and Government believe wholly and solely in the operation of free market forces and are unwilling to act even when the facts of decline are staring them in the face. Despite the work that has gone on in the Commission's deliberations, the documents do not match up to the full extent of the problems that the EEC fleet has to face, far less our own fleet. What we must and will have is a full policy for shipbuilding to reverse the disastrous decline both in the fleet and in shipbuilding. I wish to goodness that we on the Opposition Benches had the opportunity to put our plans into operation now instead of relying on the present untrustworthy Government.

4.44 pm

Sir Edward du Cann (Taunton): In his interesting opening to the debate, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said that it was important and timely. I think that he could have put it more strongly. The subject of the debate is, I think, of the greatest importance to the economic and defence well-being of our nation. The situation we have to face is undeniably critical. But timely the debate certainly is, for it is appropriate that the view of the House should be solicited before my right hon. Friend has his discussions in Brussels, in which we wish him every success. I thought that he was entirely right when he said that it is appropriate that, in the course of the debate, we should discuss the context in which these discussions will be held.

The hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes) said by implication that we should use the occasion to ensure that we develop the House's thinking in relation to policy. I agree with that. I think it appears to many people outside the House, as it does to many of us in the House, that there is a vacuum on policy. It is to that aspect of our affairs that I shall endeavour to direct my remarks.

On more than one occasion I have expressed my deep concern at the decline of British maritime strength. The hon. Member for Aberdeen, North was good enough to quote one example of that, when I put a question to the Prime Minister a week ago. The statistics are well known. The hon. Member for Aberdeen, North gave some of them. In 1975 there were some 1,600 ships of 500 gross tonnage or above on the British register. By 1985 the figure was down to some 600, and now it is probably less. Our merchant fleet in effect is the smallest that it has been this century. That is the situation over which we in this House preside and of which, I believe, we should be ashamed.

We have no distant water trawler fleet. Only 44 per cent. of offshore supply vessels are UK-owned. The number of seafarers, of men employed in the sea trades, continues to fall. It was 140,000 or thereabouts at the outbreak of war, it is 30,000 today, and it will be less tomorrow. Then there is the lack of profitability of British ship-owning companies.

The implications, both economic and from the defence point of view, are serious indeed. As the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North reminded us, 80 per cent. of United Kingdom exports now are carried in non-British ships. There is thus an immense potential for economic and political blackmail.

I believe that the advantages of what is called the cab rank policy—that is, that those in Britain who wish to send goods by sea will get a price advantage if there are ships queueing up for their business — are purely temporary and are likely to be illusory. We have lost some £2 billion per annum in invisible earnings. Not only have we lost much direct employment, but we have lost much more indirect employment in the ship-related industries of

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this country: shipbuilding—which hardly exists today—ship repairing, the other marine trades, engineering, technology, finance, insurance and so on.

All this is bad enough—desperate enough, I would say—but when one examines the situation in defence terms, the picture is horrendous. As the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North pointed out, it is indeed doubtful whether we could mount another Falklands operation. We simply do not have the ships now to engage in a local conflict of that sort. It is no good my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, for whom I have the deepest respect and affection, saying that all is for the best in this best of all possible worlds. It simply is not so. I do not know what advice she is receiving, but, if it is advice which leads her to that conclusion, I can only say that, in my view, it is wrong.

When one examines the situation which might exist in general conflicts, the supply and replenishment of this nation in wartime would be quite impossible. In his deadly intervention, my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Ottaway) made that abundantly clear.

As the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North pointed out, it is a paradox that both the enemies of the free world and the most violent advocates of free trade are making common cause against the interests of this nation. He rightly said that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport is proposing action against the one. In my view, however, one cannot have a left without a right. Therefore, it is appropriate that action should be proposed against the other.

The House knows that a parliamentary maritime affairs group has been established on an all-party basis to alert public opinion about this serious matter and to endeavour to propose practical action to remedy it.

What is to be done? I maintain my view that it would be right for the Government to appoint a single Minister to be in charge of maritime affairs. I remember, as do other right hon. and hon. Members, that when Winston Churchill found that it was essential to get aircraft built during the war, he swept away the obstacles in order to get the job done. He appointed Beaverbrook, who was provided with a clear remit and given power. One person was provided with all the necessary authority, which meant that the job got done. The situation is so serious today that a similar dramatic remedy is needed.

There is other action that we can take unilaterally, especially action of a fiscal nature. However, it is an international problem. It involves the changing patterns of world trade and the ambitions of some developing nations that involve them in protectionism. They have national aspirations with which one can sympathise but to which bodies that ought to know better — for example, the United Nations — give too much practical backing. There also is a great deal of economic opportunism. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State also referred to the attitude of the Soviet Union, which is that maritime transport is a most significant economic and political asset that has to be exploited.

All of this means one simple fact: that, because of an excessive number of ships, with too many ships chasing too few cargoes, there is a real world problem. If it were not for money being too readily made available at the wrong rates of interest to finance shipbuilding, there would probably be no problem at all. It is absolutely clear that the traditional concept of free and fair competition in world shipbuilding terms is currently at stake. Some would say that it does not exist.

To mitigate that problem and to resolve it, international co-operation is needed. Where better to launch it, one might think, than in the European Community? The European Community is by far the world's largest trading bloc. It generates 25 per cent. of world trade. It has an enormous population of 320 million. Through the ports of the European Community there is handled, by weight, twice the volume of that of the United States and three times the volume of that of Japan. Therefore, it seems to me that the overwhelming issue for all member states of the Community is to ensure that it maintains sufficient maritime strength to prevent the domination of maritime transport in its waters by its competitors' fleets.

Dr. M. S. Miller (East Kilbride): Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that Britain's status as a maritime nation even antedates the industrial revolution position occupied by Britain and that if we want to recover some of the aspects of our maritime authority and power the Government should step in and ensure that that happens?

Sir Edward du Cann: I accept both of those points at once and without reservations of any kind.

If the objective of the European Community ought to be to ensure that its maritime strength is maintained, that is not what it is doing. Western Europe's shipping, in terms of gross registered tonnage, has been reduced by approaching one third in the last decade, while ships that are registered under flags of convenience, or in the Pacific basin, or by COMECON continue to increase. It is clear, therefore, that the situaton will not be self-adjusting and that action is urgently needed to reverse the trend of decline.

In this context we have these documents. I say at once that this first attempt to develop a comprehensive Community maritime policy is to be welcomed. As the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North said, it has taken a long time to produce, but, alas, I am sorry to say that, in my opinion, for what it is worth, it is on the whole a disappointment. Its recognition of the dependence of the European Community on maritime transport is a good beginning. I do not deny that the policy contains many useful features, but its failures are more significant: they are these.

What the objectives of that policy should properly be are not defined. As I have tried to show, given the already stated dependence of the European Community on maritime trade, it follows that no important element of the means of conducting that trade should be in the hands of economic or strategic competitors. To put it briefly, I believe that the essential aim of the European Community's policy should therefore be to retain control of its maritime transport system. Nor does it help that the European Community's policy has to be co-ordinated between a number of separate directorates, in just the same way as it falls into the laps of different Ministries in the United Kingdom. I truly believe that it is no blueprint for prompt and effective action to perpetuate diffused responsibilities.

It seems to me that in two significant respects these papers lack a practical approach. The most important immediate objective must surely be to create a business climate in which member states' businesses owning

merchant fleets can operate and prosper, for the reality is that if profits cannot be made by shipowners they will go out of business and stay out of business. That economic fact of life is, apparently, largely unrecognised in Brussels. I hope that my right hon. Friend will ensure that more emphasis is laid upon that fact.

Nor, I believe, are the realities of competing internationally, when costs or taxation levels are different in the European Community from those of our competitors, apparently comprehended. That is another serious weakness in these papers. Indeed, I go further and say that there is a culpable omission. The papers do not deal in any detail with the problem of Government subsidies to the shipbuilding industries—the point that the hon. Member for East Kilbride (Dr. Miller) made in his intervention. That is the root of the problem, but it is not mentioned at all in these papers. My view is that the European Community should make a strong contribution to the debate on this subject and get that debate going on a worldwide basis. I hope that my right hon. Friend will be successful in provoking that debate.

It is right that the papers insist that state aid should not distort competition between Community shipowners, but it is a second serious omission that the papers do not discuss the type of fiscal regime that would enable the European Community's shipping companies to compete on equal terms with companies in other parts of the world. Again, that is a practical matter, to which we should address our minds. As careful students of the European Community and its ways may think, such omissions are, perhaps, not surprising. The treaty of Rome is on the whole an inward-looking domestic document. It follows, perhaps inevitably, that more emphasis is placed in these papers on freedom of movement inside the Community than on wider considerations. I believe that the emphasis in the documents is wholly wrong, and that is why they are so disappointing.

I thought that one of the arguments in favour of Britain joining the Community was that we would be able to bring a new breadth of outlook to its affairs. Indeed, I hope that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will dedicate himself to doing that. There is, after all, so much that the European Community could and should be doing that is constructive. For example, it could create conditions, standards and training that would encourage young people to serve at sea; it could encourage the adoption of better technology aimed at reducing operating costs; it could develop comprehensive traffic management systems to improve standards of safety and navigation; it could take collective measures to reduce pollution and other incidents. Perhaps most importantly, the Community could be directing its actions to areas of international policy where its enormous collective strength as the world's largest trading bloc could ensure the compliance of non-member states and their fleets with fair rules of behaviour, including commercial and Government practices, technical and crew standards and conditions of employment. But alas such things are not mentioned, despite the fact that this is the first definitive document to come out of the Community and that we have waited so long for it.

It is time for an end to rhetoric, generalisations about competition policy and the like. The nation and the Community face a crisis. The position is deteriorating.

Ministers, especially our Ministers with all their experience, have great responsibilities, but they live up to them. I am sure that it is possible to identify and largely to eliminate the causes that force owners to flag out their ships or to go out of business. Let it be done. I am also sure that it is possible to reduce those high cost elements within our domestic control that prevent European shipowners from competing profitably internationally. Let that be done, too.

We have great strength in the EC—we should use it. I thought that another practical reason for joining the EC was the advantage that we were told combination would bring us—in other words, by joining with other nations the United Kingdom would acquire more influence and benefit. Of course, we know that assurances over EC affairs are often far from the reality. Let hon. Members look at our experience over budgetary controls. I believe that the House has been most grievously misled in this regard. However, that is a matter that we should pursue on other occasions.

Those of us who want to see the Community succeed now that the decision has been taken to sign the treaty of Rome find it worrying that we simply do not go for such potential advantages and seem unwilling to exploit them. As a result, the whole country seems to think that there is nothing but disadvantage to this adventure. That is not, I am sure, what the most passionate advocates of signing the treaty of Rome expected.

Why is there so little argument or pressure to maximise the advantages? There should surely be more. As has been said, in trying to obtain advantage from our membership of the EC no subject is more important than that of cabotage. My hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Sir D. Price), who is no mean expert on this subject, has been pressing the point for a long time.

Our home waters now stretch from the Baltic to the Aegean. If Turkey joins the EC, the Black sea will also be included. There is a thought. Australia and New Zealand reserve their cabotage. The Latin American free trade area countries reserve their cabotage, and so does the United States of America under the Jones Act of 60 years ago. The latter's waters stretch from Guam in the Pacific to Alaska via Hawaii and the Caribbean. They cover an immense area. I merely say that we should do the same, and thereby provide a home base upon which to build prosperity.

I very much agree with what the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North said and with what I thought my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State was hinting at. If we cannot get a Community policy, we should go it alone. We should refuse to have in our waters the ships of those nations that refuse us access to theirs. It is time that we were a little more selfish in pursuing our own interests, and a little less sympathetic to the other fellow's point of view.

It is surely right to say that if action of a more imaginative kind is not taken by the Community in order to defend its interests, we face the prospect of an EC merchant fleet that will continue to decline. Equally, the prospects for ancillary industries will be bleak. That would be quite unacceptable to me, to most hon. Members, as well as to our nation and the peoples of the Community. We need a much greater sense of urgency and determination than we have so far seen. I hope with all my heart that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, an old personal friend of mine for whom I have such regard, will set an example. I look to him to provide that determination and urgency. It is all there to win, and the cause should be won.

[Sir Edward du Cann]

The way things are going is nothing short of a scandal. We seem wholly to lack the resolution, strength of purpose and idealism to defend the interests of our people. I repeat that that situation is wholly unacceptable to me. I hope with all my heart that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will change it very much for the better.

5.6 pm

Mr. Bruce Millan (Glasgow, Govan): I am glad to speak after the right hon. Member for Taunton (Sir E. du Cann) because I agreed with many of his remarks. Indeed, I think that most of them found an echo on the Opposition side of the Chamber.

So far, the debate has been wide ranging, but I wish to make some fairly limited though extremely important points about the regulation on free trade within the Community, which is included in annex II-2. I also wish to set my remarks in the context of the deepening crisis in our shipping industry. The figures are included in the Commission document, although unfortunately they only go as far as 1983. It is clear that, between 1975 and 1983, United Kingdom fleet tonnage fell from 32·18 million tonnes to 18·18 million tonnes. That catastrophic decline is still going on. Although I am not sure of the current figure, it must be nearer 12 million tonnes than 18 million tonnes.

Between 1975 and 1983 there was not a corresponding reduction in the Community's tonnage. It remained virtually the same, dropping from 94 million in 1975 to 93 million in 1983. The reduction in the British fleet was made up by a considerable expansion in Greece's tonnage. Greece is now a member of the Community and is one of the countries that reserves total coastal trade to its own ships.

Thus, the reduction that we have suffered has not been repeated elsewhere in the Community. There has been some decline in other countries, and the position has certainly deteriorated since 1983, but the fact remains that the British fleet declined considerably during that period and is still declining. It causes considerable worry to Members on both Opposition and Government Benches. It has been met with constant complacency on the part of the Government. That complacency was reflected in the attitude of the Secretary of State for Transport in his speech this afternoon. It affects jobs, strategic interests and defence interests, specifically in relation to maritime operations. It also has important implications for the shipbuilding industry, in which I have a strong constituency interest through Govan Shipbuilders, one of the best merchant yards in the United Kingdom but one which is suffering from an appalling lack of orders at present which, if not remedied soon, will mean further redundancies later this year.

There are therefore several aspects to this debate because it goes beyond the shipping industry and involves defence, strategic interests, the future of our shipbuilding industry and the rest.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will not go too far down that road, because shipbuilding is not within the compass of our debate.

Mr. Millan: You will find, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I do not intend to go down that road at all, even though practically everyone else has, including the Minister. If I may say so, the right hon. Gentleman made a virtue of it in his opening speech, which I think you, Sir, had the misfortune, or perhaps good fortune, not to hear.

In any case, I want to turn immediately to annex II-2, the draft regulation on free trade, and to deal particularly with coastal traffic, cabotage and offshore support vessels. The present situation is wholly unsatisfactory because there are no restrictions at all on access to our own coastal trade, whereas a number of Community countries impose restrictions. Some of us have pressed the Government for a very long time now either to impose restrictions on our own coastal trade — a course which I and other Opposition Members favour — or at least to take reciprocal action against those Community countries which prevent us from having access to their coastal traffic. That, of course, has been refused by the Government and, apart from an informal agreement recently reached with Germany, we still have substantial restrictions in Denmark, France, Greece, and Italy.

If this regulation went through, it would make it impossible for any member of the Community to indulge in these cargo reservation practices. That would perhaps be acceptable if something were to happen quickly, but we have the extraordinary situation that the draft regulation not only says that any of these cargo reservation practices in relation to coastal traffic will be phased out only over 10 years; it also states that if, at the end of 10 years, there are particular difficulties the phasing out may take longer, or may never happen.

It is ludicrous for us to accept a regulation of that sort. If all restrictions were to be removed immediately, I could see some justification in the Government looking with some favour on this regulation; but such a transitional arrangement would simply mean that we would continue to give free access to our own traffic to members of the Community and others, while not having the advantage of access to the coastal traffic of other member states. There can be no justification for accepting the regulation as it stands.

Instead of arguing, as the Government have tried to argue for a number of years, for the removal of restrictions by other Common Market countries, it would have been far more sensible for us to impose restrictions here in the United Kingdom. That would have brought them to their senses. It would also have been intrinsically the best policy for this country. It is still the best policy for this country. Therefore, there can be no justification for accepting this draft regulation as it stands, nor do I believe that it will be possible, given the vested interests involved, for us to have the regulation amended satisfactorily.

In an intervention, I asked the Secretary of State why we had to take all these regulations together so that we had to accept the whole package or none of it. I received no satisfactory answer. For the life of me, I do not see why we must adopt that approach. Certain parts of the other regulations are satisfactory. Because of restrictions of time, I do not want to deal with these other regulations, but I do not see why we should have to accept everything as a package. If that is to be the approach of the Government, we must not accept any of the regulations, because this one is so unsatisfactory.

It is unsatisfactory not only as far as cabotage is concerned. The same is true for our offshore support. There has been quite a change of view on the part of that particular bit of the industry which, being part of the

General Council of British Shipping, has until recently, as I understand it, followed the usual line of the GCBS—being in favour of free trade without restrictions, being very unwilling to see action by the British Government to protect British interests, and taking the view that that would be against our interests in the wider field of shipping. That is a view which I have never held, and which I have argued against with the GCBS on different occasions.

The British Offshore Support Vessels Association is now a separate body. It takes the view that offshore support vessels should be completely removed from this regulation. I agree with that. If the regulation has to go ahead at all, offshore support vessels should certainly be removed from it. But again the regulation would simply say that there would be no possibility of the Government taking restrictive action to support our own offshore support vessel industry, one of the few bits of the shipping industry which has been doing relatively well in recent years—although even there some difficulties are being experienced, with boats being laid up.

We have the extraordinary situation, as the BOSVA points out in a recently circulated document, that in the North sea 170 vessels are operating in the United Kingdom sector at present, of which only 111 carry the British flag, about 30 of which are believed to be controlled by foreign operators, mainly Norwegian and American. So, out of 170 vessels, only 81 are genuinely British owned. Of 79 vessels in the Norwegian sector, 78 are Norwegian and only one is not.

I know that there have been discussions between the British and Norwegian Governments about this, and that all sorts of reasons are given for it. The reality is that the Norwegians very sensibly keep their offshore support a Norwegian operation. We ought to do the same. It is ridiculous that we should allow Norwegian vessels to operate freely in our sector of the North Sea when, in practical terms, it has proved impossible for British or any other support vessels to enter the Norwegian sector. The same applies in other areas such as the Dutch sector, although the two important sectors are the British and the Norwegian. Ours is open to everyone and we are paying the penalty. The Norwegian sector is restricted, in practice, to the Norwegian industry.

The British sector is the most important of all. If this regulation goes ahead, any possibility of our protecting it in the future for our own industry will completely disappear. I am delighted that at least one part of the General Council of British Shipping has recognised the need to protect our interests in important areas.

The whole business of free trade in shipping is a myth. If it ever operated, it has certainly not operated for many years now. Successive Governments have tended to say that there must be minimum restrictions on free trade because it is in the interests of British industry, and under the present Government that is almost dogma. In reality, the result has been that most export traffic is carried by non-British ships in new areas of activity, such as the North sea, where we are losing out to foreign competitors. We are being trampled on by other member states, and we are not taking effective retaliatory action.

If the regulations are passed, especially the one to which I specifically referred, far from helping the position as a genuinely active, interventionist Community policy, they will make it even worse and goodness knows, the British shipping industry is already in a critical condition.

5.20 pm

Sir David Price (Eastleigh): Like the right hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Millan), I have both personal and constituency interests in the fortunes of the British Merchant Navy. As the House knows, it has been in steady decline for the past 10 years, and all hon. Members who have spoken so far have drawn attention to that fact. Like my right hon. Friend the Member for Taunton (Sir E. du Cann) and other hon. Members on both sides of the House who care about the British shipping industry, I have been drawing the attention of the House to that steady decline year by year and seeking remedial action.

I wish to give the House the correct figures which I have received from the General Council of British Shipping. From the peak in 1975 of 1,614 ships of 50 million deadweight tonnes, the fleet decreased to 640 ships of 16 million deadweight tonnes at the end of September 1985. That is a decline to nearly one third. In fairness, we must take account of technological improvements because today a container ship does a great deal more work than a cargo ship used to do. That varies, depending on the route, but I am told that the displacement of the older vessel by the new is a factor of three or four. Nevertheless, that is a dramatic fall, and we should take it into account.

Despite the recognition of that decline by successive Ministers, the Government have not succeeded in arresting, let alone reversing, it. To be fair to Ministers, we must recognise that many of the factors which have been having such a corrosive effect on our fleet are worldwide in character and largely unamenable to actions by our Government acting alone. For that reason, I have been looking expectantly to the European Community to put a shipping policy package together which would halt the decline in European shipping.

Our European neighbours have also been suffering a decline in their merchant fleets, but not at the same rate as ours, and with the notable exception of Greece which distorts all EC figures. Therefore, it has been in our national interest to encourage the Commission to come forward with a shipping policy, and I welcome its initiative. However, I regret the delay, and I am not particulary satisfied with the results. Meantime—this cannot be emphasised too often—much of the British Merchant Navy has been quietly but irresistibly disappearing into the mists of history.

The Commission's analysis of the reasons for the decline in European shipping reveals no new factors of which we were previously unaware. Indeed, it follows conventional analysis, but is not necessarily the worse for that. It also follows, not surprisingly, the free trade spirit of the treaty of Rome in its basic recommendation that the Community should not abandon what we in the United Kingdom used to call an open-seas policy. It is worth reminding the House of the words used by the Commission in the document. It states:

> "A move to protectionist policy would almost certainly lead to a similar policy on the part of the US and most other countries and cross-trading opportunities would be lost; whilst in the direct trades little or nothing would be gained. In the Commission's view the maintenance of a non-protectionist shipping policy is still in the best interests of the Community shipping industry."

That is fine, provided the Community acts against unfair competition, and so I looked expectantly to this report. The broad statement of Community policy leads directly

[Sir David Price]

to the Community's need to take collective action against other countries which either follow protectionist policies or do not play to international rules.

The following paragraph of the report states:

"It will, in the Commission's view, be necessary for the Community and its Member States to be more active than in the past to counter the threat to Community interests from policies and practices adopted by other countries which make difficult or impossible the maintenance of a commercially competitive system and which consequently reduce the possibilities for profitable enterprise open to the Community's shipowners."

That is fine, but I wonder how far there is a programme for action in the document along those lines, and how far there is merely a vague recognition that there is a problem, and some day somewhere something may be done.

I then turned to the Commission's proposals against unfair pricing practices and read the analysis, which is good. Again, there is a reluctance to come to the point at issue. The report states:

"For some time now the Commission has paid particular attention—through its monitoring of specific liner trades—to the activities of state trading countries such as the USSR. The monitoring exercise, started in 1979 and covering trades between the Community to and from Central America, East Africa and the Far East, has been working very satisfactorily and has revealed that such tactics employed by state trading countries' carriers as underquoting and the creaming off of high paying cargo are causing damage to Community carriers."

The Commission recognises the problem, but then it lays down many criteria, at the end of which it states:

"If all these criteria are satisfied the Commission proposes that it should be empowered to impose a countervailing duty on the freight rate(s) in question."

We should move much more quickly to impose such countervailing duties. The sooner they are imposed, the more likely those who are causing unfair competition and unfair pricing will take remedial action.

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Bristol, East): Does my hon. Friend believe that one of the possible reasons why this report does not have more teeth is that Community members may be responsible for some of the restrictive practices and pricing policies? Consequently any action against them may have been watered down.

Sir David Price: That is certainly possible, but as I was not involved in the discussions in Brussels I cannot answer my hon. Friend. Possibly the Minister can when he replies.

Why does the idea of imposing countervailing duties apply to passenger and cruise ships? I am sure all hon. Members who follow shipping matters have had representations from British shipowners. However, I do not wish to detain the House for long, and I should like to consider the internal market, as it is called in the paper.

I wish to take up the points made by the right hon. Member for Govan and by my right hon. Friend the Member for Taunton on cabotage. My right hon. Friend the Member for Taunton was kind enough to give me a pat on the back for raising this issue on a number of occasions. I do not think enough people are aware of the importance of coastal shipping not only to the shipping industry, but in its own right as a method of moving goods and freight around the United Kingdom. It is comfortably the second largest method after road transport. A great deal more tonne mileage is moved by coastal shipping around Britain than, I regret to say, by British Rail. I draw the attention of the House to this because it is an important matter in itself. Coastal shipping is also important, as right hon. and hon. Members have already said, as a good base for our shipping industry. I am grateful that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has been zealous in his desire to obtain access to the coast trades of other member states for British ships.

My right hon. Friend has had some success with Germany, but little success elsewhere. My right hon. Friend posed three alternatives, but I suggest a fourth. If my right hon. Friend has no collective success with the member states, then he should build on his experience with Germany and try for more bilateral arrangements. If that does not succeed, I am entirely with him on his third alternative: to close our coastlines to ships of other nations. I sense that is the general feeling of the House.

In the context of the forthcoming Budget, I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to a chapter in the Commission's report dealing with how the Community can properly help our seafarers. The Commission recommends tax concessions as appropriate aids to seafarers. For better accuracy, I shall quote the passage:

"The Commission would regard a favourable direct tax regime for Community seafarers as a reasonable way of helping to maintain the employment of EEC nationals on Community ships."

Obviously my right hon. Friend cannot comment on that. However, I hope that, within collective responsibility, he will make certain that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer takes that recommendation firmly on board.

5.33 pm

Mr. Stephen Ross (Isle of Wight): I start by supporting the Secretary of State when he visits Belgium on Thursday to uphold the rights of Sealink with the Belgian Government. The Minister will be aware that I have not always said nice things about Sealink since it has been privatised, but I think this issue deserves the support of the whole House and I hope he is successful.

I spoke to Mr. James Sherwood a few days after he had acquired Sealink and I made it clear that he had the virtual control of my constituency's economy in his hands—80 per cent. of all those who go to and fro, and most of the commercial traffic. I asked Mr. Sherwood whether he could reopen the Robb-Caledon yard at Leith to build a third "ro-ro" ferry. Mr. Sherwood had already said that he intended to order another such ferry straight away to carry some 150 cars. Scottish Members will be aware that the two largest car ferries that operate from the Isle of Wight were built at the Robb-Caledon yard—they were the last to be built—and they are successful boats.

Mr. Sherwood said that I must have thought him mad and that there was no likelihood of his ordering the boat from a British shipyard. He said that the boat would probably be ordered from the far east, although it could be fitted out in Britain or possibly in Scandinavia. I am glad to say that the third ferry is being built in Britain, not at Robb-Caledon but on Humberside. At least Mr. Sherwood has discovered that he can have a ship built in this country at a price which is acceptable to him.

We have had a powerful and damning speech from the right hon. Member for Taunton (Sir E. du Cann). He is chairman of the maritime group in the House, and I support all that he has said. I thought that he was a trifle hard on the Community, for I believe the rundown in our merchant fleet would have occurred even if we had stayed outside the EEC. However, at least we now have moves

towards a common maritime policy. That must make sense. The General Council of British Shipping, in its brief to the debate, gives its blessing to the EEC document, and it states that it shares its support for free trade and points out the important statistic which has not been quoted in the debate, that British shipowners still earn half their income from carrying other people's trade.

The National Union of Marine Aviation and Shipping Transport Officers claims, however, that a move to a common maritime policy will do nothing to protect or promote British flag ships. Like many others in the House and outside, I am desperately concerned at the demise of the British merchant fleet. Many statistics have already been given and I will not bore the House with more. However, I would direct Members' attention to the document "Why the ships went", which has recently been published by the British Maritime League. It should be read by all Members, as they would learn much from it. That document forecasts that, by 1987-88, we will be down to about 500 ships, and it lists the different types. I will not bore the House with them, but it is a worrying statistic.

I do not believe that hiding behind our own protective barriers will do much, if anything, to stem the tide of decline. We stand a better chance of regaining lost ground if we support the Commission's proposals but press continually for much earlier action to implement them.

Such pressure should be exerted not only in Brussels but in the United States. In fairness to the Secretary of State, he recently made a speech on this subject in Washington. I happen to have read that speech and I congratulate him on his action. I hope that the Secretary of State will be tough in Brussels. He can be pretty nasty at times and he should be as nasty as possible over there. The Secretary of State should keep his barbed comments for Brussels and be nicer to those of us on Standing Committees.

The Commission states on page 27 of the report:

"it seems to the Commission that the promotion of a competitive Community shipping industry in terms of a non-protectionist policy, which could well mean an increasing concentration on high value, high technology services, is an effective means of ensuring and possibly expanding employment of EEC nationals in the long run."

The Commission suggests that there should be more attention to training. As the hon. Member for Eastleigh, (Sir D. Price) has stated, there should be a direct tax regime to increase the chances of employment for EEC nationals on Community ships.

With the Budget a week away, I know that the Secretary of State is debarred from commenting on this, but I hope that he has been putting pressure on his former friends in the Treasury to introduce some favourable tax incentives to the Merchant Navy, the shipping industry and perhaps those people working in the industry. That would be a step forward in the attempts to assist an industry which is in crisis.

I have read the explanatory memorandum submitted by the Department of Transport on the various annexes. That relating to annex II-6 deals with the important subject of unfair pricing practices in marine transport. Like the Secretary of State, I welcome the appearance of these regulations, subject to the need to tackle unfair competition within the Community itself. I know that the Secretary of State is attempting to do that. Annex II-5 concerns the application of EEC competition rules. It is rather more controversial and comes in for some criticism from the GCBS. Such criticism is in conflict with the Government's views, and perhaps we will have some comment on that when the Minister replies.

I welcome the paragraphs in the main document on marine safety and pollution prevention. I urge that pressure be put on those countries which have not yet ratified the relevant international instruments. I represent a part of the country which is close to busy shipping lanes and has a coastline that is vulnerable to pollution. It is essential that ships passing through those waters are in sound condition—we have already taken steps in that direction — and under the control of somebody with experience and local knowledge. Several years ago, I went to Brussels with a local government delegation concerned with this subject, but nothing happened. Something has now happened, and it appears in the document. It is well itemised and I welcome all that it says.

Earlier today we received the views of Trinity House on the future of marine pilotage—a subject that the Select Committee on Transport considered last summer and reported on in July. I gather that legislation on the subject is probably due next Session. We made some recommendations about safety standards, compulsory pilotage and the manning of pilot boats, all of which are dealt with in the document. We found that Trinity House is held in high respect on the continent of Europe. It must have a major role to play in the future of coastal maritime affairs.

The motion accords with my thinking and that of my colleagues. If the motion is divided on—I would regret that—I shall vote with the Government.

5.40 pm

Mr. Richard Ottaway (Nottingham, North): It is a pleasure to speak after the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Ross). I endorse what he said about pollution. Many members of the Community have a Mediterranean coastline and a large role to play in combating pollution there.

I warmly welcome the Government's thrust towards this document — "Progress Towards a Common Transport Policy". I welcome anything that helps to remove internal barriers to trade in the EC. The proposals on cabotage are important. I do not support retaliation. Threatening to put up our shutters if we cannot get agreement does not help, but it must be said that, unless we can get the support of our European partners, we cannot rule out such action. We have strength in Europe. If we cannot get a common policy, we must protect our own interests, especially if we are faced with competition from non-United Kingdom vessels which receive fiscal support and other favourable conditions. I have in mind the fierce competition that offshore support vessels experience in the North sea. Many offshore support vessels are laid up primarily because of unfair competition from other countries.

One of the most serious problems facing our maritime fleet arises from the fact that, apart from their support for the Commission's proposal, the Government do not have a policy for the merchant marine. It is questionable whether the Government sincerely want a merchant fleet. Of course, they will pay lip service to the objective of a British merchant fleet, but they have shown no practical support for it.

I agree with ny right hon. Friend the Member for Taunton (Sir E. du Cann) who, in an excellent speech,

[Mr. Richard Ottaway]

called for a single Minister to get to grips with the British merchant fleet's problem and to formulate policies and promote them here and in the country. With the decline of the British merchant fleet, we are witnessing flagging out. A shipowner does not flag out from the British flag lightly, whether it be British Petroleum or a small owner. He will flag out for the simple reason that he can operate his ships more commercialy if he has the benefit of such things as lower crew costs and lower registration charges. If he finds it financially worthwhile to flag out, I see no reason why he should do so.

Mr. Ridley: Surely my hon. Friend means he should not do so.

Mr. Ottaway: My right hon. Friend is correct, but he will appreciate that the converse applies. If my right hon. Friend wants shipowners to flag in, he has only to make the prospect attractive. A little arithmetic shows that that would not be an expensive operation. When I made inquiries of the Department of Transport about how much the nation earns from British-owned and flagged vessels, the answer was not very much. I found it slightly surprising that the Department could not give a precise figure, but it reckoned that taxation revenue from British flagged ships amounted to about £20 million a year. That is a drop in the ocean for the Chancellor.

I hesitate to speak of capital allowances because the Government have just scrapped them, but if we could introduce disguised capital allowances and call them assistance to the British merchant fleet and they cost £20 million, and many ships flagged back in because it was financially attractive to do so, the benefit to the country would be immense. Crews would be employed and the many service industries in the City of London which rely on shipping would be helped. The service industries are to be found in the City of London for primarily historic reasons. The growth in world shipping occurred when London was the centre of world shipping. If London is no longer regarded as the centre of world shipping, the service industries, which bring in about £4 billion a year to the country—that should be contrasted with the £20 million —will simply drift away. It will become attractive to conduct arbitrations in New York or Geneva, because that is where the shipowners are. The chartered surveyors and engineers will wander off because there will be no good reason for remaining in London.

With the price of oil dropping, there will clearly be more trade in oil. The many oil tankers that have been laid up in the Norwegian fjords are being pulled out. That stimulus to trade—it might have been Sheikh Yamani who did it—shows how a little injection of enthusiasm to world trade can promote activity.

Many hon. Members have mentioned defence, but it was noticeably absent from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's speech. I do not blame him for that, as he is presenting proposals for a Common Market policy, but he and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister have often said that we can still mount a Falklands operation. However, 50 per cent. of the ships that were used in the Falklands operation have been sold or are no longer available. We have had several NATO exercises recently. A couple of years ago we had operation Lionheart and just a few weeks ago we had a NATO exercise off Norway. On both occasions we had to charter Danish vessels to move British troops and stores.

Mr. Ridley: Where a ship that is chartered for military exercises comes from depends on what ships are available and whether they can be more gainfully engaged, because, for the military exercise, it is a one-off charter. The picture is therefore more encouraging than my hon. Friend thinks, because British ships suitable for the purpose were engaged on contracts elsewhere. Only underused Danish tonnage was available. That means that our ships were on more profitable business.

Mr. Ottaway: I think that proves my point. If ships are gainfully employed on commercial operations elsewhere, why does my right hon. Friend think they will suddenly be available in moments of crisis of which he has no notice?

Mr. Ridley: My hon. Friend should know that we can requisition tonnage in times of tension or war on a wide scale. We would most certainly do that.

Mr. Ottaway: My right hon. Friend says that we can requisition tonnage. Of course, much of the tonnage to which he refers is now flagged out. It is well established that he can requisition ships under, for example, the flag of Bermuda. However, he will have to find out where a ship is, pull it back, get rid of the crew and get British certificated officers on board, if there are any. He might then be able to start. The fact that the crisis may be over by that time is neither here nor there.

There is another aspect. A British-owned vessel may be flagged out under the Liberian flag. As yet, nobody has tried to requisition a British-owned vessel under non-British colonial ownership or flag. I do not think that it will be appropriate to test whether we can requisition a British-owned vessel under Liberian or Panamanian flags in the courts at a time of crisis. The crisis will be over by the time the courts decide.

The other day I was talking to a British shipowner who flagged out under the Bermudan flag because he found it more financially attractive to do so. He is now despairing. He wanted to get British business, he wanted to take things to the Falklands, but he found that other vessels were being chartered. There was no positive encouragement for him to keep his vessels available for use by the Ministry of Defence or the Department of Transport. I am not saying that he should rely solely upon business from the Government, but if there is not a system of priority chartering of British-flagged vessels for Government use, there is no encouragement for a shipowner to keep his ship on stand-by for use in times of crisis.

This is the greatest nation on earth, and it was built upon a history of maritime affairs. I believe that we should turn the corner in our lack of policy. We should start to formulate a policy. I think that the report we are debating and the European aspect is welcome. We have the European side sorted out. We must now get our own national fleet sorted out.

5.52 pm

Mr. Michael Cocks (Bristol, South): I shall be brief because many of the points I wish to raise have already been adequately covered on both sides of the House. I wish to say that it is a travesty that we are here pleading for the remnants of the Merchant Navy of this country. Those of

us who were brought up on *Jane's Fighting Ships* and the gallantry of the Merchant Navy seamen during the war find this a bitter issue to face. Bristol, which I still represent, has a very long maritime tradition and has adapted to the times—the shifting from the port in the heart of the city to the out-port of Avonmouth and latterly constructing west dock.

Our debate on these regulations stems from the loss of sovereignty which took place when we joined the EEC. It is interesting that I speak shortly after the right hon. Member for Taunton (Sir E. du Cann) because when we had our historic debate on the principle of entry he and I were here late at night and I followed shortly after him then. We both expressed reservations about the course which was to be followed. I think that the right hon. Gentleman abstained whereas I voted against it, but we were both extremely unhappy.

One of the arguments which was put forward at that time was that we should have been in at the start of the Common Market, we should have joined when it was formed and that inevitably there was a price to be paid for our late entry. However, it seems to me that we have the worst of all possible worlds. We are told that we have to pay a heavy price for not being in on the initial negotiations on entry and now we are told that some of the latest entrants into the Community are causing us some of the greatest problems. I refer particularly to what was mentioned earlier—cabotage. If we look at the countries which are said to be causing difficulties—Spain, Italy and Greece—only Italy is a founder member of the European Community. Spain and Greece are latecomers. However, if I may use a slang phrase, they seem to be getting away with it and we seem to be pig in the middle all the time.

On Second Reading of the Bill dealing with the accession of Spain and Portugal I raised an anxiety in my own area about the bottling at source of sherry, port and different wines. I received an assurance from the Minister. However, on reflection it seems to me that we are the only country which seems scrupulously to observe all the rules and regulations within the Community. It also appears that, of all the countries in the EEC, we have pursued the most non-protectionist policy in regard to shipping and yet have suffered the greatest comparative decline. Therefore, on behalf of those of us who are atheistic or agnostic about the EEC, I urge on the Government the need to be strong about this matter.

Some years ago, in the early 1970s, I went on a delegation to the United Nations. Despite my reservations about the EEC, it seemed that one of the great benefits of joining the Community was the possibility of presenting a cohesive voice speaking as one from this great bloc, which the right hon. Member for Taunton mentioned. The size of its population and the sheer bulk of its trade would carry more weight than any of the individual members. It is true that at last some remnants of the shipping policy are coming forward but we wish it had been sooner and more cohesive. Unfortunately, there is now a tendency to talk about economic boycotts and restrictions by countries to enforce political policies and if the EEC speaks as one on this it is in a stronger position. Regrettably, we find that the rules are flouted with apparent impunity.

I should like to follow up the remarks of the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Ottaway). I find it appalling that if we had a problem such as the Falklands dispute we would be scratching around to get the ships together with which to carry the men, materials and supplies. In his answer to the hon. Member for Nottingham, North, the Secretary of State said that British ships were being used to better advantage. I do not know of any better advantage to which ships can be put than taking British military and civil supplies to an area where we are in a state of conflict. If something is reduced to that sort of commercial equation, I wonder how we define the national interest.

It seems to me that during the first Saturday debate on the Falklands crisis there was a mood in the House which recognised that we had reached a very poor pass as a nation if we were scratching about to service such an operation. I hope that when the Secretary of State discusses the regulations in the Community he will try to get more cohesion and will try to press on our partners there the need to use our economic strength to much greater advantage. I did not want us to go into the Community to join a rich man's club but, in a world with such bickering and backbiting, and people not playing along, he must try to get them together. I wish him well in his efforts, but I hope that we can get more cohesion and more economic strength and do our best to keep our merchant shipping fleet going.

6 pm

Mr. Don Dixon (Jarrow): I agree with the right hon. Member for Taunton (Sir E. du Cann) that we cannot wait much longer for a maritime policy. We cannot wait until the EC gets around to it. His points are reinforced by the fact that not long ago we had a debate on shipbuilding, in which hon. Members commented about the decline in the merchant fleet and were answered by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. Later, in a debate on defence, the right hon. Member for Taunton referred to the merchant fleet as the fourth arm of defence and expressed concern about the decline in it. That debate was answered by the Secretary of State for Defence. Today, we are discussing shipping in a debate on an EC document on transport, which will be answered by the Secretary of State for Transport. That alone points to the need for a maritime policy of which a Minister is specifically in control.

In 1981, the Select Committee on Trade and Industry dealt with shipping and shipbuilding, and in its report recommended that there should be a co-ordinated maritime policy for Great Britain. Unfortunately, no one has taken any notice, and right hon. and hon. Members since then have been imploring the Government to do something about the decline, not only in the merchant fleet but in the shipbuilding industry.

The explanatory memorandum on the document says:

> "These proposals touch on the whole range of issues which affect shipowners; ports policy; maritime research; the operation of technical social, safety and environmental rules and standards; the problem of maritime fraud; the provision of navigational aids within the European waters; and so forth."

However, it does not mention the fact that if we want a fleet we have to build and maintain it. It does not mention the fact that for years the EEC has been talking about a scrap and build policy. Such a policy was first discussed in the EEC in 1977, was brought back in 1979, but is still being discussed. Such a policy would help the merchant fleets, but two other nations are putting a block on the proposals.

Right hon. and hon. Members have spoken about the decline in the United Kingdom fleet from over 1,600 ships and 50 million deadweight tonnes to 640 ships and 16

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million deadweight tonns. Our shipping industry has declined—50,000 seafarers have lost their jobs, and, what is more, the composition of the fleet leaves much to be desired. For example, 42·7 per cent. of our ships are over 10 years old, 13·7 per cent. are over 15 years old and 5·1 per cent. are over 20 years old. This compares with Denmark, France, Spain, Germany and Norway who have, respectively, 77 per cent., 73 per cent., 71 per cent., 69 per cent. and 68 per cent. of their vessels less than 10 years old. Such a large loss of ships in the United Kingdom fleet and the age of the remaining ships leave much to be desired.

We are talking not about a few thousand seafarers and a few ships but about the possible effects on 300,000 people employed in shipping. One of the problems is that we have always fought by the Marquess of Queensberry rules while everybody else has been involved in all-in wrestling. We know that Korea will carry its exports in ships under the Korean flag and that France will import oil only in French oil tankers. United Kingdom shipowners have had to contend with such practices for a long time.

The decline in the merchant fleet is reflected in the way that the British shipbuilding industry has declined. When the shipbuilding industry was nationalised in June 1977, 87,000 men were working in the industry. This year, British Shipbuilders is employing 10,000 men, albeit some have been transferred to the privatised warship yards. Next year, we have been told that there are no orders for merchant shipping and that that number will fall to 4,000 men.

It has already been said that if Galtieri were to invade the Falklands again today, we would not be able to put out a task force because we would not have the merchant ships available that we once had. In the 1930s, we also had no maritime policy. I can recall the rationalisation of those years. There was a shipbuilding security limit, and merchant bankers, shipbuilders and shipowners felt that there was over-capacity and used to go around buying up shipyards and closing them, and putting an embargo on the building of ships. In 1934, they came to the town where I was born and bred and closed down the Palmers Jarrow shipyard, one of the biggest enterprises in the world. Iron ore would come in and go out as a complete ship on the river Tyne. That yard was closed through shortsightedness and rationalisation, and in 1939 we could not get enough shipbuilders to build and repair our ships for the war. This is one of the dangers that we face, unless something is done immediately by the Government to try to stop the decline in the merchant fleet and the shipbuilding industry.

The Government's argument is that market forces should operate in this sector, but look what happened in Sweden. The last merchant shipbuilding yard there closed a matter of months ago and that country was one of the biggest merchant shipping builders in Europe only a few years ago.

Flagging out is another important factor in what is happening in the shipping industry at the moment. It affects people who sail the ships, and I have a letter from the deputy general-secretary of NUMAST, who was concerned at BP's decision to flag out its ships. He says:

"If its flag-out moves are allowed to follow the pattern of others in recent years we can confidently predict that within the very near future;

—firstly the United Kingdom ratings will be replaced;

—then the junior officer's jobs will be handed to Filippino or others;

—very shortly thereafter most of the United Kingdom senior officers will go;

—after a further period the United Kingdom Master and Chief Engineer will be replaced".

That is the effect of BP's decision, and some 1,700 jobs for British seafarers will be lost for ever.

The Minister should be pressing Europe and asking it what it is doing about the scrap and build scheme. If it does not soon introduce a scheme, we should unilaterally adopt one ourselves. I accept the point made by the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Sir D. Price) about tax concessions. I think that such concessions are essential and I hope that the Chancellor of the Exchequer will make some provision next week in that direction. However, I believe that tax concessions or tax incentives should go only to shipowners who build ships in this country. It is important that any concessions should go to British shipowners.

6.10 pm

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): I would have liked to discuss two issues in relation to the documents that we are discussing tonight—the ports policy in connection with competition imports and the navigational assistance to shipping in European waters. In view of the constraints on time, however, I will concentrate my comments on navigational assistance to shipping in European waters.

As the House knows, and the documents state, a research programme was set up in 1981 named "COST 301." The purpose of the research programme was to investigate the safety measures for shipping in European waters. I make that point as a background to my comments about navigational assistance.

Navigational assistance is inextricably linked to pilotage, which was referred to by the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Ross) and in the report submitted today by Trinity House and the pilotage commission. As the Secretary of State will know, over the years there have been attempts to harmonise the pilotage arrangements in ports in this country with the pilotage arrangements in European ports. My constituency covers the River Forth and the port of Grangemouth and I have strongly opposed any attempt to harmonise pilotage arrangements in European ports with those in ports on the River Forth in Scotland.

I am making a brief constituency point because there are many risks for shipping in the port of Grangemouth and the narrow navigational channel leading to it. When the Secretary of State discusses navigational assistance to shipping in European waters, he must take account of the pilotage arrangements. It is not practicable to harmonise pilotage arrangements in the River Forth with those in European ports because there are extreme hazards in that narrow navigational channel.

Before I describe those hazards, I should like to draw to the Secretary of State's attention the proposals from Europe that vessels under a certain tonnage should be able to enter ports without the need for pilotage. I am not so naive as to believe that pilots in this country do not peddle their own interests. There are pilots in my constituency and I am not taken in by the fact that many of them have come to see me at my constituency surgeries to tell me about the dangers on the River Forth. I can see both sides of the argument, and I am trying to be fair.

However, it is simply not on to expect vessels under a certain tonnage to come into a highly volatile port like

Grangemouth without pilotage. The heart of the petrochemical industry is located at Grangemouth. The new Braefoot bay terminal, which is the export point for the Shell-Esso liquid gas and petroleum plant which was built at Mossmorran, is located on the navigational channel leading to the port of Grangemouth. Fairly substantial ships are loaded with highly volatile liquid chemicals for export on the edge of that narrow navigational channel. Further up the channel is the Hound point terminal, which is the other end of the North sea oil industry. Tankers of a fairly substantial tonnage are loaded with oil for export there on the edge of that narrow channel. The royal naval dockyard at Rosyth, which is a nuclear refitting base, is also on the edge of that narrow channel.

I must put it on the record that it would be highly dangerous for my constituents in Bo'ness and Grangemouth and in all the other towns that skirt the River Forth if vessels of any size were allowed to travel that narrow channel without an experienced pilot on board.

Although I have made these comments briefly, I hope that the Secretary of State will consider them in his discussions on the draft regulations and in his consideration of the legislation which we are told by Trinity House today is likely to be introduced in the next Session. I hope that, in finalising these regulations and in drafting the legislation to which Trinity House has referred, the Secretary of State will take account of the markets and warnings that I have given on behalf of my constituents.

The safety of those who sail the seas is paramount in shipping; but of equal importance is the safety of those who live in the towns and villages that skirt the shores. I hope that I have said enough to sound a warning to the Secretary of State about the dangers to my constituency and the other small towns on the River Forth if pilotage were abolished.

6.16 pm

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Bristol, East): I thank the hon. member for Falkirk, East (Mr Ewing) for keeping to one point and allowing me to speak.

The fact that a massive bureaucracy such as the Common Market has at long last organised a common policy and written a document demonstrates how serious is the decline of the merchant fleet generally, and of the merchant fleet in this country in particular. Now that the policy has been produced, will it actually work? The answer to that depends on whether the policy has teeth.

Right hon. and hon. Members have mentioned that in 1975 we had the largest number of ships and the greatest tonnage. We should, however, also note that we had the largest number of shipping bankruptcies in that year. With or without our membership of the Community, the recession, the change from our major markets being deep-sea markets to being short or near-sea markets, the change to larger and more efficient ships and the change that North sea oil has brought about, there would have been a decline in the number of British ships and British tonnage.

The question is not how we are going to reverse that decline but how we are going to halt it. I am not so optimistic as to believe that we can return to the dead weight tonnages of 1975.

I return to the point that I made about the teeth in this EEC directive. My hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Sir D. Price) was quite scathing about the directive's lack of penalties. We must penalise the dumping of shipping on to the market at freight rates which bear no relation to their economic costs. Within the Community we need to organise better cabotage arrangements. I am delighted that the Government are at long last waking up to the reality that a shipping policy is essential for this country. I believe that my right hon. Friend the Member for Taunton (Sir E. du Cann) and other Members in this House and in the other place have made sure that the Government are beginning to understand how important a coherent shipping policy is to this country.

It has sometimes been suggested that artificially low freight rates are good for this country, as they help our exports. They may be in our short-term interests, but one must consider who is offering these artificially low rates. One would then recognise that those rates are not in our long-term interests.

There are already, and there will increasingly be, powerful trading blocs—the United States, the Comecon countries, south-east Asia, with Japan and later China leading, and Europe. For a trading bloc to be effective, the internal market must be large enough to provide the economies of scale that would make it internationally competitive. Therefore, internally we need unselfishness and co-operation. Internally, Britain has been gentlemanly but other countries, within the Common Market and outside it, have been exceedingly self-centred. We have been losing out. I hope that these regulations are but the first step towards ensuring that the internal market works effectively and works for and not against us. I hope that Britain as a major market can work in its own interests on an international scale.

6.20 pm

Mr. Roger Stott (Wigan): The debate has shown the House at its very best, because we do not often get almost complete unanimity on a subject. Every hon. Member is concerned about this subject, and that is the reason for the consensus.

When I left the Merchant Navy some 22 years ago, Britain's merchant fleet was one of the largest in the world. In every port in every country the red duster could be seen flying as a symbol of Britain's trading links and civil naval power. However, 22 years on, the picture is very different. It is almost beyond belief that this island nation, with its maritime history, has only 640 merchant ships flying the red ensign. This is profoundly worrying to the sea-going trade unions, to the General Council of British Shipping, to me and to almost every hon. Member who has spoken in the debate. I hope that the Secretary of State is seized of that fact.

The General Council of British Shipping has estimated that, if the present rate of decline continues, the British trading fleet will be reduced to between 200 and 400 vessels by 1990. The net loss of qualified seafarers is likely to continue at a rate of 5,000 a year. Almost every hon. Member who has spoken in the debate has referred to the acceleration in the decline in the past decade in the number of United Kingdom registered ships. As the armed forces do not maintain enough vessels in their own right, clearly it is to the advantage of the United Kingdom that we have a merchant marine which can support the Royal Navy in difficult times.

The sectors most hard hit have been the cargo liners, the bulk carriers and the tankers. In the past 10 years, more than 30 million deadweight tonnes have been lost. In the

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first nine months of 1984, more than 2 million deadweight tonnes were lost. Another two or three years of losses at that rate and, according to most experts, the fleet will be reduced substantially to about 12 million deadweight tonnes. The number of deadweight tonnes is perhaps more significant than the reduction in the number of ships.

The General Council of British Shipping and the unions argue that, in the next five years, there is likely to be an acute shortage of trained manpower in the industry. This will make it even more difficult for us to meet the demands for a defence capability. I and many other people believe that we will not be able to mount a Falklands-like campaign again. I have argued before about this matter with the Minister of State, Department of Transport. He has said that, if there is a conflict, Britain will have the right to reclaim those ships that have been flagged out. I was interested to hear the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Ottaway) say that that may be possible if the ships sail under the Bermudan flag, but it may be more difficult if they sail under the Liberian flag. That is one difficulty. Another difficulty is that, even if we get those ships back to help the Royal Navy in times of conflict and difficulty, we would not get the crews back. Foreign crews are hardly likely to rush to participate in an imperialistic war on behalf of the United Kingdom.

Given that scenario, there is an overwhelming case for greater co-ordination between Government and industry. If there is a defence rationale in terms of the size and adaptability of the merchant fleet, there is obviously a case for setting a level below which, in the national interest, the fleet should not fall. However, to my knowledge, no such planning and co-ordination is taking place.

Britain has moved from the position in the 1950s when she had the largest merchant fleet, the second largest Navy, a large fishing industry and a large shipbuilding industry. This rapid decline is tragic. If in the future we are engaged in a military conflict, there will be problems in finding the men to man the ships required, even if ships sailing under other flags can be obtained. The trained officers and men to man them are unlikely to be available, unless steps are taken now to create a Merchant Navy reserve. In 1939, there were 159,000 seamen in Britain's merchant fleet; today, there are fewer than 40,000. It is against the background of that rapid and accelerating decline that we should judge these proposals.

My hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes) and the right hon. Member for Taunton (Sir E. du Cann) outlined the difficulties they saw in the regulations. I echo their remarks. The European Community depends to a large extent on its merchant shipping for its economic and social advance. With about one third of the world's seaborne imports and one seventh of the world's seaborne exports, shipping is vital for the Community. Traditionally, member states have carried a large proportion of their own trade in national flag vessels and some have been particularly important carriers of trade between other countries. Merchant shipping makes an enormous contribution to the Community's economy. It is a lifeline for imports and exports, it helps to earn foreign currency and it benefits the balance of payments. It is a customer of Community services, such as shipbuilding, steel and other related products. It is clear beyond doubt, therefore, that the Community's merchant marine is important on many fronts. If there is a further decline, the problems will continue.

I do not have a great deal of time in which to go into great depth about the regulations. I hope that the House will forgive me. I should like to make a number of points because it is important for the Secretary of State to respond to hon. Members' suggestions.

On flags of convenience, the Commission's analysis and the proposed measures have ignored the fact that shipping differs from other industries because of the rights and obligations which flow from registration. A ship represents a particularly mobile piece of its flag state inasmuch as the flag state's jurisdiction extends to the ship; yet it represents also a particularly mobile form of capital, the ownership of which can change quickly and can be almost totally obscured.

The Commission refers to "flagging out" as a response to the loss of a competitive advantage for member states' fleets. It argues that flagging out is a means used increasingly by EEC owners to remain competitive in world shipping markets and at the same time to retain control of their operations. Yet the Commission completely fails to acknowledge that it is the very existence of flags of convenience which makes it difficult for traditional ship operators to remain competitive.

As long as there is a mechanism to which owners can resort for avoiding social, safety and financial obligations, it will be difficult for any responsible owner to remain competitive. Furthermore, the Commission's statement that open registry shipping fosters the operation of highly competitive shipping services is an absurd justification for a system which has been set up primarily to flout attempts to impose controls at national or international level on safety, crewing and other aspects of seagoing activity. It is the very existence of flags of convenience that causes some of the major problems in world shipping today. The European Community should do something about it quickly.

My hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, North drew attention to annex II.2. A more positive approach to the question of cabotage would be the introduction of EEC wide cabotage, allowing member states to restrict participation in their coastal trade to their own flag or to those EEC flags which removed restrictions. That reciprocity would mean that we could enter the waters of other countries and they could enter our waters. If we cannot have reciprocity, it is not in our interest to continue the dialogue with the European Community. The chairman of the transportation committee in the European Assembly, a Greek whose name I cannot pronounce, said that we are talking about a free market approach but that we must take into account the differences which exist between member states. I am sure that the Greek Government and Greek shipping and transport Ministers are doing that. That is where we will probably find the most difficulty.

My hon. Friend outlined specific proposals that would help to stop the decline of Britain's merchant fleet. Other hon. Members, notably the right hon. Member for Taunton and the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Sir D. Price), both of whom have had a high profile on the issue for many years and who are concerned about the way in which our merchant fleet has declined, have expressed concern and have asked the Secretary of State to do something positive.

I want to underline the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, North by urging the Secretary of State to read the document prepared by the International Transport Federation entitled "Towards a Common Maritime Transport Policy". That is a very good document, which points to sensible solutions to the problem. If the Secretary of State has not read that document, I ask him to do so because it makes a major contribution on the subject.

The maritime unions have consistently, realistically and accurately underlined the problems of the decline in their industry. They have also consistently, realistically and accurately put forward soundly based solutions for its survival. I want to do the same. The International Transport Federation, in its submission to the European Community, made proposals which could help. I shall refer to six of them.

Instead of opposing cargo-sharing arrangements the Commission should tackle the orderly development of cargo movements. The relationship between shipbuilding and other industries, such as steel, should be examined and an integrated approach should be adopted. A European scrap and build policy should be introduced with the aim of getting rid of substandard ships and building new ships in European shipyards to the highest standards and with the most advanced technical features. The capital side of shipping should be examined to see how the financing of Community shipping could meet the competitive advantages offered in non-Community shipyards and to non-Community owners, with particular reference to far east shipyards and shipowners. The fiscal regimes of flags of convenience countries should be considered, with a view to eliminating the unfair advantages which arise from the way in which capital and profits are created.

Most importantly for seamen, the social aspects of seafarers' employment should be examined with particular reference to hours of work and pressure to reduce crews. Strict regulations exist for the hours of work of other transport workers, such as lorry drivers, but the Commission has ignored the lack of regulation in shipping and the dangers which excessive working time poses to the health and safety of seafarers, vessels and the environment. Regulations on minimum rest periods, leave and time off should be introduced. There are other suggestions in that document which the Secretary of State might adopt.

As for my own suggestions, there is an overwhelmingly urgent need, as has been said on both sides of the House, for the appointment of a Cabinet Minister responsible for co-ordinating maritime policy. It is time the Government decided upon the level at which the Merchant Navy should be maintained. In his forthcoming Budget the Chancellor of the Exchequer should introduce a tax regime to help positively British shipowners to purchase ships from British yards. The trade unions and the shipping industry have been telling him that. The Government need to see shipping and shipbuilding as being more interdependent. Britain needs an integrated maritime policy. The first plank of such a policy should be the reservation of coastal trade and offshore supplies, combining the ordering, designing, building, operating, manning and repairing of ships for the United Kingdom within the United Kingdom.

As in so many other industries in Britain today, we are approaching five minutes to midnight. Shipping is crucial to this island nation. British shipping has served the nation well. British seamen have served the nation well in peace and war. It is now up to the Government to show them and the nation that they have a policy which will stop the terminal decline of the industry.

6.36 pm

Mr. Ridley: With the leave of the House, I shall try to answer as many of the points raised in this excellent debate as time allows.

The hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes), who has apologised for not being here, asked about the trouble we are having with Belgium and about the type of order that might be made. The hon. Gentleman was correct. Section 14 orders, under the normal procedure, require the approval of the House before action is taken. That is the type of order upon which I have consulted. Section 15 also allows action in advance of approval. We could use such an order if it was necessary but, as I have already said, I hope it will not be.

The hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Ross) and the hon. Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Ewing) made considerable contributions about pilotage. I hope they will forgive me if I leave that to another occasion. The Government wish to legislate on it at the earliest opportunity and it does not fit in with the rest of the debate, although I listened with care and interest to what the hon. Gentlemen said.

The hon. Member for Aberdeen, North mentioned the serious problem of maritime fraud, although I do not think it is responsible for all the sinkings that he listed round the world. Solutions will only be reached through international co-operation. I assure the House that no nation is playing a bigger part in the discussions in the International Maritime Organisation and under the auspices of the United Nations than we are in trying to make progress on that important and dangerous subject.

Many hon. Members, particularly the hon. Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon), referred at length to shipbuilding. I do not think we should discuss that matter now. If we are to help the United Kingdom shipping industry we must consider its problems in isolation and not seek to tie it to, say, the supply of ships.

Mr. Millan: Why should we look at the shipping industry in isolation? Every hon. Member who has spoken today has said that it should be looked at in the context of a general maritime policy. The trouble is that we have been looking at it in isolation.

Mr. Ridley: I do not agree. It is right that the sources of purchase of transport equipment, whether for aeroplanes ships, buses, trains or cars, should be considered separately from the environment in which those transport industries operate.

There were pleas that the alleged six Ministers who deal with shipping in Britain should be rolled into one. I hate to have to say that that dreaded responsibility already falls on me and on my noble friend Lord Caithness, who has listened to much of the debate. Although I hesitate to expose myself to the wrath of the House more than I need, I cannot claim that other Ministers share that responsibility.

Let me come to the problems of the merchant fleet on the wider canvas and deal with many of the points that have been made. We take seriously the cries for help which the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North said that the industry has put forward. Much of what we are in the

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course of doing will prove to be much more helpful than perhaps hon. Members have given us credit for. Moreover, it is a difficult time for me to debate this because we are a week from the Budget and I cannot possibly give a hint, even if I were able to do so, of what my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer proposes. Much of the argument today has been about fiscal matters which cannot be pursued at this difficult time in the calendar of the House.

Let me say what the Commission's proposals will do to assist the decline in tonnage in the United Kingdom register. The right hon. Member for Bristol, South (Mr. Cocks) said that the regulations were too late and in a way I agree with him. I wish that they had come forward much earlier. But it is perhaps of some significance that they have been brought forward, debated and more or less agreed, quicker than any regulations that I can recall in the Community's existence. That is a measure of the urgency and importance with which the Community views the matter.

The regulations will be of great importance for liner shipping which, although it accounts for only 13 per cent. of the tonnage on the United Kingdom register, earns 43 per cent. of the revenue of our total fleet. Let me pay tribute to the tremendous performance that our liner companies are putting up in the face of intense competition and, in many trades, gross over-tonnaging.

The hon. Member for Aberdeen, North asked about Taiwan and Japan. There is no evidence as far as I know that the Taiwanese and Japanese liner trades are subsidised at all. However, he is right to say that the United States' lines are subsidised to a publicly known degree which can be ascertained. Secondly, if we can sort out cabotage, an EC policy will be of great benefit to our short sea traders and cruise operators. That underlines the difficulty of choice before us in the EC Shipping Council.

My hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Sir D. Price), the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North and the right hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Millan) discussed cabotage. The GCBS believes that to open the European trades to our ships would be of far greater value than to close British trade to their ships, because the market is much greater than that which would be secured for us. I agree that 10 years is far too long to keep those trades closed to us. We have already pressed for a two or three year period at the utmost and I shall continue to press for the shortest period possible. However, the difficulty is that 12 countries must now agree to any regulation of this sort and we may well have to reconsider the options that I mentioned earlier.

Mr. Sayeed: If we cannot speedily reach agreement on cabotage on a Community-wide basis, will my right hon. Friend take steps to agree cabotage arrangements on a bilateral basis with Community members?

Mr. Ridley: We already have bilateral cabotage agreements with five member states. I gave the options earlier as to how we might pursue this matter and I should not like to decide which options we shall eventually have to take.

I come now to the decline of the fleet and the pressures that have led to the substantial reduction in the size of the United Kingdom fleet over the past 10 years, both through outright sales and transfer to overseas registers of vessels under United Kingdom beneficial ownership. We are not alone in this. The fleets of virtually every traditional maritime nation have declined in recent years. We must not exaggerate as some hon. Members did today.

The extent of the decline depends on what base year is used. All hon. Members seem to choose 1975. That was an all-time peak for the United Kingdom at an unstable level brought about by excessive subsidy before that period. That in turn shows the danger of excessive subsidy in shipbuilding. The decline from the level of the 1960s is far less marked. If United Kingdom beneficially owned overseas registered shipping — flagged out to foreign registries — is taken into account, the reduction in deadweight tonnage is small — only about 5 per cent. Therefore, there has been some exaggeration of the decline.

Flagging out has been a feature of the debate. We are not the only nation to flag out. Twenty-three per cent. of the Norwegian fleet, 26 per cent. of the Japanese fleet, 36 per cent. of the Greek fleet and 64 per cent. of the United States fleet sails under foreign flags. The United Kingdom figure is 21 per cent.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Taunton (Sir E. du Cann) mentioned the fact that we carry only 20 per cent. of trade from the United Kingdom. The figures show that we carry 22 per cent. of our imports and our partners carry 19 per cent. by weight. Of our exports we carry 24 per cent. and our partners carry 13 per cent. The rest of our trade is carried by cross traders and those cross trades are of immense importance to our fleet. Over 40 per cent. of the earnings of British shipowners comes from the cross trades. If we were to make a move which sought to deny the openness of cross trade to the world's free market fleets, we would do more damage than in any other way that we could to our interests. Therefore, that is not such a strong point as my right hon. Friend suggested.

Furthermore, those are aggregate figures for the decline in tonnage which cover different sectors of the industry —tankers, dry bulk cargoes, cargo liners, ferries, cruise vessels, and short sea and offshore support vessels. None of those is a privileged market—far from it. But their opportunities and prospects differ considerably. That is one reason why broad speculations about the future size of the fleet, while it may be striking and frightening, are not particularly meaningful. One must get down to the detail.

The National Union of Marine Aviation and Shipping Transport Officers has made a crude estimate that numbers in the fleet could fall by half this year. That takes no account of the different prospects for the different sectors of the fleet. On the other hand, the GCBS has recently suggested that numbers might fall to 400 or 500 by 1990.

Mr. Stott: Three hundred to 400.

Mr. Ridley: No, according to the GCBS it is 400 to 500. Neither of those figures allows for the increasing amount of shipping beneficially owned in the United Kingdom but registered overseas.

The surprising and striking omission from the debate has been how few hon. Members have referred to the matter of BP Shipping. My hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Ottaway) and the hon. Member for Jarrow did so, but only in passing. As the House knows, the company is handing over manning responsibility for its bulk tanker fleet to three agencies based outside

the United Kingdom. The seagoing staff are being offered early retirement and redundancy terms by BP Shipping and jobs by the agencies. The plan involves the transfer of the ships to the Bermudan register. The company reckons to save £12 million a year by doing this. It is in the order, I believe, of £300,000 per ship per year in running costs alone.

I do not welcome the move, I do not welcome such transfers, but I must make it clear to the House that I have no power to stop any company moving the place of registration of its ships; nor would it be possible for the House to legislate to take such power because any company is free to establish its place of business and to register its ships in any country that it wishes.

BP's move illustrates the critical importance of the underlying factors of fiscal and crew cost advantage for the particular sorts of shipping involved. Overseas registers are here to stay—they will not go away—and we must seek to make the best use of such shipping for our economic benefit and defence planning as we can. The saving of £300,000 a ship will probably enable BP to run its fleet as an economic viable entity.

It depends to some extent—and this is the important point I wish to put to the House — on whether the overseas registry is British, as in the case of Bermuda, or foreign. This is the point to which my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, North referred. Vessels registered in Bermuda fly the red ensign. They are subject to the safety controls of the Bermudan registry which is ultimately controlled by us. The question of safety was raised by the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North. We can control the safety provisions in that registry in the way that I have described, so that point is covered.

The United Kingdom powers to requisition ships apply to the Bermudan registry or to any other dependent territory registry. The constraints of nationality of certain officers on merchant vessels registered in dependent territories are very similar to those in the United Kingdom. This is the point mentioned by the hon. Members for Wigan (Mr. Stott) and for Jarrow. There is no difference in the crewing requirements for the British registry and for the Bermudan registry. That enables us to maintain, and perhaps even with some negotiation to increase, the British crewing proportion. Indeed, in terms of the decline of the United Kingdom fleet and in terms of policy, in my opinion we should be talking about ships on the United Kingdom and the dependent registers together. In discussions with the United Kingdom shipowners, this is one of the matters that I intend to raise about their foreign registered ships and the defence needs of the United Kingdom.

Hon. Members have raised other general points about the availability of ships and crews to meet defence needs. With regard to ships, the House probably knows that the studies carried out for us by consultants last year indicate that generally adequate numbers of suitable ships are, and should continue to be, available to meet the needs of the Ministry of Defence in time of tension and of war.

I repeat what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said, that we have no doubt of our capability to mount a similar campaign to the Falklands campaign with the necessary attendant commercial merchant ships which were used on that occasion if the need should arise. There is no doubt whatever about that.

Mr. Ewing: Is that not unpatriotic?

Mr. Ridley: I think it is very unpatriotic of the hon. Gentleman to suggest that we cannot. I assure him that we can.

Sir Edward du Cann: My right hon. Friend surely must agree that it is the duty of all of us in the House to speak the truth as we see it. With the greatest of respect to his view, he has endeavoured to answer the debate by saying that the picture is by no means as black as many of us fear. In my opinion, there are answers to the points that he made. In my opinion, for what it is worth, the picture is indeed very much as black as we have suggested, and we have a duty, if we think that there are dangers in matters of defence, to state that plainly in the House, and there is nothing unpatriotic in doing so.

Mr. Ridley: My right hon. Friend is perfectly justified in seeking to say that, but to say that we do not have an adequate merchant marine to mount a similar operation to the Falklands is simply not the case. I hope that my right hon. Friend will accept that from me, because my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence and I have satisfied ourselves fully on that point.

I have more than I can say in the time available about the need for resupply and the ships available in time of tension or of war. This is a responsibility of NATO. NATO would pool its ocean-going shipping. We reckon that the resources of the NATO pool would be substantial, perhaps amounting to 50 per cent. of the deadweight tonnage of the free world. That is the tonnage available to NATO if civil resupply should be necessary.

The Government have studied all these matters. They have a policy for the future of the merchant marine. In addition to what I have said, we are major participants in——

It being three hours after the motion had been entered upon, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question pursuant to the order [10 March].*

The House divided: Ayes 239, Noes 153.

Division No. 97] **[6.56 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Alton, David
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arnold, Tom
Ashby, David
Ashdown, Paddy
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Atkinson, David *(B'm'th E)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Beith, A. J.
Bendall, Vivian
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'to'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Boyson, Dr Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brinton, Tim
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Bruinvels, Peter
Bryan, Sir Paul
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon A.
Buck, Sir Antony
Butcher, John
Butterfill, John
Carlile, Alexander *(Montg'y)*
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Cockeram, Eric
Colvin, Michael
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Couchman, James
Cranborne, Viscount
Crouch, David
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Dover, Den
Dunn, Robert
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim

Emery, Sir Peter
Evennett, David
Eyre, Sir Reginald
Fairbairn, Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Anthony
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fletcher, Alexander
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Freeman, Roger
Freud, Clement
Galley, Roy
Gardner, Sir Edward *(Fylde)*
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Greenway, Harry
Griffiths, Sir Eldon
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Harvey, Robert
Haselhurst, Alan
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heddle, John
Hickmet, Richard
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Howarth, Alan *(Stratf'd-on-A)*
Howell, Ralph *(Norfolk, N)*
Howells, Geraint
Irving, Charles
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Johnston, Sir Russell
Kennedy, Charles
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Knowles, Michael
Lang, Ian
Lawrence, Ivan
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim
Lewis, Sir Kenneth *(Stamf'd)*
Lightbown, David
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Nicholas
McCurley, Mrs Anna
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
Maclennan, Robert
McQuarrie, Albert
Major, John
Malins, Humfrey
Malone, Gerald
Maples, John
Marlow, Antony
Mather, Carol
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Hal *(B'grove)*
Mills, Iain *(Meriden)*
Mills, Sir Peter *(West Devon)*
Mitchell, David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Roger
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M. *(N'hampton S)*
Moynihan, Hon C.
Mudd, David
Needham, Richard
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steven
Onslow, Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Sir John *(Harrow W)*
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Parris, Matthew
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Penhaligon, David
Percival, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Pollock, Alexander
Porter, Barry
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Prentice, Rt Hon Reg
Price, Sir David
Pym, Rt Hon Francis
Rathbone, Tim
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Robinson, Mark *(N'port W)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ross, Stephen *(Isle of Wight)*
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Silvester, Fred
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speller, Tony
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(Dorset W)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon John
Steel, Rt Hon David
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Terlezki, Stefan
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waddington, David
Walden, George
Wall, Sir Patrick
Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watson, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Whitfield, John
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Woodcock, Michael
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Tony Durant and
Mr. Francis Maude.

NOES

Abse, Leo
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Bagier, Gordon A. T.
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnett, Guy
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Bidwell, Sydney
Boothroyd, Miss Betty
Boyes, Roland
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'rmline E)*
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Buchan, Norman
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Rt Hon J.
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Carter-Jones, Lewis
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Thomas
Clay, Robert
Clelland, David Gordon
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S)*
Cohen, Harry
Conlan, Bernard
Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Craigen, J. M.
Crowther, Stan
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dobson, Frank
Dormand, Jack
Dubs, Alfred
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eadie, Alex
Eastham, Ken
Edwards, Bob *(W'h'mpt'n SE)*
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Forrester, John
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
Godman, Dr Norman
Golding, John
Gould, Bryan
Gourlay, Harry
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hamilton, W. W. *(Fife Central)*
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Haynes, Frank
Heffer, Eric S.
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart *(Vauxhall)*
Home Robertson, John
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Janner, Hon Greville
John, Brynmor
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ronald
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
McCartney, Hugh
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Robert
Madden, Max
Mallon, Seamus
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Maxton, John
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meacher, Michael
Michie, William
Mikardo, Ian
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Miller, Dr M. S. *(E Kilbride)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Pavitt, Laurie
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Ernest *(Hackney N)*
Robertson, George
Rogers, Allan
Rowlands, Ted
Sheerman, Barry
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Mrs R. *(W'hampt'n NE)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*

Smith, Rt Hon J. *(M'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Stewart, Rt Hon D. *(W Isles)*
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Thomas, Dafydd *(Merioneth)*
Thomas, Dr R. *(Carmarthen)*
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Tinn, James
Torney, Tom
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert
Welsh, Michael
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Wilson, Gordon
Winnick, David
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Don Dixon and
Mr. Allen McKay.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Northern Ireland (Local Government)

7.8 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Richard Needham): I beg to move,

That the Local Government (Temporary Provisions) (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 (S.I. 1986, No. 221), dated 12th February 1986, a copy of which was laid before this House on 13th February, be approved.

This order was made on 12 February 1986 at a meeting of the Privy Council under the urgent procedure as provided for in schedule 1, paragraph 1(4)*(b)*, of the Northern Ireland Act 1974. The urgent procedure requires the order to be approved by resolution of both Houses within 40 days after the date on which the order was made, if the order is to continue in force.

Hon. Members will be aware that since September 1985 Unionist-controlled district councils in Northern Ireland have been adjourning, first, in protest about the presence of Sinn Fein members on councils and now because of the Anglo-Irish agreement. By the end of January, early February of this year, it was clear that the adjourning of councils would put at risk the striking of district rates for 1986-87. The House is aware that under the provisions of local government legislation in Northern Ireland there are three specific functions which must be exercised by councils themselves and cannot be delegated either to officers of councils or to a committee of the council. These functions relate to the striking of rates, the borrowing of money and land transactions. The failure to strike a rate is a clear indication that Unionist-controlled councils intend to escalate their action against the Government's policy. In these circumstances, the Government's first priority has to be the protection of services and jobs and it was for this reason that on 12 February we requested the Privy Council to make this order. I made clear at that time that

"This precautionary step is being taken because the Government is not prepared to allow citizens and ratepayers in any district council area to be deprived of those services and facilities to which they are entitled, nor to allow the jobs of council employees to be put at risk through the actions of councillors."

The House may be aware that there are default powers already existing in local government legislation in Northern Ireland. These powers would be insufficient to secure the uninterrupted delivery of local services, however, since they require a failure to exercise a function or a breakdown in service before action can be taken, and such action would take several weeks to complete. As it has now been indicated by some Unionist councillors that they wish to cause maximum disruption to local government, it would clearly be irresponsible not to take additional powers to minimise the damage that could be done either to the public or to the employees of the councils. That is the main reason why the Government are seeking the approval of the House to these new powers.

I should tell the House that we now have a situation where a majority within Belfast city council has deliberately defied the rulings of the High Court, where 18 councils, including Belfast, have deliberately defied a direction from the Department of the Environment to make a district rate, having earlier already decided to break the law by not striking a rate by the due date, and where these same councils continue to adjourn or suspend meetings, thereby threatening services in these council areas.

[Mr. Richard Needham]

If I may now turn to the main provisions in the order, hon. Members will see from article 3 that, if it appears that a council has failed or is unable or unwilling to exercise duly and effectually any of its functions, the Department of the Environment could make an order which would suspend that council and appoint other persons to assume responsibility for the affairs in that council area. I think it important to emphasise that, since this is a measure of the last resort, the Government would also want to ensure that any application of these powers would not be permanent. Hon. Members will therefore see that there are provisions for the order to be revoked if circumstances subsequently changed and councillors were willing to resume normal business. It is also important to draw the attention of the House to paragraph (2) of article 3, since this would give the power for the suspension from all other public bodies to which a councillor has been appointed or elected by virtue of his membership of a district council. It would be anomalous to suspend district councillors from their council activities and not at the same time consider their suspension from those other public bodies on which they represent local council interests. The remaining provisions in article 3 are provisions which follow from the suspension of councillors and their replacement by others. These powers will ensure that those persons appointed to look after the interests in any council area have the full authority of the law to continue to exercise all functions previously exercised by the council. This would include the modification of any transferred provisions.

Paragraphs (7) and (8) are designed during direct rule to preserve the position of the Assembly if legislative powers were devolved to it. While direct rule continues, they are modified by schedule 1 to the Northern Ireland Act 1974 which suspends the requirement to lay such orders before the Assembly in its present consultative form.

Hon. Members will see from article 4 that the legislation will remain in force until 31 May 1988 but could, if necessary, be extended for periods not exceeding one year until 1991; that is, for a five-year period in all.

The Government will not be deflected from their objective of safeguarding those services in Northern Ireland which are a fundamental entitlement in any society. The Government have been patient over a period of months during which local councils have not been meeting. The stage has now been reached where it has proved necessary to seek these additional powers as a contingency in order to be in a position to secure the provision of services and to protect jobs. I hope that these powers will not have to be used, but I can assure hon. Members and the people of Northern Ireland that, if it proves necessary as a measure of last resort to take this step, the Government are prepared to do so. I should like to remind Unionist councillors that the functions provided by their council, such as burials, refuse collection and the operation of leisure facilities, are for the benefit of all sections of the community. I naturally wish that these important local services should remain under the control of local elected representatives, but if this proves to be impossible the Government must be certain that they can step in to protect innocent members of the community.

I have explained to the House the background against which the Government have decided to introduce these new powers. I have outlined the main reasons why we find it necessary to seek these powers and have given a summary of their intent. I am sure that hon. Members will agree that our action is justified in the circumstances, and recognise that the powers will be used only if it proves essential.

I commend the order to the House.

7.16 pm

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): This debate must be set in the context not only of the Anglo-Irish agreement but of the Unionist reaction to it. For it is that reaction which has led to 18 Unionist-controlled councils in Northern Ireland systematically adjourning, systematically turning their elected faces to the wall, and declining not only to set a rate but to care for the majority community which elected them to do just that. It is not that those Unionist councils are unaware of their duties, as the Minister explained. All of them have been directed by the Department of the Environment to set a rate. All of them have, in effect, refused.

In one case, that of Belfast city council, the council has been ordered to do so by the Court of Appeal. But Belfast city council has closed its ears to the counsels of the law. The only law that appears to have any significance for those Unionist councillors who hold the majority in the 18 councils that have refused to set a rate—eight other councils which are not Unionist-controlled have set a rate—is the law of rhetoric or, rather, the law of King Lear—

> "I will do such things,—
> What they are yet I know not,—but they shall be
> The terrors of the earth."

We have seen several such "terrors" since the signing of the agreement. Faced for the first time with an Anglo-Irish agreement that agreed ways should be sought to enhance security co-operation between the Governments of the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland, what did the Unionist leadership do? It organised a march on Belfast city hall. Faced with an Anglo-Irish agreement which led to the Republic acceding to the European convention on terrorism, what did the Unionist leadership do? It called for a series of by-elections throughout Northern Ireland, saw its vote fall, and found that one of its Members of Parliament lost his seat.

Faced with an agreement that affirmed that any changes in the status of Northern Ireland would come about only with the consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland—an obligation to be lodged with the United Nations—the Unionist leadership called for a day of protest which led to violence on the streets of Belfast; a violence that winged its way round the world and was seen on television screens in the United States of America at the very time when its Senate and Congress were discussing $250 million of aid for Northern Ireland and the border areas. We saw the work force at Harland and Wolff pulled out at a time when three vessels are up for contract with the Ministry of Defence, and when an assurance of political stability was sought. There was a call for the suspension of the very agreement that seeks to add a sense of security to the lives of all who live in Northern Ireland. None of these measures has had the slightest impact upon the Anglo-Irish agreement.

To add to the irrelevance of Unionist reaction, we are debating this order, which would give the Government powers to send in commissioners, on the very day that there has been a further intergovernmental conference in

accordance with the agreement. I am not entirely sure whether Lear would turn in his Shakespearean grave, but those who believe in the unity of the United Kingdom must be concerned that the attitude of the Unionists, the Unionist reaction, the Unionist response, the Unionists' turn to violence and intimidation, is likely to sunder the United Kingdom more than any IRA bullet, bomb or other act of aggression. The sight of Sinn Fein councillors voting to strike rates in their communities, while the Unionists seek to adjourn business, must be particularly galling for those who have long espoused the Unionist cause.

Those who believe in local democracy and who believe that local democracy should serve local people, that rates are set for services, and that services are there for people must feel a particular sadness when, on a small scale, Unionist leaders and elected representatives withdraw their consent and their representation in order to make their own people suffer more. For example, and it is only one example, some 40 jobs may be lost and a variety of community services brought to an end on 31 March because of Unionist non-co-operation at local level.

The *Belfast Telegraph* has reported that in east Belfast a clean-up programme could go, with the loss of 27 jobs, jobs created under the Action for Community Employment programme. Belfast city council has until Friday of this week to decide on grants for community groups for the 1986-87 financial year. The members of the council have been too busy to do that because they have been considering whether there should be a banner reading "Ulster Says No" on the town hall; that is more important to them than saying yes to renewal of community programmes. If no decision is made by the council, all the community groups depending on such grants will have run out of money by 31 March.

When an approach was made by the community groups to the appropriate executive in the Belfast town hall, he suggested three courses of action. The first was that an approach be made to a bank to negotiate a loan. This is impossible because, since most are charities, they cannot legally and knowingly run up deficits. This course of action was a non-starter. The second was to serve redundancy notices for 31 March, and I am saddened to have to say that most have now done this. We may here have shades of Liverpool, but whereas the Labour party was the first to squeal and shout at the treatment of the workforce of Liverpool, it is equally right that we should be concerned about what is happening to community workers in Northern Ireland.

The third alternative for these community groups was that the staff should be asked to stay on voluntarily from the 31 March. This alternative to firing people is just as bad, for they are condemned to work without pay because of the irresponsibility of Unionist-controlled councils. One asks them to run up bills and not to make mortgage payments because elected councillors turn their faces from the tasks that they were elected to perform. One brings local government into disrepute. One brings one's own principles to desuetude for an abstract principle of opposition to an agreement that guarantees one's rights but is not remotely concerned with how families can survive when the breadwinner does not work—or, in this case, works but is not paid—because a council declines to strike a rate.

Some 25 groups in Belfast alone will suffer as a consequence of this default of the Unionist-controlled council. Other workers funded from elsewhere will lose their jobs if their organisations collapse. Further workers on Action for Community Employment schemes administered by the community organisations will also lose their jobs. The sum involved in relation to these groups is £129,850 for next quarter, or a total for the year of £389,550. The problem is not that decisions have been taken not to fund, but that decisions to allocate funding will not be taken in time. Seven directly funded resource centres will close. Seven other directly funded community centres will also close. The funding for these groups amounts to £79,600 a quarter. Some 27 full-time and 10 part-time workers will be affected. All 14 groups are on annual block grants from Belfast city council.

A further 11 groups in receipt of grant funding will be seriously affected. Four community relations projects will be placed in jeopardy, together with another seven: the Association of Local Advice Centres, the women's education project, the north Belfast resource centre computer project, the Workers' Educational Association sixties-plus unit, Trinity technical aid, Northern Ireland, the conservation volunteer urban unit and a community education project. These 11 groups receive their funding through the Belfast area needs programme. The money is provided by the Department of Education, but the city council can claim it from the Department only after it has been spent. The money involved—£50,250 for the last quarter of 1985-86—should have been claimed from the Department last Friday to cover the period from January to March 1986. It was not claimed, so, although the money is available, it will not reach the groups which need it most. For these 11 groups a total of nine full-time jobs are threatened, along with a number of ACE posts. The legal responsibility for community work was handed over to district councils in 1976, and the Department of Education has said that it cannot and will not interfere.

It has always been a part of the Unionist case that there should be true integration with the rest of the United Kingdom. It has long been espoused by the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell). I am sure he will not begrudge my telling the House that Down council has actually set a rate—an 8p rise in the pound, which has put up the rates by 18 per cent.

But who would wish to give more powers to local councillors who then proceed to walk away from them? Are the Unionists fully aware of what they are doing to public opinion in this country, even in so minor a matter as the equivalent of parish councils setting a rate? Who would want to give them devolved powers over education, health, and fire services, if, for a political purpose, a political gain as they perceive it, they would withdraw their members from the council chambers, adjourn business and walk away? Even Pontius Pilate washed his hands before doing so.

The Unionist dream of integration, of giving more powers to local councils, must be even more remote as the British public gradually understands what withdrawal of consent means to the average, ordinary man and woman of Northern Ireland: a threat to services, a threat to jobs, disrespect for the law, and, if the Unionists had their way, anarchy.

The recital that I have given of Belfast city council's treatment of community programmes is mirrored throughout Northern Ireland. All Unionist-controlled councils are putting their voluntary organisations in the same position, although the crisis has come to a head sooner in Belfast because the court declared ultra vires the

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town clerk's acting and taking decisions on behalf of the council. In other councils, the town clerks are still acting. Some of the non-Belfast councils, however, have been boycotting for an extended period, dating from the protests against Sinn Fein. Craigavon borough council first adjourned in November 1985 and has made no payments to voluntary groups since.

The immediate impact outside Belfast is lessened by the fact that no community group jobs are wholly funded by Unionist-controlled councils. Ultimately, however, the effect will be the same, as groups are denied funding and gradually bleed to death. What is happening in Belfast is only a microcosm of what is in store for the next financial year, and we urge the Government to remedy the situation now before there is irrevocable damage.

In a statement on 10 February, when he was talking of emergency legislation, the Minister said that it had been necessary to seek these powers to ensure that there was no breakdown in the provision of local government services, and to protect the jobs of council employees. He described the measure as a precautionary step because the Government were not prepared to allow citizens and ratepayers in any district area to be deprived of those services and facilities to which they are entitled, nor to allow the jobs of council employees to be put at risk through the action of councillors. The Minister had in mind the burial of the dead, the collection of refuse, the maintenance of public health and the operation of major leisure facilities.

What we have in mind is the community programmes, those who work in them, and those in the community who benefit from them. While we understand the Government's reluctance to send in commissioners too early, and accept that that should be a last resort, we ask the Minister to direct his attention to the community programmes and to those who are in them. We suggest, respectfully, that he directs his mind immediately to those issues.

No one wishes to disturb the balance of a local democracy or unduly to interfere with the powers of those who have been elected. But at the same time jobs should not and cannot be put at risk. It is shameful that Unionist councils have turned their backs on community services and on those who work in them. For that reason we urge the Government not to be intimidated on the ground by Unionist rhetoric or Unionist leaders; to let the commissioners go in to protect jobs and services; and not to let the people of Northern Ireland again suffer the futilities and barrenness of Unionist policy. We want the Government to act on these matters. We shall not divide the House tonight, but we urge the Government to act promptly when the order is placed on the statute book.

7.31 pm

Mr. J. Enoch Powell (South Down): The easy philippic to which the House has just listened will bring no benefit to any section or interest in Northern Ireland or Great Britain, including the Government. When the Secretary of State wrote on 13 February to my right hon. Friend the Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux) announcing the order he said:

"I understand the depth of feeling which exists."

Alas, would that that were so. It is perfectly clear that neither the Secretary of State nor the Government have comprehended the depth of feeling that exists. If they had, the Secretary of State would not have perpetrated the solecism of fixing the debate on a day when in Northern Ireland the Anglo-Irish conference is meeting, and of sending almost the most junior of junior Ministers in the Northern Ireland Office to present the order to the House. He would have realised the inherent offensiveness of that step, to which, I presume, he was blind because I do not imagine that it was intentional. It is simply an evidence of the continuing incomprehension.

The Minister would also understand why, having done that, my right hon. Friend the Member for Lagan Valley and some of my other hon. Friends thought it would be more in the interests of their constituents in Northern Ireland and of the Union that they should be in the Province today and this evening, rather than in the debate. He would also have understood—this is what the debate is about — *[Interruption.]* If the hon. Member for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth (Mr. Hogg) wishes to intervene, perhaps he would get on his feet and let us hear his remarks instead of muttering under his breath. I see that he is not responding to my challenge. If the Secretary of State had understood the depth of feeling, he would understand what it is that brings the debate about, and that in the eyes of hundreds of thousands of people in Northern Ireland, ever since 15 November 1985, the Government of Northern Ireland are essentially a Government who are no longer that of the Crown in Parliament, but one effectively shared with the Ministers and Government of another country.

That being the sense shared by those councillors with large numbers of their fellow countrymen, they could not in honour continue to participate, even in the minimal form of government which is represented by the local government of district councils as it exists today in Northern Ireland—a form of government, which, not inaccurately, was described just now as being more or less equivalent to that of a district council.

Nevertheless, in the eyes of those men that was part of the government of the Province which had ceased to be governed as part of the United Kingdom, and where genuine authority and influence lay outside this country. That is why they declined to take part in or responsibility for even that vestigial part of the government of Northern Ireland. In those circumstances, it was right and necessary that the Government should take up the responsibility.

The Government have, under existing legislation, the power to make a rate. But I do not criticise the fact that the Government have taken power at the same time effectively to administer these local government services. They must take responsibility for that for which elected persons in those 18 councils no longer in honour feel that they can take responsibility. That is what is going on, and that is what lies behind the order.

It may come as some surprise to any hon. Member uninterested or unacquainted with Northern Ireland if he were in the Chamber this evening to know how vestigial the powers of district councils are. The Government are already directly responsible, although they do not always admit their responsibility to the House, for the major services which are administered in the rest of the United Kingdom by elected authorities. Only a small addition to those powers for which the Government are already responsible will be made if the order is put into effect. Indeed, the district rate covers only the penumbra of services. The general rate, which corresponds to the rate

paid in a corresponding part of the United Kingdom and supports the main services, is already fixed by the Government on the Government's responsibility.

I hope that if the order is put into effect, and I believe that it will be, the Government will accept their full, direct responsibility to the House for the details, as well as the policy, of all the elements of administration which then lie within their control. I hope that they will be prepared in the House to answer debate and questions on the details, as well as the policy of those services. Hitherto they have sought to hide behind the appointed boards for health, housing and education. I hope that they will not behave in that way in relation to the services which they will take over under the order from local government.

I believe that good can come from evil, and that the extremity to which the Government's mistake of 15 November is inexorably leading can have a good result, and lead the House and the Government to face the realities in Northern Ireland, instead of constantly hiding and running from them. Regarding local government—this was touched on by the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) — there is no complete membership of this United Kingdom without full enjoyment of local government as it is enjoyed in the rest of the United Kingdom. There have been arguments and suggestions that only the vestigial powers that exist at present can safely be left with elected authorities. Otherwise, there might be misadministration and discrimination.

This order is a reminder that, as a learned judge remarked not long ago, local government is the creature of statute and local government is ultimately the creature of central Government. The ultimate responsibility for what is done in local government inexorably returns to and rests with central Government.

It is perfectly feasible that those councillors in Northern Ireland — and I know them well — of both political majorities and colours are capable of administering far more than the trivial services that are at present within their scope. It is perfectly possible for them to be entrusted with the range of services which elected councillors supervise and administer in the rest of the United Kingdom. What we are doing tonight is a reminder that it is wholly within the powers of Government to ensure that such a transfer of responsibility is not misused but is controlled and does not lead to any of the results which have been feared.

This is not an order that any of us would welcome. Rather we regard it as inevitable. Nevertheless, there lies behind the order, and I say so here tonight, the possibility that the day will come when the people of Northern Ireland will be endowed, as they are entitled to be endowed, with the right to local administration of those services which are locally administered in the rest of the United Kingdom. The claim of the people of Northern Ireland, as long as they are part of the United Kingdom, to be administered like the rest of the United Kingdom in all respects is in the end an indefeasible claim. That claim sooner or later will extend to local government.

7.41 pm

Mr. Seamus Mallon (Newry and Armagh): The right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) has spoken four times about the depth of feeling which exists in Northern Ireland, and which is not appreciated here. I assure him that I have seen that depth of feeling. I have seen it in practical terms. I saw it last Monday. I saw it no later than yesterday. A brave and courageous nursing officer, who tried to get her staff into a hospital at Craigavon, had her leg broken by people who were suffering from a depth of feeling. One of my constituents was taken to Craigavon hospital with his head split by a brick, which had resulted from a depth of feeling. I know that depth of feeling; I know the result of it. I assure the right hon. Member for South Down that there is at least one person here who knows that depth of feeling and knows the effect of it.

It is a matter of regret that, as we face all our problems in Northern Ireland, the democratically elected councils throughout the north of Ireland have to be dealt with in this manner. I speak as a member of Armagh district council which will no longer operate when this order has been put into effect. When the councils were formed, we regarded them as having great potential. We regarded them as the nursery beds for partnership and reconciliation on decisions on a minor scale. We hoped that that nursery element would grow into the politics of the north of Ireland. However, like most other things, because of the depth of feeling, that opportunity was lost.

What have we seen? We have seen discrimination which has been proved in the courts of Ireland. I ask hon. Members not to take my word for it, but to look up the court records. We have seen the way in which councils have been used for political reasons. The Minister of State said that this was the second time that Unionist councillors had withdrawn from councils. It is not. It is the third time. On that previous occasion, as a member of a council and as a citizen, I attested to the court the right of Unionists to stop doing council business. I lost, and it cost me a great deal of money. After three attempts, I hope that the Department will now grapple with this problem.

I am loth to speak in political terms, but I find it difficult not to do so. I prefer to consider the merits of councils, their functions and effects, but it is not as simple as that because they are being used as political tools, not for the first time, but for the third time since 1973—we must all realise the essence of this matter—to challenge the sovereignty of this Parliament, as we saw on the streets of Northern Ireland last Monday. The Unionists in the north of Ireland are claiming quasi-sovereignty — independence for Northern Ireland within the British context. Somehow they are seeking to have their cake and eat it.

Those in the House who are sincere, committed Unionists must realise that this is the essence of the Unionist revolt. That is why district councils are being treated as they are by Unionists on those councils.

The hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) has rightly itemised some of the effects that this will have. Yesterday, I spoke to people employed by Belfast city council in the resource centres. There will be no community service budgeting for those centres, and there will be no money for the neighbourhood development schemes in Belfast. Such schemes are crucial in a divided city where a concrete wall has to be built between the Protestant and Catholic sections. The neighbourhood development schemes and councils will not be able to operate. The wages of the people in the centres will not be paid, and there will be no cash for the resource centres. The Action for Community Employment schemes will come to a halt. New employment will therefore not be

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created through the admirable ACE schemes. The clerks in the councils do not have it within their power to fund those resource centres any further.

We are entering a situation where people will lose their jobs and the food off their plates so that others can demonstrate their depth of feeling. That will be one of the net results. Another net result, which I fear as a councillor, will be the lack of services to the public. When I write to the district councils on behalf of constituents, I do not even get the courtesy of a reply. Councillors do not have the right of consultation to which they are entitled, especially with the Department of the Environment in relation to roads, housing and planning permission. That shows the way in which the electorate is being put at a tremendous disadvantage. This form of elected democracy, which should be the basis of the most intimate relationship with the community, is suffering and all that important work is going by the board.

Remarkable cuts in the housing programme, which councillors should examine and influence, are being swept through. Armagh district council will not furnish me with details of the housing programme. It will not send planning schedules. Therefore, people who, like me, wish to carry on as councillors do not have the facility to do so. Must my democratic rights and those of my constituents be sacrificed so that the depth of feeling can continue to express itself?

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): I am listening to the hon. Gentleman with great interest. Will he explain whether the refusal to communicate with him is a deliberate act and, if so, who is responsible for it, as I find what he is saying extremely disturbing?

Mr. Mallon: In their wisdom, Unionist councils—they are the majority—decided to hand over all powers of administration to the chairmen of the councils, who could instruct the clerks to the councils. For the whole of the Armagh district council area, one man, who I saw manning the barricades showing his depth of feeling last Monday, has power over every item of council business and decides whether I shall get a reply to my letters.

The service to the public is vital and initiatives, if there are any, of some council officers will be frozen because they will not run the risk of taking decisions for which they might have to answer. They have to consider whether there will be retrospective authorisation of decisions. Council clerks who want to do their job properly are being put in an impossible position, as are councillors who want to fulfil their role.

The right hon. Member for South Down talked about the depth of feeling of councillors who are bringing district council business to a standstill. He conveniently ignored the fact that there are people in the north of Ireland who want to serve on councils. I am one. There are many others, including the 100 elected members of my party who want to serve their constituents, but they cannot, because the Unionist parties have arbitrarily decided that they will not. The right hon. Gentleman ignored the fact that eight councils are operating well. They have struck rates and are serving their constituents. They all happen to be in areas where there is a Nationalist majority. These are strange times indeed. I belong to a party which was born on the streets in revolt and in the civil rights movement. Unionism has gone down the road that we took 10 years ago and discovered was a cul-de-sac. Can they not learn even from recent history, if not more distant history?

I welcome the prospect of action on district councils at last. I have not seen much action in the past. It is unfortunate that it has been left to individuals to go to the courts at their own expense to test legislation. It was unfortunate that I had to do that. It was unfortunate that individuals from Craigavon and Belfast district council had to test the law. Why did the Department sit back and watch? I should have thought that it was part of its duty to discover legal realities. I hope that the Minister of State will give us some assurance that, as a result of this problem, he will have the legislation under which councils operate in the north of Ireland examined thoroughly, as it is patently faulty.

Because of faulty legislation, councils can be used, just as they have been three times since 1973. The ball is in the court of the Minister and the Department. I ask him to use some courage in that regard. The order provides that, if councillors are suspended, those who serve on area boards will also be suspended from membership of those boards. In those circumstances, it would be only right to appoint people from the councils who wish to serve to redress the imbalance. The Minister should not tell us that he cannot do that because every appointment after election to a council is a nomination by the Minister. He has an opportunity to ensure that democratic representation on those boards continues.

I am aware that the Unionist parties have sent the Minister to Coventry, but that is no reason why he should not speak to the other political parties in Northern Ireland. I remind him of a request that my party made on 19 November 1985 for a meeting to discuss the problems of district councils. We have not yet had a reply. The request has been repeated, but we have still not had a reply. I should have thought that four months was long enough. Is the Minister taking a leaf out of Armagh district council's book and ignoring the request of other parties?

I welcome the order with some regret and for an extraneous reason. If implemented, it will give the Department a chance to do something crucial—to get a worm's eye view of how local government operates in Northern Ireland. It will have an opportunity to see the quality that does not exist in many councils in terms of representation and administration.

The order provides that proper steps should be taken to ensure that councils at administrative level are properly led and administered and not dragged down to the depths by lack of imagination or commitment. The Minister knows what I mean and what I am speaking about. He should get a worm's eye view of what we have to live with in Armagh, Craigavon and many other councils throughout the north of Ireland.

The hon. Member for Middlesbrough started with a quotation from Shakespeare. It is worth remembering that one of the essences of tragedy is that it is self-inflicted. Once again, we have the trauma of people in the north of Ireland inflicting punishment on themselves and others when it could be avoided. There should be no equivocation. The Minister said, "as a contingency" and "if it proves essential". I should have thought that experience of the past five months would have shown that the time for "ifs" and "buts" was over. I, too, would like to quote Shakespeare:

"If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well

It were done quickly".

7.58 pm

Sir John Biggs-Davison (Epping Forest): It was my misfortune to have to be absent when the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) made his maiden speech, and I am glad to have heard him speak today with force and eloquence. It is right and proper that the voice of Nationalism should be heard in this place. Indeed, it is right that the voice of separatist parties in Wales or Scotland should be heard here. This House is a place where there can be dialogue between Unionism and Nationalism. The Northern Ireland Assembly cannot fulfil that role and I believe that Ministers are now contemplating its termination.

There is an irony in a member of the Social Democratic and Labour party appealing to the sovereignty of this Parliament. The hon. Gentleman described his party as being born in revolt. I thought that his party's mission was to throw off the sovereignty of Parliament over Northern Ireland.

Mr. Mallon: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. I hope that my days here are numbered, as I hope the days here of every representative from Northern Ireland are numbered. As I said in my maiden speech, I want to do that in such a way that we create unity within Ireland without spilling one drop of blood or diminishing one man's rights. As such, while I am a Member of the House I shall treat it with respect and I shall try to present that point of view, but make no mistake about my position.

Sir John Biggs-Davison: I hope that it will always be possible for there to be discussion between Unionists and Nationalists in this House.

The Under-Secretary of State who introduced the order made a sad speech because this is a melancholy occasion. As the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh pointed out, the people of Northern Ireland of every faith and opinion now face hardship, inconvenience and danger. The order is the "Local Government (Temporary Provisions) (Northern Ireland) Order 1986." "Temporary" is a euphemism for emergency. Northern Ireland, the United Kingdom and this House are in the presence of the largest emergency since the troubles began. We all know, whatever we say and however much we whistle to keep up our courage, that the Anglo-Irish agreement has antagonised the most moderate Unionists and the most moderate Unionist councillors. The hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) quoted "King Lear". I suppose that if by one's policy one drives men mad, one is fully entitled to call them mad. That is what is happening today.

I submit to the House that it is time that both Front Benches stopped lecturing and started to listen. When will the day come, which was promised by the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, that Unionists will see the benefit of the Hillsborough agreement? When does my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary think that we shall see progress under this agreement towards peace, reconciliation and stability?

The House rarely discusses local government in Northern Ireland and it is sad that now it is obliged to discuss local government it cannot do so in a constructive fashion. The right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) hoped that some good would come out of this evil and that realities in Northern Ireland would now be faced. The reality is that the only practicable constitutional way forward is that which is constantly neglected and even ridiculed by Ministers — the fullest administrative devolution to local government — analogues to, not identical with, local government in other parts of the United Kingdom. That is the way forward. I invite Ministers to consider that way forward. It might help to mollify an estranged majority in the Province of Northern Ireland.

8.3 pm

Mr. Ian Gow (Eastbourne): A fortnight ago today the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux), the leader of the Ulster Unionist party, and the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley), the leader of the Democratic Unionist party, had a meeting with my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. After that meeting a statement was issued by the Prime Minister —I do not think that it was an agreed statement—in which she said that she also offered consultations with the Unionist leaders about the arrangements for handling Northern Ireland business in Parliament at Westminster.

I have long felt that this procedure for debating legislation for Northern Ireland, even if the motion which stands in the Prime Minister's name is moved and passed, is most unsatisfactory because we cannot amend the order which is now before us. Therefore, I very much hope that the matter which was discussed a fortnight ago will be resumed and that there will be further discussions about arrangements for handling Northern Ireland business in Parliament at Westminster.

I agree with the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) about the timing of today's debate. It is perfectly understandable that the leader of his party and his hon. Friends wish to be in the Province today. However, I shall allow myself what I hope the right hon Gentleman will not think is an impertinence. I want to say that I hope that the leader of his party and his hon. Friends will participate in this House in future debates which affect not only Northern Ireland but the rest of the United Kingdom and all other matters. I hope to see a return to full representation from the Unionist parties in this place.

The arrangements for this evening's debate, however unsatisfactory, are arrangements which I believe are required by the situation. In my opinion, there was no way in which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State could have failed to bring forward this Order in Council at this time. However, perhaps even my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State will agree that the debate would not be taking place had it not been preceded by the Anglo-Irish agreement of 15 November.

I agree entirely with the right hon. Member for South Down that those who sit on the Treasury Bench still do not understand, or at least give no appearance of understanding, how deep is the feeling of bitterness and resentment about what happened on 15 November. There is no need for my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary to take my word for that. I can understand if my hon. Friend pays no heed to me, but he ought to pay heed to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. During an interview published in the *Belfast Telegraph* on 17 December 1985 my right hon. Friend said that the response in Northern Ireland to the Anglo-Irish agreement was "much worse" than had been expected. Was it much worse than my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary expected?

[Mr. Ian Gow]

Yes, I think that all Northern Ireland Ministers, if they are honest with themselves, will say that they did not expect the reaction to be as it was. Why did they not expect the reaction which was totally predictable and predicted by others? It was because the advice which was being given by those in the Northern Ireland Office to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and to my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs was based on a misunderstanding of the depth of Unionist feeling.

I understand why the order is before the House but I have to say to my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Treasury Bench that one cannot continue to govern a part of this kingdom in a way which is massively and significantly different from the way in which one governs other parts without the consent of the majority of people whom one is governing differently.

I hope that it will not be necessary for this order to remain in force for long, but I can understand the depth of feeling that have led Unionist councillors to take the action that they have taken. I hope that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary will show a little more understanding of those depths of feeling and a greater willingness than has been in evidence since 15 November to acknowledge that it is just possible that Northern Ireland Ministers may be in error.

8.10 pm

Mr. Needham: By leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I shall reply to the points that have been raised.

The hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) made a powerful plea for a deeper understanding of ACE schemes and community projects in Northern Ireland. I think that the whole House will agree that it is a pity—I put it no higher than that—that the protest that we so much hoped would be both lawful and peaceful turned out in several instances to be neither. As the hon. Member for Middlesbrough said, in local government, the effect of the unlawful process is to bring into considerable doubt the schemes that are of real benefit to the community.

We have only become fully aware of the problems that have arisen within the past few days, and we are considering them. I go back to what I said earlier—the appointment of commissioners would be a last resort, and grant-aiding community projects is a permissive power available to the councils. We wish to see those permissive powers kept with the councils and used by them, as that is the basis of their functions.

I could hardly be flattered by the comments made by the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) about my position in Northern Ireland. However, I am the Minister responsible for local government and for the protection and provision of services. Therefore, it is right that I should be here to introduce the order and reply to this debate.

I was interested to hear the right hon. Member explain —I understand his point—why his colleagues are not here. In support of something said by my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow) I point out to the right hon. Member that I hope it will not be too long before his colleagues return to take up their seats, as I think that I heard him suggest might be the case, so that they can resume their questioning of me and my colleagues with the determination of which I know that they are capable.

When they do so, I humbly suggest that they encourage their colleagues to resume some of their functions on councils, although it can be argued that many of the services that local councils perform, as the right hon. Member for South Down said, are trivial in comparison to many of the functions that local councils or county councils have here. I must agree with the hon. Member for Middlesbrough that it will be even more difficult to persuade Government or Parliament to give greater responsibilities to those councils when at present their councillors appear to be prepared to act outside the law.

Unfortunately, I was not here for the maiden speech of the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) but I have read it and I have had the privilege of listening to him come to the wicket for the second time. Whereas the right hon. Member for South Down hardly flattered me by calling me the most junior of junior Ministers, the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh, by referring to me as the Minister of State for Northern Ireland, has done my ego a great deal of good. All of us—I point out to my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne — understand the depth of feeling in the majority community. Therefore, it is even more necessary that all of us, wherever we are and whatever our position, are careful about the words we use and the tone in which we use them.

The hon. Member for Newry and Armagh said that the ball is in my court. I cannot accept that proposition entirely, but the whole point of local government has to be that the powers that are given to local government are exercised locally. If they are not being conducted properly we have, as a Department, introduced a commissioner of complaints and the local government auditor. We are not "big daddy", and nor is it right that we should be. The hon. Member and some of his colleagues have taken the opportunity of pursuing matters locally through the courts and that, in our judgment, is the way to proceed.

Mr. Nicholas Lyell (Mid-Bedfordshire): Many of our right hon. and hon. Friends are thinking carefully about the depth of feeling. Is my hon. Friend aware that many of us feel that we could understand it better, when we look back on the day of action or strike, if we had been able to see a more spontaneous withholding of consent, if that was what was going to happen, by those in Northern Ireland, and not the widespread intimidation, barricades and bullying that appeared to go on that day, which seemed substantially to fog any true expression of feeling?

Mr. Needham: My hon. and learned Friend is right. The effects of the day of action, and its effects on the British public at large, were traumatic and extremely unfortunate. It has done considerable harm to future investment possibilities in Northern Ireland and to the image of the Loyalist community. That is a tragedy because I know that the vast majority of people in the Unionist and Loyalist community in Northern Ireland are decent, law-abiding and sensible people.

The hon. Member for Newry and Armagh asked about the introduction of commissioners, but I hope that that will not become necessary. If they were to be introduced, all councillors would be suspended. Therefore, it would not be possible to take councillors who are against the boycott and put them on to boards—such a move would not be a particularly good and sensible idea as it would be denying the ballot box by putting into positions of power people who had not been elected to those positions.

Mr. Mallon: I thank the Minister—I go no further this time after promoting him last time — for giving way. However, I have to disagree. Every person who sits on an area board is in the last analysis appointed to it. Some of these people are not elected to district councils or to any other office. If a commissioner is appointed, the councillors who wish to serve on the council are disadvantaged not only in connection with the council but in relation to sitting on an area board. The Minister must clear up that contradiction.

Mr. Needham: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is aware that there are rules governing appointment to boards which vary from one board to another. There are ministerial appointments which take into account the background, experience and professionalism of appointees to those boards. In other cases many people have to be appointed and the minister and the Department have no say in that under the statute.

Mr. Mallon: Will the Minister confirm that each person who sits on an area board is appointed to that board by the Minister responsible for that relevant board?

Mr. Needham: I think that we are getting into a slightly esoteric argument but the point is that the Minister has no discretion and must accept the people put forward to him from the local authorities or from the organisations under the statute.

Mr. J. Enoch Powell: The point that the Minister must clarify is whether the withdrawal, after the appointment of commissioners, of these appointed members from the boards will create vacancies which can be filled by the Minister. The Minister must address himself to that point.

Mr. Needham: I cannot give a definite answer to that question. As I understand it, and I will confirm this later to the right hon. Member for South Down and to the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh the appointments are lost and cannot go to the commissioners and would not fall back to the Minister for appointment. I will find out and write to the right hon. Gentleman and the hon. Gentleman about that.

I apologise to the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh if he has not received a reply to his request to send a deputation to see me. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that in the present circumstances I am only too happy to receive a deputation from anybody. I have been informed that the hon. Gentleman's November or December letter did not arrive and I have replied to the hon. Gentleman's colleague in the last two weeks.

As the only part I have ever played in Shakespeare was the fool in King Lear, I shall adjure from making any quotations. I accept the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne who commented that men who were driven mad become mad. I understand my hon. Friend's point, as it was Lear who drove himself mad.

I must tell the House that as the Minister with responsibility for the environment I do not relish bringing this measure to the House. My hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne is correct to say that in the Prime Minister's statement following the talks in Downing street one of the offers that was made was to consider the methods by which legislation in Northern Ireland could go through the House. The councils were adjourned because of the Sinn Fein presence before the Anglo-Irish agreement. Nevertheless, I accept that the situation has been subsumed by that.

As I said before, in putting this order to the House, I hope that, we will not have to use it. I hope that in local affairs in Northern Ireland it will be possible, accepting the depth of feeling, for councils to resume their normal business in the not too distant future in the same way as the right hon. Member for South Down has resumed his place in the House.

We all agree that the order should not last too long and that it is an order we would prefer to do without. However, as the Minister responsible for the environment, I have the duty to protect services and jobs if necessary. I therefore commend the order to the House.

Question put and agreed to,

Resolved,

That the Local Government (Temporary Provisions) (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 (S.I. 1986, No. 221), dated 12th February 1986, a copy of which was laid before this House on 13th February, be approved.

Northern Ireland (Appropriation)

8.26 pm

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Dr. Rhodes Boyson): I beg to move,

That the draft Appropriation (Northern Ireland) Order 1986, which was laid before this House on 19th February, be approved.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ernest Armstrong): It might be helpful if I make it clear that the debate on this order may cover all the matters for which Northern Ireland Departments, as distinct from the Northern Ireland Office, are responsible. Police and security are the principal excluded subjects.

Dr. Boyson: The order is being made under paragraph 1 of schedule 1 to the Northern Ireland Act 1974.

The draft order has two purposes. First, it is intended to appropriate the 1985-86 spring Supplementary Estimate. That is dealt with in part I of the schedule that sets out the details, by class and vote, of a further £72·7 million required from the Consolidated Fund of Northern Ireland. That sum is in addition to some £3,056 million which has already been approved by the House for the 1985-86 financial year. It brings the total Estimates provision for 1985-86 to £3,129 million.

Part II of the schedule gives details of the issues for which the vote on account of the £1,365 million for 1986-87 is required. That provision is necessary to enable services to continue until the 1986-87 main Estimates are debated later in the year.

Full details of all the provisions sought in the draft order can be found in two volumes, copies of which have been placed in the Vote Office. These are entitled the "Spring Supplementary Estimates" and the "Statement of Sums Required on Account."

Before going into the details of the extra funds being sought, I should like to say a few words about the general economic position in Northern Ireland and its effect on all of these accounts. The trend for both total industrial production and manufacturing output has until recently remained upward. There is also some encouragement to be gained from the employment figures. In the year to September 1985 — the latest period for which information is available—total employees in employment in Northern Ireland fell by 1,490 as against falls of 2,100 and 5,850 in the two previous 12-month periods. Nobody wants an increase in unemployment, but, in the past four or five years, there has been a steady decrease each year in the number becoming unemployed. There is evidence that the numbers of self-employed may be rising. At the last Northern Ireland Question Time, I said that we estimated that there had been an increase of about 7 per cent.—to 85,000—over three years in the number of self-employed people.

Nevertheless, a continuing rise in the supply of labour has been evident. One factor is that the birth rate in Northern Ireland is 36 per cent. higher than the birth rate in Great Britain. Also, the decline in the number of people emigrating means that unemployment remains the major economic problem in the Province. There is no getting away from that.

The Government are making a determined effort to tackle that problem through the job creation efforts of the Industrial Development Board, the Local Enterprise Development Unit and the various training and re-training schemes. However, the violence and destruction which took place during the strike a week yesterday, which was televised throughout the world, will certainly not help the efforts being made by the IDB, the LEDU and others to bring additional industrial investment into the Province.

I turn now to the provisions of the draft order. In class I, which covers agriculture, token Supplementary Estimates are being taken in both vote 1 and vote 3 to bring some important changes to hon. Members' attention. In vote 1 an increase of £200,000 is sought for the payment of student awards at Loughry, Greenmount and Enniskillen agricultural colleges. This brings these awards into line with other student support arrangements in Northern Ireland. However, additional receipts from board and lodging charges in student halls of residence have more than offset the increased expenditure. This is a book entry in which the figures are moved from one column to another. An additional £600,000 is sought for scientific equipment to test meat for residues, including hormonal content, and for research into the potential of using irradiation for the preservation of food. As about 80 per cent. of meat in Northern Ireland is exported, not only to Great Britain but to the rest of Europe, it is important to consider its hormonal content.

Also within vote 1, an additional £900,000 is required for the milk outgoers scheme to compensate producers who have given up milk production. Farmers in Northern Ireland and Northern Ireland Members are very concerned about the milk quota scheme. This additional £900,000 brings the total provision for payment to milk outgoers to £1·3 million to finance the reallocation of 32 million litres of Northern Ireland quota.

In addition, a further 2·5 million litres have been made available through transfer of direct sales quota. Regrettably, this represents only half of the Northern Ireland tribunal determinations in respect of exceptional hardship claims and allows some limited provision for small producers. I am very conscious of the need to find ways of bridging the gap and bringing Northern Ireland producers into line with their Great Britain counterparts. There may be some hope of solving this difficult problem in the proposed new EC outgoers scheme which is presently under consideration in Brussels. We are all concerned about this.

The second token Supplementary Estimate is in class I, vote 3, where £300,000 from the European Community is being appropriated in aid. These receipts under the urban renewal regulation are in respect of expenditure on drainage infrastructure projects largely in the Belfast urban area.

Turning to class II, the additional provision sought in votes 1 and 2 relate to the activities of the Industrial Development Board. Within vote 1 an extra £518,000 is being sought—£450,000 to meet additional expenditure on factory building and estate development and the balance for increased administration costs. The fact that a further £450,000 is required for factory building is a welcome reflection of increased capital investment by industry this year. This money is required to enable extensions or alterations to be made to a number of buildings to meet the requirements of particular projects. A proportion of the money is used in the development of Northern Ireland's first technology park at Antrim where construction work is well under way. The first phase of the main roadway is nearing completion. The building of two 7,500 sq ft units has begun, with a completion date for the

first of the buildings in July 1986. I am glad to say that interest in the park by industry has been particularly encouraging.

Of the £21·6 million being sought within vote 2, some £20·6 million is required to meet claims for grant assistance arising from the IDB's activities in recent years in promoting and maintaining employment in Northern Ireland. Expansion and modernisation projects recently promoted by the IDB are now coming on stream and beginning to earn their financial assistance. The IDB is continuing to concentrate resources on the priority activities of attracting new investment projects and encouraging the expansion and reorganisation of existing industry. New measures have also been introduced to encourage companies to focus greater attention on marketing.

One of the basic needs of the Province is to find the markets and to make the goods to satisfy them. The new measures include special exercises to increase exports, to maximise local resources and to improve marketing skills. A major initiative designed to encourage industry to adopt a more strategic approach to marketing has been launched. Successful trade missions have already taken place in the United States, Norway, Denmark and Switzerland. Overseas the IDB's promotional activities are concentrated on clearly identified areas, both sectorally and geographically, which offer the greatest potential for sales from the Province to overseas markets.

In class II, vote 3, an additional £1 million is required for the Local Enterprise Development Unit—Northern Ireland's small business agency. I pay tribute to the LEDU which has promoted almost 26,000 jobs since it was set up in 1971. The figure for the last financial year of 4,009 jobs was a record. Viewed against the economic conditions of recent years, that is a considerable achievement which demonstrates not only the potential that exists for small firms in Northern Ireland but the continuing success of the agency's work in promoting development and employment in the Northern Ireland small business sector.

An additional £4 million is sought for the continued support of Belfast shipbuilders Harland and Wolff. This increases the provision for the year to some £36·6 million and highlights once again the Government's recognition of the company's importance to the Northern Ireland economy.

Right hon. and hon. Members will note the significant increase of £20·6 million in the provision for capital investment grants. Changes to this scheme were announced in March 1985 which included a reduction in the overall rate of grant from 30 per cent. to 20 per cent. with effect from 1 May 1985. There has, therefore, been some acceleration of investment by industry to avail itself of the higher rates of grants under the former scheme and to benefit from the higher capital tax allowances which are now being phased out.

In class II, vote 5, the labour market vote, there are three areas seeking extra funds in the current year. First, an additional £1·82 million is required for the youth training programme. This is a direct result of the programme's continued success in attracting into full-time training schemes a large number of 16 and 17-year-olds who would otherwise be unemployed. At the last Northern Ireland Question Time, I cited figures showing that in the current year a higher percentage of those without jobs have opted to join the YTS than in preceding years. That is a vote of confidence in those working hard on the schemes, as is the fact that more people are getting jobs before they end their training. This year, 57 per cent. of those between 16 and 17 who undertook the one-year course have left to go to jobs. In the previous year, it was 55 per cent., and in the year before that it was 51 per cent. The fact that three out of every five people who join the schemes go directly to employment is a vote of confidence in the schemes. There are still opportunities for employment in Northern Ireland.

Secondly, an additional £1·48 million is required for the training on employer premises scheme, which is designed to help to meet local industries' manpower training requirements and to encourage a planned approach to the training of new recruits. The scheme has proved very attractive to new small firms. This involves the drawing up of a plan by a small firm showing how it will train its new recruits. The plan is then submitted to the Department of Economic Development for approval by its technical assessors. The agreed version covering the extent and period of training is the basis of agreement between the Department and the firm. It is intended to produce a systematic training course which will benefit the firm, the trainees and the Northern Ireland economy. Hon. Members know that comparisons are often made between the amount of training given in other countries — for example, Germany — and in Britain. We should all welcome any increase in training either outside or inside the firm.

Thirdly, class II, vote 5—the action for community employment scheme, better known as ACE—requires an increase of £1·75 million. ACE provides temporaray employment for the long-term unemployed. By the end of this financial year the number of employees is expected to increase from 3,050 to 4,400 and we hope that by June 1986 5,000 will be on the scheme.

We must continue to hope that, with employment in the Province picking up, we shall not need so many schemes of this type. But we must go on the basis that, with the level of unemployment that now exists—and, as I said, the strike a week ago will not help investment there—provision is made so that people need not stay on what we used to call the dole, but have opportunities to retain their self-respect, interest and availability for full employment.

In class IV, vote 1—roads services—net additional provision of £1·6 million is being sought. Increases in expenditure on operation and maintenance of roads and street lighting and on public liability claims are partly offset by additional receipts from sales of surplus land, the recoupment of VAT and EC receipts under the urban renewal regulation.

In class V, vote 1 — housing services — the net increase of £6·1 million is attributable largely to a technical adjustment relating to changes in the pattern of Government recoupment of the Housing Executive's expenditure on house renovation grants and to an increase in the number of grant applications. Within the vote, a fall in demand for the co-ownership scheme in the early part of the year has led to a projected underspend of £4 million in the provision for housing associations. This has been used to offset higher revenue requirements by the Housing Executive, mainly in increased loan charges arising from higher interest rates and borrowing levels.

Further token provision occurs in class VI, votes 1 and 2. In vote 1—water and sewerage services—an increase

[Dr. Boyson]

of £1·6 million for operational and administration costs is offset by savings in computer costs and additional receipts, mainly from metered and other water charges.

In connection with vote 2 — improvement of the environment — right hon. and hon. Members will be aware that major conservation legislation bringing Northern Ireland into step with the rest of the United Kingdom came into operation during the current financial year. This, together with the acceptance by the Government of the main thrust of the recommendations of the Balfour report, "A New Look at the Northern Ireland Countryside," has meant the commitment of an additional £700,000. The result of this expenditure will be to provide better access to the countryside, and thus enable Ulster people and visitors to the Province to enjoy the many natural beauties of the area.

Mr. Seamus Mallon (Newry and Armagh): If the roads are not blocked.

Dr. Boyson: Yes, if the roads are not blocked. Knowing the ingenuity of the people of Northern Ireland and the beauty of the hills—not that I am suggesting that people take to the hills when the roads are blocked —one trusts that tourists to the Province will come not just to see demonstrations in the towns — we would rather that they did not see such things—but to see the beauties of the whole Province.

This is a side of Northern Ireland which, unfortunately, does not receive much attention from those who observe events in the Province. However, from personal experience I assure the House that parts of Northern Ireland are as beautiful and peaceful as areas anywhere in the world. Hon. Members have a responsibility to sell that fact at every opportunity. Indeed, this morning I attended a meeting designed to increase the number of tourists coming to the Province.

I come to education, class VIII, where Supplementary Estimates are being sought in votes 2, 3 and 4. In vote 2, an extra £2·5 million is sought. Just over £1 million of this is to cover the cost of redundancy and compensation payments made to staff prematurely retired under university restructuring arrangements. A further £300,000 is required in the university capital sector, where additional expenditure on computers has been partly offset by slippage on the development of Magee college campus. Hon. Members will recall the decision we made last year on the extension of the Magee college campus — a development that has been widely welcomed in the area.

About £600,000 is required to cover the cost of the 1985 pay award to further education teachers, while £700,000 is sought because some receipts from the European social fund, which were expected in the current year, will not be received until 1986-87. There always seems to be a difficulty in knowing the date when funds of this type will arrive. Accordingly, we must make provision, pending their arrival, to keep everything going. We know that they will come, though sometimes we should like them to arrive faster. There is a saving of £100,000 on the training and interchange of teachers which contributes partly to offsetting the additions required.

Under vote 3, which covers Department of Education miscellaneous services and administration, a token £1,000 is sought. Increases totalling almost £700,000 are required for departmental administration costs — notably the installation and running costs of computer equipment. These are largely offset by savings on capital grants to district councils resulting from slippage. Substantive provision is also sought for VAT and EC receipts, which are expected to amount to £1·2 million.

Vote 4 is the final education item. Of the total of £900,000 sought, £550,000 is required for increased capital expenditure on essential minor works in schools, including a number of health and safety schemes. The balance of £350,000 is a net figure resulting from a downward revision of estimated receipts, notably those from the European social fund, some of which are not now expected until 1986-87.

On the health and personal social services front, in class IX, vote 1, I draw attention to a new mental health commission and to other significant changes within the vote. Subhead C7 of vote 1 makes provision for the mental health commission, an independent body to be established under the Mental Health (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 to safeguard the rights of patients in mental hospitals. It will not begin work formally until later this year, and the provision in the current financial year is to meet essential advance expenditure.

Now the other changes in class IV, vote 1. It is planned to increase expenditure in this vote by £3·5 million, £1·1 million of which is to assist with the transitional costs of opening the new Belfast city hospital. As hon. Members may know, the first in-patients were admitted to the new hospital early in January, and the transition from old and exhausted buildings to the new hospital is now gathering momentum.

The new hospital took a long time to build. Some sceptics doubted whether it would ever be finished. We can now rejoice in the knowledge that patients have moved in. It is fortunate that the timing of the opening of the hospital should coincide with the debate. That has not been intentional. While some might say that certain unfortunate events are having to be discussed, I am now dealing with a fortunate event. I am glad to say that not only is the new hospital now in operation, but that the new accident and emergency department opened for business this evening, though I hope that no hon. Members of this House will ever have to use it.

Other significant increases in capital expenditure are proposed to take account of essential health and safety work and in grants to voluntary bodies.

Before leaving class IX, I wish to draw hon. Members' attention to an unfortunate discrepancy between part 1 of the schedule to the Appropriation (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 and last year's spring Supplementary Estimates volume. The increase to appropriations in aid for vote 2, class IX was stated in the schedule to the order as £1,489,000, whereas the correct figure of £1,389,000 appeared in the 1984-85 spring Supplementary Estimates volume. This regrettable clerical error had no bearing on the actual amount which this House approved should be issued out of the Northern Ireland Consolidated Fund or upon the actual level of expenditure by the DHSS. It came to light only after close study. It has not affected anything that has happened in the Province. No one realised until now that an error had been made. Sometimes one wonders what other clerical errors have occurred. Indeed, there may be some in what I am saying tonight. Next year I, if I am so honoured, or some other Minister may have to correct the figures that I have put forward tonight. So far as I know, there are no clerical errors in them —

[Interruption.] I must not be diverted by the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), obviously a militant in disguise as he is sitting below the Gangway. If he is not upsetting the Church of England, he must not be allowed to upset us. I must add that I have the highest regard for the hon. Gentleman, although I do not think that remark will do him any good. If it would help him in his constituency for me to attack him, he only needs to tell me.

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): I had intended to wait until the end of the Minister's presentation, but, as he has kindly mentioned my presence, perhaps I may raise a point now. The hon. Gentleman said that Harland and Wolff was getting a subsidy of £36 million. Can he give an undertaking to the House that none of that money will be used to create unfair competition between that shipyard and shipyards in England and Scotland?

Dr. Boyson: I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's constituency concern, as well as his ultimate seeking after truth. I should perhaps have put those in reverse: I appreciate his seeking after truth and also his minor constituency interest.

Mr. Field: Just answer the question.

Dr. Boyson: I shall answer.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): My hon. Friend requires notice.

Dr. Boyson: No, of course not. I answered my hon. Friend on de Lorean and I can answer him again. We are pressing to the end on those legal cases.

I agree entirely with the hon. Member for Birkenhead. Any competition for orders must be fair in every way. We are committed to that in our support for Harland and Wolff. When it competes for orders, including defence orders, with shipyards elsewhere in the United Kingdom, the books will be checked to ensure that the competition is fair. I give the hon. Gentleman a guarantee that that will be done.

A token estimate is also found under class X—social security—in the provision for non-contributory benefits, where increases amounting to almost £3·5 million are offset by savings and increased receipts. In vote 4, an additional sum of about £3 million is sought for administration and miscellaneous services, covering salaries and wages and charges for agency services.

I also draw hon. Members' attention to amendments to the ambits of votes 2 and 4 and consequential changes to sections G and A of the respective votes. The changes clarify the relationship between the Department of Health and Social Services and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive in the payment of housing benefit and were made following criticism by the Comptroller and Auditor General in his report on the 1984-85 appropriation accounts.

In class II, vote 3 — other public and common services—£4·1 million is sought mainly to finance the ongoing reorganisation of the efficiency services and the related costs of computer hardware.

Finally, in class XII, vote 1 — office and general accommodation services — increased provision of £2 million is required mainly to meet additional costs in the new works and maintenance subheads arising from the repair of bomb damage to Government premises in Belfast.

In these opening remarks I have tried to cover the main features of the draft order and to draw the House's attention to a number of new items of expenditure.

Mr. Nicholas Lyell (Mid-Bedfordshire): Can my hon. Friend help me with other figures? Apart from security matters, how much does it cost to operate government as a whole in Northern Ireland, and what is the tax take in round figures from all sources within the Province?

Dr. Boyson: I welcome questions from the Opposition more than from my hon. Friends. I can answer the second question, but I am not sure about the first. Government expenditure in Northern Ireland is about £4·5 billion. About £1·5 billion, or 37 per cent., is transferred from the United Kingdom. I shall write to my hon. and learned Friend if I am wrong; I shall write to him even more cheerfully if I am right. From my statistics, it seems that the tax take in the Province is about £3 billion.

As for the cost of the administration of the various Departments in the Province, I cannot give my hon. and learned Friend an answer without studying the document. My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, who will be winding up, is already turning the pages rapidly. I should not be surprised if he, either himself or by inspiration from outside, found the answer to the question. If my hon. and learned Friend wants an answer from me, I shall write to him tomorrow.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: I shall not press my hon. Friend at this time about the cost to the administration in Northern Ireland of pursuing the de Lorean affair. There will be future occasions when I can do that. I have listened with great interest to the able way in which my hon. Friend has put forward the appropriation measure. Has he any concern about the increase in administration which, as he has indicated to the House, is occurring in the appropriation measure? Under a number of separate headings he has indicated that the cost of administration has been more than was estimated. When all is said and done, the cost of administration is necessary, but it is not passing the real facility and service to the people who need it. People are not necessarily receiving the benefit of the funds and resources which are going into Northern Ireland. Does he have any concern about that and is he prepared to comment?

Dr. Boyson: I shall comment. Obviously administration involves those who are directly serving the public. The ultimate test of administration is: is the public served as it should be? The Department of Finance and Personnel checks carefully the numbers employed and keeps them under tight control. If we add up the changes in the various orders, it is not a great amount. That does not mean that we should not look at them. A man can drown in 6 ft of water as easily as in 20 ft if he is only 5 ft 11 in tall. Much of that is the result of late pay claims. A similar situation arises from the current teachers' pay claim which, on my reckoning, will cost about £20 million, and that will have to be cleared up. However, I shall write to my hon. Friend and give him a full reply dealing with administration as a percentage of the overall budget and of the numbers employed over the past three or four years for his satisfaction and for mine. I must hurry on before hon. Members think of other questions, and that must not be encouraged.

As usual on these occasions, right hon. and hon. Members will wish to express their views on these and

[Dr. Boyson]

many other matters. I shall listen with great interest to the points raised, and my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary will reply to the debate. The order deals with the basic question of money going to the Province. We do not take that lightly, although I trust that we take it cheerfully.

I commend the draft order to the House for the continued good organisation and administration of the various Departments in Northern Ireland.

8.59 pm

Mr. Peter Archer (Warley, West): This debate is an exercise in direct rule. In the previous debate the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow) expressed some criticisms of the way in which Northern Ireland is ruled. Some of us in the House have expressed those same criticisms more than once. A few months ago some discussions took place with a view to improving matters but they were overtaken by more dramatic events.

The House is debating tonight the intensely practical needs of the people of Northern Ireland, and, as the Minister of State has just said, they are important issues. They are not dramatic issues. They are not highly charged or likely to be widely reported and the House is not so well attended for this debate as it was even for the previous debate. If those facts come to the knowledge of the people of Northern Ireland they may conclude that no one here really cares about them. That would be a misleading assessment, but it would be an understandable one. I hope that we shall be able to resume the discussions which were taking place some months ago to ensure that while direct rule survives it becomes a more meaningful process.

I say at once that we are not seeking to oppose the order. The Opposition's complaint is not that the Government are seeking to make provision for services in Northern Ireland but that they are making so little provision. We should have been glad to support a more generous provision. The Government never tire of telling us how much money is provided for Northern Ireland, and, as the Minister said in reply to the hon. and learned Member for Mid-Bedfordshire (Mr. Lyell) a few moments ago, a substantial sum of money is being transferred—£1·5 billion a year. That is not inappropriate because for many years public services in Northern Ireland were allowed to fall tragically behind the equivalent services in other parts of the United Kingdom. We are still engaged in the catching-up process.

In addition, the people of Northern Ireland still have more than their share of contemporary crises. We heard in the previous debate from my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) and from the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) of the many voluntary services into which so many people pour so much dedication and care, in many cases with no financial reward. Those are services which can make vital differences to whole communities. Those people are looking forward with no joy to the end of their contemporary funding.

That situation is not principally of the Government's making but we have ventured to hope that the Government might want to help. The Government's sin is not that of the thieves on the Damascus road. They have not robbed the traveller. If there is a sin—perhaps we shall be able to assess this better when we see what transpires in the immediate future——

Mr. J. Enoch Powell: The right hon. and learned Gentleman means Jericho.

Mr. Archer: I am most grateful to the right hon. Gentleman. He reads my mind better than I know it myself. I did mean the Jericho road. His geography is also better than mine.

Mr. Powell: My scripture is better.

Mr. Archer: I am not sure whether the right hon. Gentleman's scripture is better but on that occasion it was more accurate.

We shall be in a better position to assess the Government's actions in the near future. Their sin is not that of the thieves. If there is a sin, it is the sin of the indifferent officials who passed that way and who saw the problem but passed by on the other side.

For the services to which I now seek to invite the House's attention, the provision is the Government's responsibility. The way in which it is provided is part of a pattern that applies to the whole of the United Kingdom —squalor in the public sector. We are speaking of public provision of services of which once this country could be proud, services which were the envy of the world, but now public provision appears to be seen as the last resort for those who can afford nothing better.

I turn first to part II of the schedule, class VIII, No. 4, grants to education and library boards. In order to live within the Department of Education allocation of £35,460,000 for the coming financial year, the south-eastern education and libraries board will have to cut £711,000 from its services. It will be spending that much less than it is spending in the present year. But that is not the full extent of the shortfall because to keep its services at the existing level would require just under £750,000 additional money, so it would have meant reducing the services even if there had been no cut at all. The real reduction, therefore, will be the sum of those two figures, in the region of £1·5 million for the year. That is the south-eastern board. The Belfast board is having to reduce its budget by about £1·6 million, and the southern board by about £700,000.

All those are figures on paper, and are the work of accountants. But I have seen what they mean for people in the area of the Belfast board. I have been to some schools whose heads have received instructions from the director to reduce the cleaning bills by taking out of use part of the floor area. It may mean locking away classrooms or other accommodation, it may mean closing off parts of the school and that, it is hoped, will reduce cleaning bills by reducing the cleaners' wages. I was shown what that would mean for education—parts of the school will simply not be in use any more for education purposes.

I saw the other side of the coin. I spoke to ladies who had given years of service as school cleaners. In a number of cases they were the only wage earners remaining in their families because their husbands, sons and daughters were unemployed. When I spoke to them, it was not known whether some of them would be sacked. Some were wondering whether their earnings would be reduced below the figure that would qualify them for pension entitlement so that, having worked in some cases largely in order to be assured of a pension when the time came, they may find those pensions taken away from them. They did not know how the cuts would be made. They knew only that the total

amount to be paid to them collectively as wages would have to be reduced. They felt that the board not only had not prescribed how the reductions should be achieved, but possibly did not greatly care. It may be that was an unfair assessment, and that members of the board cared desperately and were very unhappy about what was happening.

What I suspect may be wholly fair is to say that this all came about because of the Government's proposed cuts. The Government have not demonstrated that they care greatly how those cuts are to be achieved. The Government have not measured the need, they have not calculated how much could be saved from a particular bill without causing harm, they have not assessed whether there was any identifiable slack in the system. The Government just lopped a global figure off the budget for those boards. They have told the boards that this has to be saved from somewhere, irrespective of its effect on the children, on the men and on the women. It may be achieved by reducing the earnings of people who depend upon those earnings, or it may mean sacking people who will have lost all of their earnings, or it may mean cutting the budgets in some other way, but the Government have decreed that those cuts should be made and apparently they have not manifested any concern about how they should be made.

Mr. J. Enoch Powell: The right hon. and learned Gentleman has pointed out that the Government have referred to the boards a required quantum of reduction and have left the boards to decide how that is to be achieved. Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman agree with me that since these boards are appointed by Ministers who are agents of the board the Government are just as responsible for the methods by which the cuts are achieved as for the quantum of the cuts themselves? In fact, a sham local government responsibility is placed upon the boards which stand between the Government and their real responsibility for detailed administration decisions.

Mr. Archer: I follow what the right hon. Gentleman has said, but I would not want to associate myself with the view that the members of the boards are virtually robots who are propelled by strings that are pulled by the Government. That would be less than fair to people who make a substantial contribution to public life in Northern Ireland. It would be better if these matters were decided in some way by the elected representatives, and I certainly agree that, when they are given a global figure and told to get on with it, those who give that global figure to them must accept their share of the responsibility.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman accept, as I do, in support of the elected representatives in this House from Northern Ireland, that they would wish to see much more meaningful local government implemented in the Province at the earliest possible date? If the right hon. and learned Gentleman accepts the argument that I have put forward and my point of view, would he and his colleagues support those hon. Members who want really meaningful devolved government to be granted at the earliest possible date to local authorities in Northern Ireland?

Mr. Archer: I have read the document entitled "The Way Forward". It would be out of order and perhaps out of place in this debate if we became involved in a discussion about the future of local government in Northern Ireland. I was seeking to draw to the attention of the House not so much how these decisions are taken but what will happen to children and their families because these cuts are being made. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me if I content myself with that question for the moment. We may have an opportunity to discuss his question on another occasion.

We are told that the board takes the view that £35,000 could be knocked off the milk and meals bill. No doubt it could, but so far as I can see that could be done only by reducing the quality of the meals. In many of these schools, meals are not an additional snack which provides a kind of optional extra. Many of the children I saw receive virtually no other substantial source of protein. One headmaster to whom I spoke in a deprived area said to me, "They do not come to me to be educated; they come mainly to be fed." That may have been a cynical view, but we are speaking of schools where it is unusual for a child to come from a family which can afford to pay for school meals. I asked one headmaster how many of his children pay for school meals. He said, "I am still using the roll of meal tickets I started four years ago."

One way in which the Belfast board is seeking to meet the target is by cutting £100,000 off the Belfast school of music. That would mean an end to something like half of its teaching. Belfast has a long musical tradition. It has maintained that tradition, despite all the difficulties of recent years. The people of Belfast have found solace and inspiration in their music. Now, in addition to all their other deprivations, they are to be deprived of music teaching. The Government are even stopping the children from singing. I have written to the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the hon. Member for Peterborough (Dr. Mawhinney). I say at once that he has not yet had time to reply. I look forward to his reply. But when the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the hon. Member for Wiltshire, North (Mr. Needham), replies to this debate we shall be grateful if he is able to provide a crumb of comfort about that subject.

Mr. Mallon: I see the point that the right hon. and learned Gentleman is making. He is concentrating on one area board, but I hope that the Minister will bear in mind that more places in Northern Ireland than Belfast are affected by such cuts.

Mr. Archer: I readily accept that. But the hon. Gentleman will understand that in the interest of time I cannot go through all the figures with which I have been provided. I was citing an example of something which is tragically widespread.

One other way in which the Belfast board proposes to save £50,000 is by closing two nursery schools and, I believe, five nursery units. I do not know whether the Government have assessed whether there is a need for those schools and units. But I heard today about one of the schools which is to be closed. I refer to Stranmillis school. Its closure will save rather less than £10,000 a year. It is attended by Catholic and Protestant children, and, I am told, by black and white children. The school is already over-subscribed, so there is no suggestion that the places are not needed. The families of those children do not seem to have any alternative school to which to send their

[Mr. Archer]

children. They just have a problem. The total number of nursery places to be lost amounts to about 300. What is to happen to those 300 children?

I turn to class V and housing. In his clear opening speech the Minister told us that the apparent increase in the grant for housing was simply a technical adjustment. However, I know that on 30 January 1986 the Housing Executive announced that its budget for 1986-87 was £94 million less than it had envisaged. It had requested a budgetary increase of £50 million and it had received a cut of £44 million. That means that there will be 1,500 new houses instead of 2,500. In addition, improvement work on 7,000 homes will have to be shelved, including work on 2,000 homes that are designated as priority, and the rehabilitation of old houses will have to be halved.

I say at once that the Housing Executive in Northern Ireland is to be congratulated on a substantial improvement in Northern Ireland's housing position over the past few years. But that, of course, has to be seen against a background of deprivation. There is still a waiting list of 24,500 families. About half of them are estimated to be in urgent need. Although that need is still unmet, it looks as though some 3,000 jobs will be lost in the construction industry as a direct result of those cuts and that another 2,000 will be lost indirectly.

That gives the lie to the suggestion that unemployment is caused by modern technology. Those 5,000 workers will be eating their hearts out on the dole not because those vital houses are being built by robots but because they are not being built at all. So we have a Government who appear to be indifferent to education and housing need.

Class X relates to social security and other financial benefits. It would be easy to give examples of families in need of immediate benefit. But the House has discussed such problems before, and I do not propose to list them tonight. Instead, I shall turn to the Government's proposed restructuring of social security. As the Prime Minister told us some time ago, it is a restructuring. There will be some winners and some losers. The implication, as I understood it, is that that makes it about right. I do not accept that, for two reasons. First, we are dealing with individuals. It does not follow that because someone has done a good turn to A it is all right to do a bad turn to B. It might be acceptable if it could be shown that the losers were all those who could afford to lose, but that is not the case. The cuts are falling on the low paid, the unemployed and the elderly along with everyone else.

Secondly, there is no evidence that the winners and losers will balance. Those in the most vulnerable categories are not likely to break even, even when they are considered not individually but as categories. As I understand it, no one will receive benefit to cover the whole of the rates. Even the poorest will pay 20 per cent. of their rates bill. There will be no additional lump sum payments for those receiving supplementary benefit for special needs.

At Question Time on 27 February, I quoted some calculations of Dr. Eileen Evason, who estimates that, overall, single people will lose

"an annual total of £8·9 million, pensioners £11·4 million, low-income families £3·3 million and families as a whole £8·8 million". — [*Official Report*, 27 February 1986; Vol. 92, c. 1061.]

Has the Minister a word of comfort for the people affected by all that?

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: The right hon. and learned Gentleman will appreciate—and I am sure that my hon. Friend will say this when he responds to the debate—that the Social Security Bill to which he has just referred is still going through the House, and its conclusions have not been reached. I hope that he and his colleagues, together with some of my colleagues on the Government Benches, will put down amendments not only in the remaining Committee stages but also on Report. There are still some uncertainties and the concern that he has expressed about certain areas is shared by both Government and Opposition Members. Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman accept that?

Mr. Archer: I am most grateful to the hon. Gentleman for those encouraging words, and I will see that they are passed on to my colleagues who serve on that Committee. The hon. Gentleman will appreciate that the Bill is not directly concerned with Northern Ireland, but it may be that any advantages gained on that Committee will be reflected for the people of Northern Ireland. I am most grateful to him.

Finally—and I say "finally" not because it is the last example of deprivation but because my time will be exhausted long before this unhappy catalogue of suffering is complete — I draw attention to class IX, item 1, expenditure by the Department of Health and Social Services on health and personal social services. Does that item include any provision for the hospital service? The hon. Gentleman referred to the new City block. I had pointed out to me recently the new guidelines for getting better value for money in the health and social services. I make no complaint about that. We are all in favour of better value for money. If that inquiry can identify areas where resources can be saved without damage to services, there will be no complaint from Opposition Members. Until that has been done, however, we still have to look at cases where the lack of resources causes serious problems.

For some months there has been widespread anxiety about hospital services in Northern Ireland. Some local hospitals are threatened with closure. At others there is concern because the services are not meeting the requirements of the public. There has been concern about what is called "paediatric cardiology". Those are long words. The use of technical terms sometimes seems to soften the force of the blow. What it means is children with heart conditions. The Government have made some provision for that, for treating renal disease, for cervical screening and for the diagnosis and treatment of AIDS. For that we are grateful. The provision came after some recent manifestations of widespread concern. The Government made the money available, but the Minister will have seen the letter by Professor Buchanan, the chairman of the medical division of the Royal Victoria hospital, in the *Belfast Telegraph* of 6 March, indicating that it is very far from the end of the problem. Recent losses of acute medical beds in the region have thrown considerable strain on other medical beds. The closure of Claremont hospital has led to the loss of neurology beds, and that has led to a shortage of specialty beds generally.

Two days after the letter, on 8 March, Mr. Jim O'Reilly, an official of CoHSE, gave examples of the

consequences of that loss of beds. He spoke of seriously ill patients waiting in the corridors of the Royal Victoria hospital because no beds were available. We know that hospitals have been placed under acute strain. Perhaps a crisis has been averted because the staff are concerning themselves to avert one, but unless something is done lives will be placed at risk. I cannot attempt to put it better than Professor Buchanan when he said:

"The Government appears to be intent in cutting the 'boiler room' of medicine, the unsorted acutely ill who are often elderly and may have additional social problems. This area tends to be unglamorous, without champions and pressure groups. It is, therefore, a softer target, as it is less indentifiable and has less muscle. But it is at the front line of hospital medicine.

The public must be made aware of the feelings of impending doom prevalent among the servants of the National Health Service. We agree with rationalisation, but the cutting of funding which can result in deterioration in patient care and almost certain loss of life is unforgiveable."

I do not seek to improve on that as a way of drawing to the attention of the Minister what is going on in the hospital service.

I have sought not to over-dramatise these matters, but to recite the facts as I know them. Unless the Minister says that those are not the facts, the House is entitled to ask: what action are the Government proposing to take? The burden on the House is all the heavier because today, for political reasons, which I would be out of order to discuss, all those misfortunes are falling on the people of Northern Ireland when most of them are not being represented in the House and when their needs are not being made known by their elected Members of Parliament.

We in the Labour party have not made the task of government in Northern Ireland more difficult than it needs to be. No one can accuse us of lacking in restraint. But these things are crying out to be said, and someone must say them. Thousands of people in Northern Ireland will be listening to the Minister's reply.

9.26 pm

Mr. J. Enoch Powell (South Down): In presenting the order, the Minister gave the House a painstaking analysis of some of the major expenditure decisions which were reflected by the figures in the order. The right hon. and learned Member for Warley, West (Mr. Archer) responded in critical vein by dealing with the substantive matters of expenditure in a number of classes and votes.

I intend to concern myself, however, as heretofore exclusively with the constitutional aspect of the order. My difficulty is that the Minister in charge of the order knows what I will say, but does not know how I shall say it in a different way from the way in which it has been said already, but hopes that I shall succeed. The gravamen of the matter is that, with the appropriation orders, we are wasting the time of the House without any corresponding gain in the precise scrutiny by hon. Members of the separate items of expenditure, or the opportunity to bring forward pertinent criticisms and to push them through. We are doing that because of the existence of an entirely unnecessary piece of financial mechanism — the Northern Ireland Consolidated Fund, into which money is poured so that it may be poured out again, but with the side effect that a simulacrum of financial control is created which is discharged by means of these three appropriation orders during the year.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman said that this evening we were engaged in an exercise in direct rule. With great respect, I would not say that that is correct, because we could dispense with the necessity of these orders, and, indeed, with the Northern Ireland Consolidated Fund, without altering, although I hope that he is as anxious as the rest of us to alter, the procedure on legislation by Order in Council. I have his assent that that is the essence of what we have agreed conventionally to describe as direct rule.

The exercise in which we are engaged is the preservation of one of the relics of the Stormont Government and Parliament. It was set up in 1920 in order that the Stormont Government and Parliament might operate as nearly as possible as if it were a dominion Government and Parliament with a separate financial organisation and a duplication of the financial machinery which this House uses in the United Kingdom. We are taking part in the charade of keeping that in existence on the offchance that—one does not know, but somehow, some day or other in some unforeseen circumstances—it might be handy to have a Consolidated Fund for Northern Ireland.

In doing that we are perpetuating one of the causes of instability in the Province, which is uncertainty as to the constitutional future and repetition of the determination to the Government and Parliament of the United Kingdom to deny to the people of the Province that to which they are entitled as part of the United Kingdom, to be treated, administered and legislated for like all the rest.

I did give a half-indication to the Minister that I would try to vary the message to which he has so courteously responded and acknowledged on previous occasions. Happily enough, there came into my hands—although not only into mine but into those of other hon. Members and I am sure into the hands of the Government or the Government's advisers — an article by Andrew Likierman, who is the senior lecturer at the London Business School and a director of the school's institute of public sector management, which has published a propos in the *Journal of Irish Business and Administrative Research*—it could not be better blessed in its origin or in its authorship.

He has, for the first time so far as I know, carried out a thorough and critical examination of exactly the phenomenon which is before us this evening in the form of this order. He is not in favour of it. He believes that it mystifies far more than it enlightens. He is on the track of the question that the Minister was asked from his own Back Benches. It tends to obscure the real relationship between the finances of Northern Ireland and the finances of the rest of the United Kingdom. It also denies to those who are attempting to control expenduture in Northern Ireland the full use of the opportunities which are given in the rest of the United Kingdom by the financial mechanisms which operate there.

I am not going to trouble the House with many quotations, but in fairness to Mr. Likierman I think it would be right if one or two sentences were on the record. He said:

"the Northern Ireland position is made very much more obscure than that of the rest of the United Kingdom because of a mechanism in the control of Northern Ireland expenditure which has no parallel in either financial or constitutional terms elsewhere in the United Kingdom — the Northern Ireland Consolidated Fund which was set up in the 1920 Government of Ireland Act."

He then points out that it is perfectly practicable to dispense advantageously with this antiquated survival from a past constitutional era and says:

[Mr. J. Enoch Powell]

> "To bring Northern Ireland into line with the practice for Wales and Scotland, it would not appear to be difficult technically to cover the Northern Ireland Supply Estimates as a whole in Class 17. The dividing line between what was covered in Class 17 and what was covered in other Classes"—

this dividing line applies to Wales and Scotland as well—

> "would then be decided on the basis of administrative boundaries".

In other words, he is saying that Northern Ireland should be treated as Wales and Scotland are treated for the purpose of Estimates and for the purpose of financial procedures.

He then outlines the two steps which would produce that result:

> "First, the creation of a Select Committee to handle the affairs of Northern Ireland in the same way as the affairs of Scotland and Wales are handled by their respective Departmental Select Committees."

May I interrupt the quotation at that point to refer to the speech of the right hon. and learned Member for Warley, West? I am sure that he would agree with me that that interrogation would be conducted much more effectively if it were conducted within the ambit of a Select Committee which could call for witnesses and interrogate Ministers and report to the House.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): I have advocated such a Select Committee and I am most interested to hear that the right hon. Gentleman appears to be suggesting one himself as a mechanism for ensuring that there is proper discussion in the House where all who have the right to be consulted and can consult one another can sit around a table, discuss matters and call for papers and witnesses.

Mr. Powell: I am answering the hon. Gentleman's question strictly in the financial context, but he is entirely right. The deduction from treating Northern Ireland for financial purposes as Wales and Scotland are treated is indeed that that method of scrutiny would be available to deal with the Northern Ireland Estimates.

I interrupted the quotation. I shall return to the remaining part of it which outlines the second step which, in the author's opinion, would need to be taken.

> "Second, the winding up of the NICF and the direct voting of Northern Ireland expenditure by Parliament in the same way as public expenditure for the rest of the UK is currently voted. With or without Direct Rule, Northern Ireland Supply Estimates could be voted through without the need to engage in duplicate voting of 'Transfers to the NICF' at Westminster or the transfer of funds into and out of a notional account."

We are holding an inquest, I hope, this evening upon a constitutional device which does not serve Northern Ireland or those who represent the people of Northern Ireland, which does not serve the convenience of this House and which is out of line with the financial mechanisms that the House has evolved, and recently improved, for the control and scrutiny of public expenditure.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: I do not want to embarrass the right hon. Gentleman or to delay the House on this important subject but if the right hon. Gentleman's proposal were accepted—I would urge the Government to give it more than just sympathetic consideration as a means of bridging the gulf — would the right hon. Gentleman, whose presence we are all delighted to have, give an assurance that it might bring some of his worthy colleagues back to the House so that the people of Northern Ireland would be represented here? Would it give them the opportunity to come back without breaching the principle upon which they clearly feel it difficult to serve in this place despite having been elected?

Mr. Powell: It is not for me to pass my personal judgment on my colleagues' decision where and how their duties to their constituents of the Province are best discharged, but I can come towards the hon. Gentleman by saying that anything which holds out to the people of Northern Ireland an assurance of the only available constitutional stability — that is, to be treated as what they are: a part of the United Kingdom — would be a pacificatory and beneficent act and could well be crucial in overcoming the current crisis which has been upon us since 15 November.

I wanted to refer to a respect in which Northern Ireland happily is within the ambit of the financial procedures of the House. We have the benefit of the consideration by the Public Accounts Committee, along with the reports of the Comptroller and Auditor-General and of the Comptroller and Auditor-General for Northern Ireland. It would be churlish of me, having said what I have about financial arrangements, not to acknowledge in this House the work done by the Comptroller and Auditor-General for Northern Ireland and the stimulating effect it has on the Northern Ireland Department.

I hope that those who serve Northern Ireland in such a way do not imagine that, because of our apparent preoccupation with politics, which is unavoidable, we do not study or benefit by their work. I have taken the occasion in other contexts to pay tribute to those who scrutinise the delegated legislation. I pay tribute here to those who scrutinise the financial accounts of the Northern Ireland Departments.

I should like to refer to the response published only in October 1985 by the Northern Ireland Department of Finance and Personnel to two reports of the Public Accounts Committee, particularly the 14th report. I think that it would be fair to those whose work resulted in that interchange between the Committee, the Comptroller and Auditor General and the Northern Ireland Department of Finance and Personnel to underline some of the recommendations. I underline the recommendations in connection with hospital costs, the separation of staff and patient catering, full trading accounts for canteens, monitoring of the level of staff contribution to overheads, and target levels for waste. I believe that all those matters have been taken on board by the Department of Health and Social Security but it would be welcome if it could be acknowledged by the Minister when he replies. If there is anything to add since the report which was laid before the House in 1985, I am sure that he and I could contrive ways in which that could be made available more widely than simply by a letter to myself.

I want to refer to the supplementary benefit paragraphs of that report, particularly to the subject of single payments and the potential abuse of single payments. Here, I am approaching ground mentioned by the right hon. and learned Member for Warley, West. I was one of those who was dismayed by the proposal so drastically to reform the single payment procedure as has been agreed, at any rate, for the rest of the United Kingdom. I think that this is one of the opportunities that one can take to put on

record what I have found to be the function of the social security offices in Northern Ireland and the use by those offices of the weapon or instrument of the single payment.

It has been my experience in the 12 years that I have represented a constituency in Northern Ireland to have been far more closely involved in the affairs, needs and anxieties of my constituents than I ever found was the case in Wolverhampton. I have been much closer, thereby, to the practical work, individual by individual, of the social security offices and have often been a bearer of tidings between the constituent and the social security office. I want to put it on record—I hope that it is not too late for this testimony to be taken into account in any reforms which take place more generally throughout the United Kingdom — that I have been impressed by the extraordinary value of the single payment as a means whereby unique circumstances can be treated uniquely by the social security staffs.

Social security staffs are, for the most part, highly experienced and very hard-boiled individuals. They combine those necessary qualities of experience and being hard-boiled with very real human understanding and sympathy and knowledge of local circumstances. Over and over again I have been astonished at the way in which what seemed to be a way out, request or plea from a family or a person has been recognised, defined and met by a social security office by means of a single payment.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: The right hon. Gentleman may be interested to know that the corporate wisdom of the Select Committee on Social Services, which has undertaken a short but full report on the reform of social security proposed in the White Paper, fully endorses his views.

Mr. Powell: I am glad to hear that, and I believe that a substantial element of such discretion will be left behind in the hands of the social security officers, for over and again I have found that apparently intractable family and individual conditions can be analysed and dealt with in a way that they could not have been dealt with without the power to make a single payment.

No doubt there has been substantial additional expenditure beyond what was estimated under this head; there will always be, where there is discretion, marginal cases where judgments might be different and where possibly pressures — perhaps especially in Northern Ireland—have been unduly exerted. I have no hesitation in testifying to the House that overwhelmingly, on the basis of my experience in the past 12 years, not only do the social security officers perform the most outstanding of all the social services in the Province, but the ability to use their discretion in the form of a single payment is an instrument of which it would be wrong to deprive them.

9.46 pm

Mr. Nicholas Lyell (Mid-Bedfordshire): It is of the essence of the Union that we are all united in one country, and it is because we are united with Northern Ireland that tonight we are debating this order and the moneys that will be transferred from this part of the United Kingdom to that part of the United Kingdom. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Minister of State for clarifying in my mind the fact that those moneys are about £1·5 billion each year, excluding the cost of defence. It is proper that the better-off portions of the United Kingdom should be paying that money to assist Northern Ireland, which is less well-off at the moment, but which I hope will not always be so.

Nevertheless, we should be conscious that this is the first appropriation order debate since the Anglo-Irish agreement and it is the view of the House, which is one Chamber of the Parliament of the Union, that the agreement is in the best interests of our nation as a whole and of Northern Ireland. That view may be right or wrong. With my limited knowledge, I support it. Real benefits for Northern Ireland and our country as a whole can derive from the agreement, and I do not believe that it represents the threat to Northern Ireland that I know that some of my right hon. and hon. Friends, and some Opposition Members, believe it to be. Whatever we believe, it is the will of Parliament.

I realise that those who oppose the agreement feel the matter deeply, but because we are all one Parliament I am taking this opportunity to say that if people hold such feelings, the right place to express them—they have the best possible example in the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell)—is in this Parliament, where they can talk to us and help us to understand their views better, and give us the opportunity to express to them the reasons why we hold a contrary view.

I was most interested in what the right hon. Member for South Down said on his constitutional theme—that he wished that the whole of the United Kingdom were governed in the same way. I may be misrepresenting what he said, but I hope that I understood at least that he was seeking to say that we should be governed much more closely in the same way, whether we be in Northern Ireland or on the mainland. I cannot see why that should fit in with any dislike of the Anglo-Irish agreement. It should make the agreement even more popular because, whereas they see themselves separately treated, it would mean that we were all treated in exactly the same way.

Mr. J. Enoch Powell: Is the hon. and learned Member suggesting that the Anglo-Irish conference should deal with the administration of Wales, Scotland and England? If that is so, I would join hands with him.

Mr. Lyell: I am glad that the right hon. Gentleman asked that question. Although it is not my suggestion that that should happen, if it did happen perhaps the right hon. Gentleman's reasons for objecting to the agreement would disappear.

Mr. Powell: It is no worse than the EEC.

Mr. Lyell: As the right hon. Gentleman says in his own way, it is no worse than the EEC. I believe that the right hon. Gentleman has put his finger on the problem. The Anglo-Irish agreement is no worse than the EEC.

Mr. Speaker: Order. May I draw the hon. and learned Gentleman's attention to the fact that we are debating the appropriation order and expenditure in Northern Ireland and not the agreement.

Mr. Lyell: You are correct, Mr. Speaker, to draw me back to that topic. I shall return to the appropriation order. I started with that subject and I apologise if I have gone on a slight loop.

I started with the agreement because the appropriation of moneys from one part of the United Kingdom to another part is essentially the function of this Parliament. It is

[Mr. Lyell]

inextricably bound with the other elements of government and with the most important element of government in Northern Ireland which is in all our minds at present.

Whatever the view about the appropriation order or the view of the nexus of this party or Government or of the Government of any other country, the right place for such a view to be expressed by hon. and right hon. Members elected from Northern Ireland is within this Chamber. The right attitude for those hon. Members to express towards bullying, barricading, or threats to their citizens, which will increase the costs and the requirements for appropriation from this House, is here in the Chamber. That last point brings me back within the rules of order.

Hitherto I have received no correspondence from my constituents on the subject of Northern Ireland in all the years that I have represented my constituency. My constituents now make the point that they think that the people in Northern Ireland should obey our laws, particularly those people who set themselves up as leaders in their community. They should obey our laws in the same way as we expect everyone to obey our laws.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: My hon. and learned Friend is making an interesting speech, quite late at night. Would he agree with me that, if he wants to see his objective reached, the Government could achieve it by setting up a Select Committee for Northern Ireland along the lines described by the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) in his interesting and positive speech earlier in the debate? Would my hon. and learned Friend agree that——

Mr. Speaker: Order. This subject is rather wide of appropriation.

Mr. Winterton: Would my hon. and learned Friend agree that that could be achieved, in relation to appropriation matters, along the lines of the Select Committees for Wales and Scotland that already exist in the House?

Mr. Lyell: You will recognise, Mr. Speaker, that constitutional suggestions from my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) always require the most careful thought. Consequently I shall ponder his suggestion.

There are other interesting constitutional ideas in the Anglo-Irish agreement which might or might not have a bearing on my hon. Friend's suggestion for wider discussion between various parliamentarians. I commend those ideas for careful thought also.

I should like to conclude by saying that the way of democracy is persuasion and the way to persuade is to be present to persuade. We greatly look forward to seeing those whom we deeply respect as brave men, elected to represent their constituents in this House, present in the Chamber to do that.

9.54 pm

Mr. Seamus Mallon (Newry and Armagh): Unlike the hon. and learned Member for Mid-Bedfordshire (Mr. Lyell) and the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell), I find it refreshing to have an opportunity to speak without referring to Northern Ireland's constitutional position or any of its attendant problems. I shall be brief because the right hon. and learned Member for Warley, West (Mr. Archer) put his finger on all the major issues in the order with which I wanted to deal. He did so superbly and referred to the essence of my criticism of the legislation. When it comes to buildings, machinery and land, there is an increase, but when it comes to people, there is a decrease. That is the essence of the order.

I should like to refer to the people who are least able to look after themselves. People in the farming industry are suffering. On the suggestion of agricultural advisers in Northern Ireland, they went into the milk industry. Suddenly, a milk quota was tied around their necks and they could not cope. They could not sell their milk. We have been told that there has been a £1·3 million increase, but that is not an adequate amount to give the people who need to be saved.

I ask the Under-Secretary of State to re-examine the quota to ascertain ways to help those farmers. It is not merely a matter of farmers having had a bad year. It involves the loss of the farmer's entire stock and machinery. It entails total reinvestment by the farmer if he is ever again to become viably involved in agriculture.

I have dealt with one raw material in Northern Ireland —grass. I should like now to deal with another resource —our young people, especially in relation to education cuts and the comments by the Minister of State on class II. The Minister said that there was an increase of £1·2 million in the youth training programme. What provision, if any, will be made from that sum for the special training programme for handicapped people? Last year, I contacted the Minister's office about this matter. It is sad to see the way in which young handicapped people cannot avail themselves of the programme's benefits. Under that programme, they can develop at their own pace. They cannot cope in training schemes, so they give up. I specifically ask for an increased provision because of the need in all towns in Northern Ireland. It is a shame that we do not have such a provision.

I agree with what the Minister said about the increased allocation for the ACE schemes, but he made no reference to Enterprise Ulster. That was a serious omission. Although I am a great advocate of ACE schemes, I recognise that Enterprise Ulster has created employment stability. It has provided great advantages for district councils and various other bodies. Enterprise Ulster caters for the middle-aged part of the market whom ACE schemes simply do not cover. Has the Minister been converted about Enterprise Ulster?

Under class V, the Housing Executive will receive £94 million less than it requires. I should like to home in on one element of the Housing Executive. It applies not only to Northern Ireland but to England, Scotland and Wales. The cuts have meant that maintenance is not of lasting benefit. That applies right across the board. In five, 10 or 15 years, some of the maintenance work will have to be carried out again. That means pouring good money after bad.

It being Ten o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

It being Ten o'clock, MR. SPEAKER *proceeded to put forthwith the Questions which he was directed by paragraph (1) of the Standing Order (Questions on voting of estimates, &c.) to put at that hour.*

ESTIMATES, 1986-87 (NAVY), VOTE A

Resolved,

That during the year ending on 31st March 1987 a number not exceeding 71,000 all ranks be maintained for Naval Service.

ESTIMATES, 1986-87 (ARMY), VOTE A

Resolved,

That during the year ending on 31st March 1987 a number not exceeding 187,600 all ranks be maintained for Army Service, a number not exceeding 5,000 for the Home Service Force, a number not exceeding 141,000 for the Individual Reserves, a number not exceeding 86,000 for the Territorial Army and a number not exceeding 7,780 for the Ulster Defence Regiment.

ESTIMATES, 1986-87 (AIR), VOTE A

Resolved,

That during the year ending on 31st March 1987 a number not exceeding 96,600 all ranks be maintained for the Air Force Service, a number not exceeding 6,900 for the Royal Air Force Reserve and a number not exceeding 2,500 for the Royal Auxiliary Air Force.

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES 1985-86

Resolved,

That a further supplementary sum, not exceeding £896,102,000, be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund to defray charges for the Defence and Civil services which will come in the course of payment during the year ending on 31st March 1986, as set out in House of Commons Papers Nos. 190, 213 and 249.

ESTIMATES, EXCESSES, 1984-85

Resolved,

That a sum, not exceeding £155,484,146·89, be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund to make good excesses on certain grants for Defence and Civil Services for the year ended 31st March 1985, as set out in House of Commons Paper No. 227.

Bill ordered to be brought in upon the two foregoing Resolutions and upon the Resolution [3 February] relating to Supplementary Estimates and to Excesses, by the Chairman of Ways and Means, Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. John MacGregor, Mr. John Moore, Mr. Ian Stewart and Mr. Peter Brooke.

CONSOLIDATED FUND (No. 2)

Mr. John Moore accordingly presented a Bill to apply certain sums out of the Consolidated Fund to the service of the years ending on 31 March 1985 and 1986: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 91.]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at this day's sitting, the Ways and Means Motion may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Mr. Peter Lloyd.]*

Northern Ireland (Appropriation)

Question again proposed.

Mr. Mallon: I was referring to the repair and maintenance of Housing Executive houses, and my remarks apply not only to Northern Ireland but throughout Britain. Good money will have to be thrown after bad because of the decisions that are being made about maintenance work following the cuts that the Government have made.

I raise a constituency point; I have spoken to the Minister about it, although it applies to other parts of the country. There are in my area 184 houses which are being converted from gas to coal-fired. This is the third system to be put in those houses, all in an attempt to get the smoke to go up the chimney. A blind man might have seen at the beginning that a proper chimney was required, but no. Three attempts were needed to prove that a chimney was necessary. What has been the cost of that? If we skimp on such matters, we shall get a bad job and it will cost double or treble the money to put things right later.

As I have said, our second great natural resource in the Province is our young people. We shall debate this whole issue tomorrow, and I hope to speak then. Youngsters in Northern Ireland—the same will apply to many people in Britain—will find that unless daddy has a great deal of money they will not get third-level education. A Northern Ireland student studying in Britain will lose about £500, in addition to losing the travelling allowance to and from the Province. No one will be able to afford such education.

That policy is short-sighted. Bitter experience has taught us in Northern Ireland that when young people find themselves on the scrap heap of life at 18 they are prey to the paramilitaries and to those who want to use them. It costs much more to keep someone in gaol for 10 years than to keep him at university for three or four years with a proper grant. That matter must be considered.

The right hon. and learned Member for Warley, West has dealt admirably with education cuts which affect those within the education system who are least able to look after themselves. It is not just the big schools in Belfast but the small rural schools which are losing additional hours of teaching. Those schools need them most because they have a greater percentage of problem and educationally subnormal pupils. The kitchens will be closed in many schools. That will be a false economy. The kitchens and the equipment will still be there but the Department will have to meet the extra cost of bussing in the meals. The Minister should note that that false economy will prove detrimental, especially in rural areas.

Class X deals with attendance allowances, invalid car allowances and related benefits. I have been trying to find out what is available to a totally blind person who is not otherwise disabled. In a caring society such a person cannot get a mobility allowance because, to qualify for it, one must be either unable or almost unable to walk. A blind person who can walk may not be able to get anywhere because he needs someone to help him. The totally blind person cannot get an invalid car allowance because, of course, he cannot drive. The totally blind person who is not otherwise disabled cannot get an attendance allowance because, to qualify, he requires constant attention day or night, or both day and night. If he can look after himself to any extent he cannot get an

[Mr. Mallon]

attendance allowance, nor can someone who helps to look after him get an allowance. Therefore, in a caring society a category of the severely handicapped cannot get allowances which are available for others.

There is a fault in the legislation if attendance allowances cannot be paid to the totally blind who are not otherwise disabled. Such a person should be able to take advantage of the mobility allowance. The legislation must be amended. We can gauge the attitude of Government and of society when they leave at a total disadvantage a small sector of the community who suffer through no fault of their own.

I leave the House with one thought. I have a small booklet here on disablement allowances. The totally blind person cannot get an attendance allowance, a mobility allowance, or any allowance to enable his relations to look after him. What he can get is very interesting indeed. It is rather cynical and insensitive. He can get a television licence at a reduced cost. That is written here. It is time that this book went into the incinerator and a proper system of services for the totally blind was printed, with the necessary changes in the legislation, so that those people are not at such a disadvantage.

Let me finish with one general point on class XI, vote 1. I note that £1,452,000 is earmarked for the Northern Ireland Assembly. We heard an interesting debate between the right hon. Member for South Down and Conservative Members on scrutiny, but here is £1,452,000 earmarked for an Assembly from which a former Secretary of State walked out and to which he refused to return, and from which the present Secretary of State has threatened to withdraw staff if they do not carry out the scrutiny that the right hon. Member for South Down was advocating. Yet within this appropriation there is that sum of money for a body which is not doing that.

I leave the matter there. I do not want to make a political point, but I should love to see that £1,452,000 being usefully used on something like services for blind people or allowances for young people who wish to continue their education.

10.11 pm

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): I wish to make one simple point. In the House we are primarily concerned with the voting of money and the redress of grievance. In both cases, one needs to participate in order to be able to appropriate.

It is with great interest that I see the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) in the Chamber. I deeply regret the fact that he is not accompanied by his colleagues. There is an opportunity for a positive and constructive solution to the current difficulties with Northern Ireland—there is an opportunity for building bridges.

I was particularly interested in the point that the right hon. Gentleman made on the extract that he read by the gentleman from the London Business School and his reference to the Select Committee. I know that the right hon. Gentleman confined his point to the financial aspects, but it would be far better if his colleagues could find their way to coming back to this Chamber in order to participate in the vote which will lead to the appropriation of moneys under this order, and in so many other ways.

I think that a Select Committee could be devised—I am not proposing the Grand Committee system, because that would be wholly inappropriate—with amendments to Standing Orders 70*(a)* and *(b)* relating to public business which would enable us to have a Select Committee in which there could be real participation and in which Northern Ireland Members could sit down with those from the rest of the United Kingdom and discuss matters which are germane to the future of Northern Ireland.

I have nothing more to say on the subject, other than that I hope we can maintain dialogue. It is a matter of the greatest importance that those Members of the United Kingdom who represent Northern Ireland who are not here tonight, should attend future debates.

10.14 pm

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): I am delighted, in dealing with matters relating to Northern Ireland, to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash). I find myself thoroughly in sympathy, as I think the House will be aware from my earlier interventions, with his proposal about how the House, by involving the elected representatives of Northern Ireland, could deal with all matters relating to appropriation, which is the purpose of the order.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland will give more than passing attention to the repeat—if one may put it that way—speech by the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell), because I believe that he put forward a way of bringing the elected representatives of Northern Ireland back to this place to deal with matters that concern them and their constituents.

I have to relate my remarks particularly to matters of finance in the appropriation order. The message is clear. I believe that it gives an opportunity for all parties to the current dispute to come together with honour in order to solve the problem. I hope that the message gets to the Secretary of State and perhaps even beyond him, to the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and to the Prime Minister. It is encouraging to observe my hon. Friend the Parliamentary-Under Secretary of State nodding to me, indicating that the message has been taken on board, because I know that it is felt strongly by a number of Members on these Benches as well as by representatives of the Province.

I wish to pick out two points from the order. The first is class V relating to the Housing Executive. I am taking up a point touched upon by the right hon. and learned Member for Warley, West (Mr. Archer) relating to the amount of money being spent on housing improvement and on rehabilitation. I have had the honour of visiting Northern Ireland on many occasions, not least recently when I visited south Belfast and other areas of Belfast. I know how important it is in Belfast for the massive programme of housing improvements to continue. It is unfortunate that there will be a cutback in expenditure in this respect.

I believe that the communities of Northern Ireland must be permitted to remain together and increasingly to blend. That will not be achieved by mass demolition and redevelopment. It will come gradually by communities which have lived together continuing to involve themselves in what is going on in their own areas—for instance, in Belfast. That comes about by communities working and staying together. It can be achieved only by

rehabilitation and improvement, not by mass redevelopment which brings into an area many people who have nothing in common. I make a plea to my hon. Friends on the Front Bench that money allocated to housing rehabilitation and improvement should be increased.

The other point I wish to make follows remarks made by the right hon. and learned Member for Warley, West relating to pre-five schooling, particularly in Belfast. The right hon. and learned Gentleman mentioned a cutback in Stranmillis—an area which I have visited. From my experience on the Select Committee on Social Services, I know how important this form of education is, particularly in some of the more deprived areas. I know that my hon. Friend the Minister of State is very keen on this. No one, I think, has more knowledge of education than my hon. Friend. He is highly respected not only in the House, but elsewhere and, indeed, in the Province, where he has played a major role in recent times.

I have found this an interesting debate in which to participate as a Member from the mainland of the United Kingdom, but I feel deeply for the problems of Northern Ireland, a troubled part of the United Kingdom. I hope that the constructive and important speech made by the right hon. Member for South Down will bring some positive response from Her Majesty's Government.

10.20 pm

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): I am not sure that there will be positive response from Her Majesty's Government. There will certainly be positive response from Her Majesty's Opposition. We are grateful for the intervention of the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton). It was lively, informed and instructive. He referred to the Housing Executive and to a matter that affects education. I shall refer to those subjects in my speech.

I accept that in these debates I play the role of sweeper. I sweep up for all right hon. and hon. Members who have already spoken in the debate. I was particularly interested in and impressed by the contribution of the hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash) and for his felicitous phrases about the voting of money, the redress of grievances and participation in order to appropriate money. He expressed well-founded regret that the Unionist Members of Parliament, with the honourable exception of the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell), are not in their places tonight.

I have less sympathy for some of the reasons that have been given for their absence. They held by-elections a few weeks ago and they won those by-elections. They lost one seat, yet they have deigned not to participate in the proceedings of this House. The right hon. Member for South Down tried to justify that by saying that it was up to them to get their priorities right as between their constituents and their constituencies and the House of Commons. However, in June 1985 the right hon. Member for South Down was quick to criticise my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Warley, West (Mr. Archer) and me for not being here to take part in a short debate on historic churches in Northern Ireland. We were in Northern Ireland at that time, but the right hon. Gentleman said:

"It is no substitute to be absent in the Province when Northern Ireland affairs are debated in this House."—[*Official Report*, 11 June 1985; Vol. 80, col. 857.]

I would not have made great play of that, had it not been stated on a number of occasions tonight that the Unionist Members of Parliament are absent because they are in their constituencies. As elected representatives, their first duty is to the House of Commons and they should take their places here. All right hon. and hon. Members would welcome them back to the House and it is their duty to be here when debates on Northern Ireland take place.

The hon. Member for Stafford referred to a point that was made by the right hon. Member for South Down about the work of the House of Commons in connection with Northern Irish matters—that is, a Grand Committee and a Select Committee. One of the casualties of the Anglo-Irish agreement and of the attitude of the Unionist Members of Parliament to that agreement is the change in the procedures of this House as they relate to Northern Ireland. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Warley, West referred some time ago to a change in the procedures. This was taken up by the Leader of the Unionist Opposition, the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux). Consultations were held on an informal basis to find out how we could improve the procedures of this House in the interests of the people of Northern Ireland. A casualty of the reaction of the Unionist Members of Parliament to the Anglo-Irish agreement is that those talks have not continued. The sooner that the Unionist Members of Parliament take their places in the Chamber the sooner we shall be able to look at the procedures with a view to modifying them in the interests of debates on subjects that affect Northern Ireland and in the interests of the people of Northern Ireland.

I was also glad to hear the speech of the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon). When we discussed the last draft Appropriation (Northern Ireland) Order I spoke after his predecessor, Mr. James Nicholson, who was then the Member of Parliament for Newry and Amargh. I was unable to be in the House when the present Member of Parliament for that constituency made his maiden speech. However, in the parlance of the House, I read it with care in *Hansard*. I am very glad to see that he has not only continued his involvement in the affairs of this House through his speeches from the Back Benches, but that in his short intervention tonight he has shown care and compassion for the people he seeks to represent, in addition to understanding the wider issues relating to Northern Ireland that are now before us. He referred to education cuts in Northern Ireland, to young people and to the intervention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Warley, West. We are, of course, very concerned about education. The cuts in the education budget will lead to 140 teacher redundancies in Northern Ireland, with the loss of 80 teaching posts in Belfast alone. The cuts in nursery schooling come at a time when nursery units need to be expanded and not reduced. The cut in further education in Belfast may lead to up to 100 job losses. Our concern about those cuts leads us to regret all the more the lack of Unionist Members in the Chamber to fight their corner.

The cost-cutting in education that has taken place over the years has led to the degeneration of plant in the Province's schools. The forcing of maintenance cuts and the moratorium on new school building will cost Northern Ireland dearly when major renovation work becomes necessary. Recently, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Peterborough (Dr. Mawhinney), told the Irish National Teachers

[Mr. Stuart Bell]

Organisation that the education budget was being increased by £42 million, which represented a 6 per cent. increase. He also stated that spending had remained constant in real terms since 1979 and that spending per primary school pupil had risen by more than 10 per cent.

The first schedule to the order calls for a decrease of £350,000 in the sums for education and library boards. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Warley, West made great reference to the cuts in that area. Such cuts hardly inspire the Opposition to view the Minister's statements on education with confidence.

The hon. Member for Macclesfield also referred to housing. We are, of course, most concerned at the cuts in housing. I have written to the Minister on the subject and he has replied to questions on the Order Paper. As has been mentioned, the number of planned housing starts has been cut from 1,000 to 850, and the number of planned improvement schemes on public sector estates has been cut from 1,200 to 40. In addition we see the cancellation of 4,500 planned improvement grants and 15,000 repair grants. I apologise to the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh for concentrating once more on Belfast, because I know that he would prefer to concentrate on the wider spectrum. but the waiting list in Belfast is 8,255 with 6,582 in urgent need.

The hon. Member for Macclesfield expressed his concern for such issues when he referred to the cut in the housing budget of £44 million in real terms. Earlier my right hon. and learned Friend the member for Warley, West said that the Housing Executive had expected an increase of £50 milion. Thus we are not entirely happy with the figures in the order or with the fact that housing problems are still so great. Indeed, they will continue to be severe for some time to come.

I come to the intervention of the right hon. Member for South Down. After a while hon. Members could almost write each other's speeches. I could perhaps write a fair speech for the right hon. Gentleman on integration, the constitutional position or on the uncertainty, as he would say, of the constitutional future of the people of Northern Ireland. However, I repeat that the way in which business is conducted in the Chamber has been a casualty of the Anglo-Irish agreement. But although the hon. Member for Macclesfield might have agreed with him over the prospect of a more devolved council administration in Northern Ireland, our earlier debate clearly showed that the withdrawal of consent in council chambers had made that less of a possibility.

One other intervention was from the hon. and learned Gentleman the Member for Mid-Bedfordshire (Mr. Lyell). He referred to the money given from the state exchequer to Northern Ireland. He said that it was a useful cause. The money given over a period of time bears thinking about. In 1979-80 we gave by way of subvention to Northern Ireland the sum of £944 million, 25·8 per cent. of the gross domestic product of Northern Ireland. In the United Kingdom as a whole it was 0·55 per cent. In 1985-86, the figure has risen to £1,573 million, a quite substantial sum of money to go from our Exchequer to that of Northern Ireland. *[Interruption.]* My hon. Friend the Member for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth (Mr. Hogg) says, sotto voce, "It certainly is." Many Welsh and Scottish Members wonder why Wales and Scotland cannot be similarly treated. We accept the problems of Northern Ireland, and we do not criticise the Government for putting £1,573 million into the exchequer there, but it is something to take into account; and, without widening the debate, I trust that those who talk wildly of some kind of independence for Ulster will ask themselves where they think that £1,573 million a year is to come from, as they try to develop their plans.

The hon. Member for Macclesfield again, if he does not mind my referring to him, mentioned the Stranmillis school, a point taken up by my right hon. and learned Friend. He pointed out that the school was under threat because a subvention of £10,000 a year would not be made available. According to my information, this school is already over-subscribed, and is to be closed in the face of very high demand. Overall, some 300 nursery places will be lost. So we are grateful that the hon. Member for Macclesfield has picked this up and has added his weight to our concern at the school's imminent closure.

The questions of health were well covered by my right hon. and learned Friend. It is worth repeating, however, that the Government are underfunding in health provision, certainly in regard to the Eastern health board, and that there is something like £2·6 million to be made up in budget cutbacks. At a meeting on 8 November 1985 the board approved the closure of four hospitals. One was referred to by my right hon. and learned Friend, the Claremont street neurological hospital. The others are the Haypark geriatric hospital, the Samaritan gynaecological hospital and Templemore avenue geriatric hospital. These closures led to the loss of 200 hospital beds. While we would not wish to reduce the level of the debate to matters of small importance, it is a fact that the cuts have put great strain on the already overcrowded and underfunded Royal Victoria hospital. We echo the concern expressed by the National Union of Public Employees in late January at the conditions found in the kitchens of that hospital, and the need for a major cash injection to maintain adequate health standards.

We have had an interesting and prolonged debate, worthy of the subject, of the people of Northern Ireland, and of this Chamber. It is proper that, notwithstanding the absence of Unionist Members, we are here to defend the cause of the people who live in Northern Ireland, and give a full and thorough airing to the issues which concern them. We look forward to hearing the response of the Minister, to see whether we can reach some agreement on some of the issues discussed, and possibly see some action.

10.34 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Richard Needham): The hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) is a difficult man to follow when he replies, because in his role as sweeper he sounds increasingly more like a Government Front Bench spokesman than the Government spokesman will sound. It is a pity that his talent will be wasted for so long in that role.

I said that I would not quote Shakespeare, but having listened to the introduction of the right hon. and learned Member for Warley, West (Mr. Archer), I must say that in some areas

"The lady doth protest too much, methinks."

I shall keep my remarks as brief as possible, but the debate raises important issues which have been seriously

discussed. If I miss a point, I assure hon. Members that either my hon. Friend the Minister or I will write to them with the details.

The public expenditure White Paper, Cmnd. 9702, published on 15 January 1986, puts forward planned increases in public expenditure in Northern Ireland of 12·5 per cent. between 1985-86 and 1988-89. The equivalent figure for the remainder of the United Kingdom is 11 per cent. We accept the need to maintain high levels of public expenditure in Northern Ireland because of the genuine difficulties and problems that exist there.

In 1983-84—the latest figures available—per capita public expenditure in Northern Ireland was £2,461, in Scotland £2,058, in Wales £1,861 and in England £1,632.

I am sure that the right and learned gentleman will agree that we fully accept the importance of public expenditure in Northern Ireland, and our plans will continue to reflect that. However, we must continue to consider value for money on behalf of taxpayers.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman talked about problems in housing. We are to some extent the victims of our own success. During the past few years our record on housing in Northern Ireland has been admirable. We have made massive strides to improve the housing stock. I regret as much as anybody the problems that we now face with the budget and the spending levels that we hoped, but unfortunately failed to maintain. The reason is that law and order has top priority in the budget, followed by industry and employment, especially employment, and expenditure under those two heads has increased.

The figures for public expenditure per head on housing for 1986-87, although not exactly comparable, are £59 for England, £125 for Scotland, £50 for Wales and £225 for Northern Ireland. I accept that loan charges take a considerable amount of that, and that receipts from council house sales have not been as great as we hoped. That necessarily affects the position. The urban renewal regulation, which provides European Community assistance, has come to an end, and Government support for housing is £2 million less this year than last year. Nevertheless, we continue to spend significant funds.

Mr. J. Enoch Powell: The Minister refers to the falling off of house sales. Does he agree that that is because the movement began much earlier in Northern Ireland, attained wider dimensions earlier, and subsequently the scope for it may be approaching exhaustion?

Mr. Needham: I accept the right hon. Gentleman's point. We have been working on the figures that the Housing Executive hoped to achieve for receipts. As it is the expert in that area, the Government accepted those figures. When they were not reached, the Government could only make up the difference with additional funds from the Northern Ireland block. He will appreciate that that has not been possible, for the reasons that I gave, but he is absolutely right.

The Government can be legitimately proud of their policy towards spending on housing in Northern Ireland in view of the two budget blocks I have mentioned. We have maintained it as a priority, and we are determined to keep it as high as we possibly can.

The right hon. and learned Member for Warley, West mentioned social security reforms, Eileen Evason and the difficulty that we will face in Northern Ireland with single payments. I do not think that Miss Evason's figures are more than speculative, but it is difficult for us to get the figures exactly right. Nevertheless, our figures show that, excluding the impact of the social fund, because in Northern Ireland there is a much larger number of families with children and a rather lower percentage of pensioners, the outcome, after implementation of the social security review, would be about even. That does not take into account the effects of the social fund. All that I can say is that this matter has not yet been decided, but we will obviously try to keep as much flexibility as possible.

I take the right hon. and learned Gentleman's point about the hard-nosedness of social security benefit officers and how they use their discretion and sense. I echo his sentiments. I recently had the opportunity to listen to the views of the main managers of the social security offices. I am sure that they make single payments in the most efficient and sensible way. When we introduce the social fund, we will try to keep it as flexible as possible. I am sure that the House agrees that the present method of applying single payments is immensely complex for those who administer it and for those who receive it.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman spoke about education cuts. Before I refer to the problems facing the area boards, I should like to remind the House of the figures given by my hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Dr. Mawhinney). The 1986-87 education budget of £662 million was an increase of £42 million, which is more than 6 per cent. above this year's outturn, when, as the right hon. and learned Gentleman is aware, school rolls will continue to decline. Some £15 million of this increase—approaching 7 per cent.—will go to area boards to recount capital budgets.

I can understand that, despite this increase, there is considerable pressure on the current budgets of the boards. My hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough, who has responsibility for education, will meet several board deputations this week. I must emphasise that none of the measures that the right hon. and learned Gentleman referred to have yet been formally submitted to the Department of Education. Therefore, it would not be appropriate for me to comment further.

I have considered the closure of nursery schools, but I assure the House that any such proposals would require the approval of my hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough, and he would have regard to any objections put to him as well as to any recommendations made to him by the boards.

I cannot accept the comments of the hon. Member for Middlesbrough to the effect that the Royal Victoria hospital is under-funded. I have heard much about this hospital, but I can honestly say that I have never before been told that one of it its major problems is under-funding. I can accept an argument about the use of resources, but it is difficult to argue that it is under-funded, especially when one considers the amount of money that it has and the value for money that it gives to patients.

As the right hon. and learned Member for Warley, West knows, expenditure on the Health Service in Northern Ireland is 25 per cent. per head higher than elsewhere in the United Kingdom. We have 50 per cent. more nurses than in the United Kingdom. I am not suggesting for one moment that there are not strong reasons for that, but those are the facts. We also have more general practitioners as a percentage of the population. We have a Health Service of which we can be proud, but, under the strategic guidelines, which I have tried to make widely available,

[Mr. Needham]

it is right to move towards greater emphasis on care in the community and preventive care, and slightly less emphasis on acute medicine, of which we have a higher level of provision than in England and Wales, although waiting lists are just as long. It is extremely important to get the strategic guidelines right, to get the Health Service behind us in what we are trying to achieve and to ensure that we are getting the best value for money.

The right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell) knows a great deal more about this subject than I know, and I have followed his writings on the subject closely. I am trying to ensure that we get the maximum of involvement and participation in the Health Service. It cannot be said, however, that there is too little cash in Northern Ireland. There must be careful reorganisation with the maximum consultation and involvement.

My hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) asked me to give the Government's view about the constitutional point raised by the right hon. Member for South Down. I would not bandy words with the right hon. Gentleman on constitutional matters in the Chamber or outside. I listened carefully to what he said. Following the meeting with the leaders of the two Unionist parties last week, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister offered consultation with the Unionists on the future of the Northern Ireland Assembly and on arrangements for handling Northern Ireland business in Parliament. It is important that we get back to negotiations on that issue and on wider issues, which I shall not go into as I should be out of order.

The right hon. Member for South Down talked of the Comptroller and Auditor General's work. As a former member of the Public Accounts Committee, I endorse everything that he said. I assure him that when reports from the Comptroller and Auditor General come to the Department of Health or the Environment Department, in which I have an interest, I make absolutely certain that they are considered and acted upon as quickly as possible. As long as I have anything to do with it, I assure him that that will continue.

I cannot comment on much of what my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Mid-Bedfordshire (Mr. Lyell) said, except that I agreed with most of it.

I shall move on smartly to the speech of the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) who is becoming a more than adequate number three batsman who seems to be playing the bowling at hourly intervals. I have some personal interest in milk quotas as my constituency has a farming make-up similar to many parts of Northern Ireland, and I can understand the problems that farmers face. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is aware that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and my noble Friend Lord Lyell are doing what they can. Under the chairmanship of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, they have concluded that an additional 50 million litres of quota should be sought for reallocation to exceptional hardship cases, small producers and special cases in Northern Ireland. I tried to work that out in the number of cows and got a nought in the wrong place. I am told that it is not 1,000 cows, but 10,000.

There has been much consideration over recent months of the Commission's proposal to introduce a Community outgoers scheme and of the fact that it may provide the means of fulfilling the objectives set out by the Howe Committee. My colleagues, the Secretary of State and the Minister, have been ensuring that the views of Northern Ireland industry are taken into account during the United Kingdom discussions on the proposed scheme.

The point made by the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh on education and training for the handicapped is an issue in which my hon. Friend the Minister is involved and is aware of. He will be writing to the hon. Gentleman in detail about it. No decision has yet been made on Enterprise Ulster, and my hon. Friend the Minister is receiving deputations, having meetings and discussing its future.

I was alarmed to hear the views of the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh on what is happening in planned maintenance, and even more alarmed when I saw one of my hon. Friends nodding his agreement. As for my nodding in agreement with my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield, I should say that I was known as nodding Needham at school. It does not necessarily mean that I agree with him. I shall obviously take this matter up with the chairman of the Housing Executive. I was of the opinion that we may not be able to do as much as was hoped for but I trusted that we would do what we did as well as possible.

Mr. J. Enoch Powell: The Minister has been good enough to place this emphasis on the matter. May I offer a lead? I think that the supervision by the Housing Executive of the execution of contracts is very often lacking in effectiveness.

Mr. Needham: That is certainly a subject that I shall take up with the Housing Executive. I will report to the right hon. Gentleman when I have done so.

On the constituency point of the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh, which ended up not as a constituency point, if it has taken three goes to get his 184 houses changed from gas to coal-fired under the existing maintenance system, one shudders to think that he may be right about any future maintenance system. I think that that is rather a separate and special point. Again, I hope that the hon. Gentleman will not mind if I come back to him on it. I am aware of the problem, as he knows.

Mr. Mallon: My goes have not solved the problem. I would like the Under-Secretary to take action before the fourth go at it and more money is poured down the drain.

Mr. Needham: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will understand that I am not in favour of pouring money down anybody's drain.

Mr. Bell: Or up the chimney.

Mr. Needham: Or up the chimney. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for helping the Front Bench, even with the jokes.

I shall write to the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh about the blind. I am aware of the case to which he referred or from which I believe his interest came. There are other methods by which people can be helped to obtain assistance through the courts, depending on their individual cases. Certainly, it is an issue that I shall consider.

I hope that I have covered the points raised by hon. Members.

Finally, I refer to the comment of my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield on rehabilitation versus rebuild.

I am convinced that it is right to rehab, as it is sexily called, where possible, but I should point out that there are cases where it makes much more sense, because of the size of the houses, their condition and the expense that would be incurred in rehabilitation, to knock them down and replace them. I think that my hon. Friend will agree, having visited the Province, as I know he has, and having looked at many of the new housing schemes in Northern Ireland, that we have done a good job in the replanning of layouts and finding additional space for people to live in.

I have got through my first winding-up speech on an appropriation order. Like other right hon. and hon. Members, I am distressed that some of our colleagues from Northern Ireland are not present, but we have had a debate that demonstrates the importance of Northern Ireland affairs and that we cover them carefully and considerately.

I commend the order to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Appropriation (Northern Ireland) Order 1986, which was laid before this House on 19th February, be approved.

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PERSONS (AMENDMENT) BILL [MONEY]

Queen's Recommendation having been signified—

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Children and Young Persons (Amendment) Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any increase attributable to that Act in the sums payable out of money so provided under any other Act.—*[Mr. Whitney.]*

WAYS AND MEANS

AIRPORTS BILL

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Airports Bill, it is expedient to authorise the levying of annual charges on airport operators in respect of the expenses of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission in connection with references made to it under that Act.—*[Mr. Ancram.]*

Housing (Livingston)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Durant.]*

10.55 pm

Mr. Robin Cook (Livingston): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise a matter of serious and growing concern to my constituents — the forward housing programme of Livingston development corporation. On the whole, I do not quarrel with the priorities of the corporation, and usually agree with the judgments that it makes within the resources available to it. My point, for which the Government must take full responsibility, is that its resources are not adequate to do the job that if faces.

There are two separate issues. The first is the amount of capital allocation available to LDC to tackle the upgrading of the existing housing stock. The second is the Government's ban on general needs building by the new towns, including the LDC. The two are linked, as, were that ban to be lifted, the new towns would require an even more generous capital allocation than they need for the upgrading of existing stock. Both cases stand on their own merit, so I shall address myself to them as separate issues.

This debate, and my application for it, were prompted by the reduction in the capital allocation for the LDC in the forthcoming year. For the current year, it received £2·4 million net capital allocation for housing purposes. Next year, it will receive only £1·7 million, which is effectively a reduction of one third in real terms. It is difficult for those of us who know and seek to grapple with the housing problems of Livingston, to understand what possible basis there could be in the reality on the ground for that reduction in the net capital allocation for LDC.

Livingston, by its nature, has a large number of houses that were built in the 1960s, when system building was extremely fashionable among architects. Those houses have proved inappropriate wherever they have been built, but they have proved particularly inappropriate in Livingston, which is on an exposed hillside in Scotland, 500 ft above sea level. Some aspects of the housing stock desperately needs urgent attention if it is to provide acceptable housing into the 21st century, and if it is to stop deteriorating before the 20th century comes to an end.

First, a large number of houses have flat roofs. Unfortunately, in the 1960s, architects forgot that flat roofs do not allow the rainwater to run off. I have constituents who have reported 14 or 15 times that their roofs are leaking. To be fair to the LDC, quite often the tenants have been visited 14 or 15 times, and have had more patches put on the flat roof above them. That is no solution. The only solution to the problem faced by the tenants and the LDC is to provide the houses with proper pitched roofs. If the rain does not get in through the roof, it gets in through the Bison cladding. The Minister will be familiar with the problems of Bison-built houses, and he will be aware that where such buildings are in an exposed position, as in Livingston, the case is as strong as anywhere else for urgent treatment of that form of building.

My next point concerns the provision of the heating systems in those houses. Unfortunately, many of the houses were built at a time when architects blithely assumed that energy, and particularly electricity, would be cheap indefinitely. They therefore built houses that were cheap on insulation, and which are now expensive to run.

A number of houses in Livingston are recognised by the DHSS as exceptionally hard to heat houses. The LDC, to its credit, perfectly properly wants to replace the heating systems in those houses and provide heating systems that the tenants can once again afford. That is a matter of concern not only to the tenant but to the landlord as, while the houses are not heated, they deteriorate as a result of the familiar problems of condensation.

In addition to all these problems with the existing housing stock, there is the further quite distinctive issue of the upgrading programme for Knightsridge 4. I will not weary the Minister with the details of that tonight, as he was good enough to meet me and the local councillor, Maureen Ryce, a fortnight ago and we much appreciate the fact that since then he has been able to make a decision approving that upgrading programme.

That upgrading programme alone requires a capital expenditure of £3·6 million spread over two years. Therefore there will be an annual expenditure of £1·8 million. That figure compares to the total net capital allocation for Livingston for the current year of £1·7 million. In other words, that project alone would swallow up the entire net capital allocation. If we add the other expenditure to which I have referred, Livingston requires and can readily absorb a net capital allocation some two or three times the figure that has been offered for the current year.

The Minister could perfectly properly argue that the net capital allocation is not the sole capital resource available to Livingston. The LDC can also apply to capital expenditure the receipts that it obtains from the sale of houses. The fact is, however, that those receipts are on a declining profile. We are over the hump in public sector housing sales. In Livingston in the past year there has been a marked reduction in interest in purchases of corporation houses. That is not surprising, since more than half the tenants in Livingston are on housing benefit and are not in a position to purchase their houses. There is bound to be finite point to the demand for council house sales and we appear to be approaching that point.

It is possible that the Housing (Scotland) Bill, which is currently before the House, will stimulate a fresh wave of applications for purchase, should it complete its passage. That, however, will be a one-off effect. The LDC expects that its receipts from house sales will decline from £2·5 million in the current year to £1·1 million in 1990. That estimate was prepared by a development corporation which takes no view on the rights or wrongs of selling public housing and which has proved itself willing and energetic in marketing the sale of such houses. That corporation nevertheless expects to be able to achieve only a declining revenue from the sale of its houses.

In other words, the LDC is faced with a declining capital revenue from the sale of its housing stock and a declining net capital allocation from the Scottish Office. On that basis, it is impossible for the LDC to tackle the grave housing problems that it has inherited. In the immediate future that means that it does not have enough resources to meet committed expenditure in the coming financial year. In the longer term, it means that some of my constituents will continue to live with flat roofs, with Bison-clad buildings and with heating that is too expensive for them to use, until beyond the year 2000 on the present

resources available to LDC. That is the situation in a housing authority for which the Secretary of State is directly responsible.

It would not require resources beyond the bounds of imagination to tackle the problems at Livinston. The capital programme of the LDC in 1978-79, the last year of the Labour Government, was double the capital programme in the current financial year. Moreover, none of that expenditure was financed by sales of the housing stock.

I do not expect miracles. I do not expect the Under-Secretary of State to be able to return us to those halcyon days and the expenditure of 1978-79. I do not think that he has brought his cheque book with him. However, I ask him to give serious and sympathetic consideration to the representations from LDC and to look at them with a genuinely open mind. The hon. Gentleman has been willing—I appreciate this—to recognise the problems in the Knightsridge 4 area of Livingston. He has been prepared to admit that there is a case for expenditure. I put it to him that having recognised those problems, he must now will the means to tackle them.

I am concerned also about the ban imposed by the Scottish Office on construction of general needs housing in the new towns. That ban was imposed by the Minister's predecessor three years ago. Since then, no general needs housing has been started in Livingston or in any other Scottish new town. The hardship caused by that moratorium has become increasingly evident during those three years.

When I was first elected to the seat of Livingston and went to my surgeries there, I had few, if any, cases of people coming to me who were not able to obtain rehousing. I have to admit that it made a refreshing contrast to my previous constituency in central Edinburgh where such cases were the stock in trade of my surgery. However, over the three years, first a steady trickle and now a steady stream of people have come to my surgeries unable to obtain the housing that they urgently and desperately need. I share that experience with local councillors. Yesterday, West Lothian district council carried a resolution requesting the Scottish Office to lift the moratorium on the construction of general needs housing in Livingston, precisely because of the experience of local councillors in finding an increasing number of constituents coming to them whom they could not assist.

To understand the pressure on the waiting list, it is necessary to remember that Livingston is a new town which has been constructed over the past 20 years. We now have a large number of second generation residents reaching their 20s, getting married and understandably seeking a house in which they can set up their family home. Forty six per cent. of the applicants on the LDC's waiting list are under 25. The houses are just not there for them. The waiting list grew steadily until December 1984 when the LDC decided, perhaps understandably, that it would have to close the waiting list, except for priority cases. Even so, the average waiting time lengthened dramatically during the subsequent 18 months. The average time that must elapse before a first offer can be made exceeds a year. Many people on that waiting list cannot afford to wait a year. One hundred applicants a year involve cases where families have split up, often in desperate circumstances, occasionally in violent circumstances.

Bluntly, LDC is caught between the twin pressures of diminishing housing stock from the sales and an increasing demand from the new generation reaching maturity and seeking a family home of their own. The only way out of those conflicting pressures is a building programme of general needs housing. I am not asking for a massive programme. I am not seeking an enormous new estate. I am asking for LDC to have the flexibility to provide a steady responsible programme of perhaps 200 houses a year.

Some private sector house starts are being carried out in Livingston, and it is welcome, but they do not match the needs of the local community. In the past seven years, the average number of starts in Livingston by the private sector has been 137. It is estimated that we require 350 homes a year. Moreover, the people buying those houses come overwhelmingly from outside the new town. They are attracted by houses in an attractive, modern environment and are welcome to the new town. However, the houses constructed by the private sector do not and cannot meet the needs of the young couples of Livingston who cannot afford to purchase them.

I hope the Minister will agree that I have put my case in a rational, reasoned and dispassionate manner. I ask him in return to give a reasoned and dispassionate response to my case for lifting the moratorium, but I do not want him to give an instant response tonight if it will be no. He will have adequate opportunity to respond. The five district councils representing Scottish new towns have formed a joint forum which has been examining, among other issues, the housing needs of the new towns. The unanimous view of those councils is that the moratorium should be lifted, and they will be placing a report before the Minister within a couple of months.

I hope that when he receives that report, he will reflect on my remarks tonight and will, in the light of the evidence that they and I have given, be willing to consider lifting the moratorium. By definition, a moratorium should be only a temporary pause. I hope the Minister will agree, when he receives the report from the five councils, that the time for lifting the moratorium is long overdue.

11.11 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Allan Stewart): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) for giving the House an opportunity to discuss the housing responsibilities of the Scottish new towns. Their achievements in housing generally have been rather eclipsed by their well-publicised and well-merited achievements in industrial promotion and development. We are all aware of Livingston's success and its pre-eminence in high-tech development, with companies such as Damon Biotech, NEC, Burr Brown, Shin-Etsu Handotai and many others which have decided to "make it in Livingston."

While the solid achievements of the development corporations in housing have not had the same public focus, their role in housing is important. It is inextricably linked to the successful overall development of the new towns, and the new towns have been alive to the interaction between their social and economic objectives.

As the hon. Gentleman said, Livingston has grown substantially. It is now the largest community in Lothian region, outside Edinburgh. Since its inception, the development corporation has built over 12,000 houses at an historic cost to the public purse of £92 million. The hon.

[Mr. Allan Stewart]

Gentleman referred to the contribution of private enterprise. That has been an increasing contribution, in Livingston as elsewhere.

The hon. Gentleman dealt at length with the current restrictions on corporation house-building for general rental needs. As he said, the restrictions were imposed by my predecessor in 1983 to stimulate private housing development in the new towns to improve housing choice and social balance. At the same time, the Government encouraged the corporations to introduce positive measures to increase the supply of and demand for low-cost homes for purchase.

Through agreements between the corporations and private builders, a growing amount of relatively low-cost housing for single people—the hon. Gentleman referred in particular to young couples — is now coming on stream. Hon. Members in all parts of the House will welcome, for example, the shared equity schemes that have been introduced in Livingston and elsewhere.

The hon. Gentleman said that corporations might feel that now was the time to reintroduce a limited programme of general needs building by the Scottish newtowns. I emphasise that I would be willing to consider a case based on genuine housing need, and I assure the hon. Gentleman that I shall be examining carefully the corporations' submissions. In relation to Livingston in a submission to my Department the development corporation has made it clear that it sees no need at present for a major general needs programme. I invite the hon. Gentleman to rely on the corporation's own assessment of its housing needs and priorities.

The hon. Gentleman rightly pointed to the importance of the gross allocation figure, which reflects not only the net allocation but also sales to sitting tenants. That is an area where Livingston has been particularly successful. It has sold over 1,700 houses to its tenants. That is evidence of the attractiveness of Livingston as a place to live. Of course, sales of public housing are important not only because of income. They help to foster a sense of pride and permanence in the community. The income has been important to the corporations which have been able to apply it to their rehabilitation programmes, to which the hon. Gentleman referred, and to their special needs programmes. In Livingston, for example, sales over the past six years have financed nearly £17 million of new investment.

I accept that future sales cannot be predicted with certainty, but in Livingston's case we have provided some flexibility by setting a sales receipts target for 1986-87 which is lower than is likely to be achieved in the current year, thus accepting the point made by the hon. Gentleman about the trend of sales.

On the Housing (Scotland) Bill the hon. Gentleman was right to point to the possible significant boost to sales following the relaxation of the cost floor. Hon. Members will recall that, under the current rules, which apply to homes first let after May 1975, if the discount to which a tenant would otherwise be entitled brings the selling price of the house below the outstanding debt on the property, discount is restricted so that the house is sold at the lower of either the outstanding debt or the market value. Clause 3(1) of the Housing (Scotland) Bill brings forward the date after which discount restrictions may apply to 31 December 1978. The general effect is to ensure that tenants of houses first let before 31 December 1978 will benefit from their full discount entitlement.

I am now permitting new town development corporations to operate the revised cost floor in respect of unmodernised houses on a voluntary basis in advance of the Bill's enactment. The impact of the voluntary consent is likely to be considerable. The vast majority of tenants in the 11,600 or more houses built in the five Scottish new towns between 1975 and 1978 will stand to benefit from the voluntary consent in now being able to purchase their homes with the benefit of their full discount entitlement. Livingston alone has some 4,000 houses in that category. In cases where the houses have not been significantly modernised since 1978, the tenants will have the opportunity to benefit straight away from improved sales terms.

I fully expect that the early application of the legislative changes will give an appreciable boost to sales over the next few months. In Livingston's case it will help ensure that the corporation achieves its target to self-finance about 60 per cent. of its gross programme involving £4·2 million for 1986-87, to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

The main components of the corporation's housing programme are the provision of special needs housing and the rehabilitation of rented stock. Relatively little special needs housing was built in Livingston in its early years because the town's youthful population structure meant that elderly and disabled groups were under-represented in the town.

However, the corporation has recognised that, as the population structure ages, the demand for specially adapted housing will increase. The hon. Gentleman will know that the corporation let the first of its contracts for wheelchair-adapted houses in 1984, in three areas of the town, and a further scheme for 31 special needs houses is due for completion in August 1987.

Improvements to rental stock, to which the hon. Member for Livingston has referred, comprised the major part of Livingston's housing programme. Over the past four years—I must emphasise this to the House—nearly £12 million has been invested in capital repairs and rehabilitation. About £3·8 million will be spent in the coming year.

The hon. Gentleman rightly pointed to the fact that the need for resources for modernisation is related to the age of the housing stock. Some 64 per cent. of Livingston's housing stock has been built since 1970. That is a high figure compared with the local authority sector, so the stock has suffered relatively little of the obsolescence affecting most housing authorities.

In 1983-84, the latest year for which figures are available, the allocation was £384 per house in Livingston, compared with £353 per local authority house in Scotland. Those figures put Livingston's needs into perspective. I recognise that there are problems and areas that could be improved. Schemes have been proposed for those areas. The resources allocated in recent years have enabled the development corporation to carry through a substantial programme of work.

Since 1982, more than 1,000 houses have been modernised; 7,700 have been insulated; 5,600 houses have had new fixtures and fittings and more than 3,000 houses have had obsolescent heating systems replaced. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that the pace of repairs has

been rapid. The resources available have enabled large-scale schemes to be carried out, which leaves less to be done in the future.

The hon. Gentleman will know that my Department approved last year a major house remodelling and refurbishment project in the Craigshill area of Livingston. That involved 119 houses and cost more than £1·8 million. Last week I gave approval in principle — the hon. Gentleman has referred to this scheme—to the physical remodelling of 427 houses in the Knightsridge area. That project will cost £3·2 million. I was grateful to the hon. Gentleman, and to the local councillor, for coming to see me to detail their concern about Knightsridge. I wish the tenants, who have been very involved in the scheme, every success.

These substantial projects are being funded from the gross allocation made to Livingston development corporation. Against this background, I must say to the hon. Gentleman that the suggestion that resources are niggardly—against a background of public expenditure restraint—does seem wide of the mark.

For 1986-87, the provisional gross allocation of £4·2 million for new investment will allow for new special needs housing and for the modernisation of about 2,500 units of Livingston's rental stock. Of course, there may be additional receipts as a result of the provisions of the Housing (Scotland) Bill.

Resources are limited and I know that the corporation would have liked more, but I hope that the House will agree that Livingston development corporation is getting a fair share of the available resources for public expenditure on housing in Scotland.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-four minutes past Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 12 March 1986

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Steel Industry

1. **Mr. Strang** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has any plans to meet the chairman of the British Steel Corporation to discuss future investment in the industry; and if he will make a statement.

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and President of the Board of Trade (Mr. Paul Channon): I shall be meeting the chairman designate, Mr. Scholey, on 17 March for a general discussion.

Mr. Strang: Is the Secretary of State aware that the closure of Gartcosh has shaken the confidence of the Scottish people in the commitment of the Government and the Conservative party to the long-term future of the steel industry in Scotland? I welcome last week's announcement of the computerisation of the Dalziel plate mill, but much more investment is required at Dalziel. We are also anxious that an early go-ahead should be given to new coke ovens at Ravenscraig. We also need a new cold-rolling mill facility if Gartcosh is to remain closed. The Secretary of State may be unable to respond positively to all of these points, but will he at least be prepared to meet the Scottish group of Labour Members of Parliament to discuss the issue?

Mr. Channon: I note what the hon. Gentleman says. I do not think that there would be much point in my meeting him and his colleagues about the future of Gartcosh, because that has been settled. It would be raising false hopes to discuss that matter again, because there is no prospect of the decision being changed. However, I am always anxious and willing to see the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends about any other matters that they may wish to discuss with me.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Does my right hon. Friend agree that Opposition Members, who only a matter of weeks ago were telling us that Dalziel would be closed, should recognise that the investment that is being made in the Scottish steel industry is possible only because of the closure of Gartcosh and because the British Steel Corporation is able to target resources where they are most productive? However, when my right hon. Friend meets the chairman designate of the British Steel Corporation, will he ask him to put every effort into creating jobs in small businesses at the Gartcosh site, as the BSC has done so successfully elsewhere in Scotland?

Mr. Channon: I shall certainly raise that matter with the chairman designate of the British Steel Corporation. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his comments. The House knows that the BSC has recently announced board approval for an investment of £2·5 million at Dalziel. I hope that that news is welcomed by the House.

Mr. James Hamilton: Does the Secretary of State recognise that there is great fear in the Motherwell constituency about the closure of Gartcosh, because of the effect on Ravenscraig? Does he recognise that an investment of £90 million in coke ovens is urgently required and desired? Will he further note that £400 million is being spent on steel plants in England and Wales? That means that the people at Ravenscraig feel that unless something sensational happens the Ravenscraig plant will be the next to close. Will the Secretary of State confirm that that is not the view of the Government? It has always been conceded that Ravenscraig is a matter upon which the Government will have to take a decision.

Mr. Channon: I have nothing to add to what the Government have already said about the future of Ravenscraig. The position remains unchanged. I hope that that is of some comfort to the hon. Gentleman. I hope also that the hon. Gentleman has noted that the BSC plans to spend £15 million on coal injection and other projects at Ravenscraig.

Mr. Crowther: In view of the serious consequences that arose from the undercapitalisation of Sheffield Forgemasters, is the Secretary of State satisfied that the resources being put into Phoenix 2 through the BSC will be adequate to meet all future investment that is needed, including the urgent need for new continuous casting facilities at Rotherham?

Mr. Channon: I hope and think that is so. We shall certainly keep in close touch with the situation.

Mr. Williams: Looking at the investment in the context of the new EEC regime for steel, were not the Government either naive or inept—or perhaps naive and inept—in agreeing to end direct state aid for steel while failing to do anything at all about indirect aid? Does the Secretary of State realise that the result is that the BSC, which receives £1 a tonne of direct assistance, will have to compete directly with Italian producers, who receive £6 a tonne, and with French and German producers, who receive £8 a tonne? Since concurrently the EEC has ended the minimum pricing regime, does that the not mean that the BSC will have to compete at an enormous disadvantage and find that it is incredibly difficult to finance its future investment needs?

Mr. Channon: No. The right hon. Gentleman is probably overstating his case. I do not think that that is the position. The Commission is taking a close interest in these problems, and naturally we will encourage it to continue to do so. It will monitor the position. There is every prospect of the BSC meeting the forecasts. That should be a major cause for congratulating the BSC, considering the difficult position that it has faced over the years.

Manufacturing Industry

2. **Mr. Knox** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the most recent figure for output in manufacturing industry; and how this compares with the figure for the same month six years ago.

The Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry (Mr. Peter Morrison): In the fourth quarter of 1985 the index of production for manufacturing industry stood at 105, based on 1980 equal to 100. This is 5 per cent. lower than for the corresponding period of 1979. However, between 1981 and 1985 manufacturing output rose by 11 per cent.

Mr. Knox: Does my hon. Friend not find it alarming that the output of manufacturing industry is lower today than it was six years ago? Why does he think that has happened?

Mr. Morrison: Yes, I find it alarming, but my hon. Friend will have heard what happened between 1981 and 1985, when we had great successes in manufacturing industry.

Mr. Norman Atkinson: Is the Minister aware that in the same period, when there was a production output drop of 5 per cent., there was a reduction in the work force of 22 per cent. or just short of 1,500,000 people? Should he not now pay tribute to the work force for having achieved such high output and production when wage levels have fallen by 18 per cent. over the same period?

Mr. Morrison: I certainly pay tribute where there have been significant productivity improvements. As the hon. Gentleman will be aware, productivity in manufacturing since 1980 has increased by 29 per cent., which is a great tribute to many people, including the work force.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: Does my hon. Friend agree that some aspects of our regional policy have merely transferred jobs in manufacturing from one part of the country to others where there are fewer manufacturing jobs? Will he reconsider the position in my constituency, where two major engineering companies have lost labour to smaller units in south Wales and the north-east? Surely that cannot be practical politics.

Mr. Morrison: I do not know the precise position about the two companies to which my hon. Friend referred, but I assure him that we consider the matter extremely carefully. I hope he will agree that the direction of regional policy to areas of high unemployment is right.

Mr. James Lamond: Is the Minister aware that he can help manufacturing industry, especially the textile industry, by ensuring that a good, strong, protective multi-fibre arrangement mandate is given to those who are negotiating on our behalf?

Mr. Morrison: Yes, I am aware of that, and I have great confidence in my hon. Friend the Minister for Trade. I am also aware that since 1979 some £7·3 billion has gone into manufacturing as a whole. That confirms the Government's commitment to it.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: Does my hon. Friend accept that we are all pleased to see that the figures for manufacturing output are increasing, not least in Austin Rover and the Land Rover group? Although he has said that they may not expect any favours, does he agree that they may at least expect fairness, so that Britain can continue with a high manufacturing output for the good of the nation?

Mr. Morrison: As my hon. Friend knows, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I have paid tribute to the great strides which have been made throughout the whole of British Leyland.

Mr. John Smith: I congratulate the Minister on having the courage to be one of the few Ministers to come to the Dispatch Box and admit that the fall in manufacturing output during the past six or seven years of Conservative government is alarming. What do the Government propose to do to change that alarming position? When will we see manufacturing output rise to the level which the Government inherited all those years ago and all that North sea oil ago?

Mr. Morrison: The right hon. and learned Gentleman quoted me a little out of context, but I am grateful to him for the compliment. I pointed out the figures between 1981 and 1985, which showed a significant improvement. I am sure he will have noticed that there is enormous confidence by international and domestic investors in terms of the stock exchange—*[Interruption.]* That is correct. It is investing in the future of Britain's manufacturing sector.

Airbus

3. **Mr. McCrindle** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has yet been approached by British Aerospace for financial assistance in the development of the proposed new Airbus project known as A330 and A340.

Mr. Channon: There have been preliminary discussions between my Department and British Aerospace about the proposed new Airbus programmes. Though British Aerospace has indicated that it would expect in due course to apply for Government launch aid in respect of these programmes, no formal application has yet been received.

Mr. McCrindle: If we are to sustain a viable aircraft manufacturing capacity in Britain, is there not a strong argument in favour of responding favourably to such an approach from British Aerospace should it be forthcoming, not least because Germany appears all too eager to take the place of Britain in the Airbus project? As we have already invested a substantial sum in the A320, should we not offer to British and international airlines an opportunity to buy an Airbus product straight across the board, as they can at the moment from Boeing and McDonnell Douglas?

Mr. Channon: I have not closed my mind to that prospect, but I am sure my hon. Friend will agree that British Aerospace will have to show that the project will be economically viable, that it will achieve a commercial rate of return, that Government support is essential to supplement its financial resources, and, indeed, that it has tried to obtain private finance.

Mr. Carter-Jones: I assure the Secretary of State that we are all grateful for the fact that preliminary discussions have taken place, but when the submission comes in will he make sure that we have some positive action quickly, because we lost orders on the A320, despite its success, and the A330 and A340 have a high element of British parts?

Mr. Channon: I note what the hon. Gentleman says, but he cannot expect me to approve an application that has not yet been received.

Mr. Robert Atkins: Does my right hon. Friend know that in a conversation that a number of his colleaues had last week with Franz Josef Strauss, the chairman of the board of Messerschmidt-Bolkow-Blohm, he made it clear that he wanted Britain to be in on the development of the A330 and the A340 and that, if we did not make a decision by the end of the year, he would try to allocate our share to European companies which were interested, and that would be a disaster for the British aviation industry?

Mr. Channon: Yes, I heard that report. We are only in March, so there is plenty of time. I shall await the application from British Aerospace. If it wants to make one, it will be judged against the criteria that I have outlined.

Mr. Park: Why does the Minister need the case proving all over again? Surely it was proved in the case of the A320, which is selling because of its high technology. Is it just a reflection of the fact that he is new to the job?

Mr. Channon: No. It is a reflection of the fact that no one has made an application to me.

Mr. Warren: Before my right hon. Friend receives the submission, will he consider the need to get from the Airbus industry proper accounts as to how its business operates, how it disposes of its money and what is the cost of producing its aeroplanes?

Mr. Channon: Yes. My hon. Friend raises three important points.

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: Is the Secretary of State aware that we accept that no formal application has yet been made, but he has erected a formidable series of hurdles for British Aerospace to overcome? Will he, in particular, confirm that although some money from private sector finance may be available, Government support will be inevitable if the programme is to get off the ground? Will he make it clear to the House today that he is not in principle opposed to public support for this important programme?

Mr. Channon: The House would think it most unreasonable if I gave an answer to an application that I had not yet received. In the unlikely event of the hon. Gentleman holding my office, he would do the same.

Manufacturing Industry

4. **Mr. Lightbown** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is his forecast for manufacturing output in 1986.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. John Butcher): A new forecast for the increase in manufacturing output between 1985 and 1986 will be published in the Industry Act forecasts at the time of the Budget next week. The recent CBI industrial trends survey suggests that short-term prospects for manufacturing output can be viewed optimistically.

Mr. Lightbown: While welcoming that forecast, may I ask my hon. Friend to confirm that that would give industry its longest sustained period of growth since 1971? Can he give me some idea of the areas of growth?

Mr. Butcher: There is clear evidence that the manufacturing sector is enjoying sustained growth and a trend of increased output. I know that my hon. Friend is a great expert in such matters. Last year, within the growth in manufacturing output, the mechanical engineering sector, which is at the heart of manufacturing, increased its output by 6 per cent. That was a magnificent achievement, and I should have thought that Opposition Members would join us in celebrating that recovery.

Mr. Ashdown: Is it true that no amount of projected growth in manufacturing output will make good the devastation caused to the industrial base since 1979, that during the past 10 years Britain has lost for ever one sixth of its industrial base, and that British manufacturing has lost 1·7 million jobs? In the light of those figures, why do the Government have no strategy for the regeneration of British industry?

Mr. Butcher: The hon. Gentleman posed his question in the context of the past 10 years. Therefore, he will agree that it is highly significant that between 1973 and 1979 productivity in the manufacturing sector increased by the appalling figure of only 4 per cent. That was an awful legacy with which to enter the world recession. By contrast, between 1979 and 1985 productivity increased by more than 30 per cent. In reply to the hon. Gentleman's philosophical question, I should say that, as a trading nation, we must manufacture goods to survive.

Mr. Sackville: Is my hon. Friend aware that a high proportion of manufacturing output in Bolton and its surrounding areas depends on the textile industry and that jobs and future investment are at risk in the absence of an orderly development of the world textile trade through a strong multi-fibre arrangement?

Mr. Butcher: My hon. Friend will be aware that my hon. Friend the Minister for Trade has been tackling that problem with great vigour in the Council of Ministers in Europe. In due course he will deliver a regime which safeguards our international requirements for free trade, while looking after the legitimate interests of the British textile industry.

Mr. Pike: Does the Minister accept that his answers this afternoon reflect the Government's complacent attitude to manufacturing industries? Will he assure the House that the Government will take steps to encourage the growth of our manufacturing industries? Will they also encourage a "Think British" campaign aimed at consumers buying products in the market?

Mr. Butcher: On many occasions I and my colleagues have urged British consumers to take another look at British products. It is interesting that those who complain the most about the performance of British industry search the least to find well-designed British products, which are coming on to the market and which are tackling the inroads that imports have made into our economy. Much of the decision-making process lies legitimately with our consumers, who should do precisely what the hon. Gentleman recommends.

Mr. Hanley: Does my hon. Friend agree that the recent performance in manufacturing production and the creation

of greater confidence in the manufacturing world has released funds from the private sector and from abroad, and that the demand for dependence on Government money, about which we hear so much from the Labour party, is largely brought about from nostalgia, a desire for state power, or a deliberate ignorance of our own success?

Mr. Butcher: Sometimes when I listen to the arguments from the Labour Benches I cannot help but think that those arguments have more to do with an affection for public funding of any description than with anything else. Therefore, their philosophical preoccupations are more important to them than are the practical requirements of industrial policy.

Mr. Williams: Does the Minister agree with his hon. Friend the Minister of State that the fall in manufacturing output under this Government has been alarming?

Mr. Butcher: My hon. Friend and I celebrate the fact that at long last we have a period of growth that has not been funded by inflation or by bogus demand management.

The right hon. Gentleman asked whether it was alarming. The answer is no, it is not alarming, to the extent that the trends are moving in the right direction.

Cornish Tin Mining Industry

5. **Mr. Harris** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a further statement on the future of the Cornish tin mining industry.

Mr. Peter Morrison: We are monitoring closely the effects of recent developments on the Cornish tin industry. My Department is in touch with the mining companies in Cornwall. We will be willing to consider carefully assisting viable projects to make the mines competitive in the new market situation.

Mr. Harris: The Cornwall tin mining industry has drawn some hope from the replies given yesterday by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in answer to the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Penhaligon), which were echoed by the statement that my hon. Friend has made just now. Does my hon. Friend accept that there is considerable concern about the Government's apparent line that we shall have to wait until the market stabilises before coming to any decision, because that could well mean that we would be too late?

Mr. Morrison: I accept what my hon. Friend says relating to concern about any delay. That is why my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and I have said on several occasions that we would wish to expedite any official proposition from any of the tin mines in Cornwall. I hope that he will agree that the viability test must be properly looked into.

Mr. Skinner: Does the hon. Gentleman recall that when another precious metal was in difficulty less than a couple of years ago the Government decided to use about £100 million of taxpayers' money to bail it out? I am referring to the gold bullion dealers Johnson Matthey. Why is it that the Government, when it comes to tin miners, unlike bankers, decide that they cannot do anything at all about the problem? Why cannot they use some of the taxpayers' money, not just to bail out, but to take over those tin mines and nationalise them so that jobs can be safeguarded?

Mr. Morrison: The hon. Gentleman will appreciate that, whether nationalised or not—I would be opposed to nationalisation—the future viability of the tin mines will depend upon the cost of production and the market price at which they can sell that production.

Mr. Penhaligon: What does the Minister believe a stabilised tin maket looks like?

Mr. Morrison: Something totally different from the present position, when we do not know what the price is.

German Insurance Market

6. **Mr. Ottaway** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he is satisfied with United Kingdom firms' access to the German insurance market.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Michael Howard): No, Sir. In common with most other member states of the European Community, Germany imposes restrictions on trade in insurance services which we do not consider to be justified. We regard removal of these restrictions as an important element in the Community's programme for the completion of the internal market.

Mr. Ottaway: Is it not deplorable that a citizen in a non-United Kingdom Common Market country cannot place an insurance policy in London? Is that not contrary not only to the spirit of the Common Market but to the treaty of Rome?

Mr. Howard: I agree with my hon. Friend. All Community members, except the Netherlands, impose restrictions on the writing of insurance service business across national frontiers, but the Commission has brought cases in the European Court of Justice against four member states that impose such restrictions. We hope that the judgment of the Court will open the way to the continuing genuine freedom of trade in insurance services, to which we consider member states are entitled under the treaty.

Mr. Fallon: Would a common market in insurance effectively add a 5 per cent. tax to household, car and life premiums in this country? Will my hon. and learned Friend undertake to make the creation of a common insurance market a top priority during the forthcoming British presidency?

Mr. Howard: We certainly intend to do all that we can to remedy the situation, and to obtain further progress towards the creation of an internal common market to include a common market in insurance services.

Mr. Gould: Why should we be compelled, week in and week out, to comply with EEC rules which govern a free market in goods from which we often suffer a disadvantage, when our EEC partners, in particular the Germans, have got away with 15 years of foot-dragging in the one area where we might be expected to derive benefit? Is it not time that the Minister and the Government stopped talking and demanded effective action?

Mr. Howard: The matter is now before the court. When the court's decision is made known we shall take action.

Mr. Lyell: How many of the 320 internal barriers to trade in the Common Market are in the financial services sector? Will my hon. and learned Friend keep a chart on his wall and tick them off one by one?

Mr. Howard: The answer to the first part of my hon. and learned Friend's question is too many. I shall adopt his suggestion about the chart and try to reduce the number as speedily as possible.

Fleet Support Vessels

7. **Mr. Millan** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions he has had with British Shipbuilders about its Fleet Support King design of fleet support vessels.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The chairman, Graham Day, has kept my right hon. Friend fully informed of the development of the Fleet Support King design, and of its potential on the home and export markets.

Mr. Millan: Will the Minister applaud the initiative of British Shipbuilders in developing this design, which would be built in merchant yards—the depressed sector of the industry at the moment — and specifically at shipbuilders in Govan and Sunderland,.? The design is excellent and will give an economic solution to certain naval requirements. Will the Minister do something to get a more positive response than we have had so far from the Ministry of Defence, because support from that Ministry would be important in obtaining orders from foreign navies?

Mr. Morrison: I agree with the right hon. Gentleman about applauding the design originating from British Shipbuilders. I understand the right hon. Gentleman's points about Govan and Sunderland, but it would be for British Shipbuilders to make up its own mind eventually. I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence will read carefully what the right hon. Gentleman said in the other part of his question.

Mr. Clay: Will the Minister accept that it is not good enough to say that his colleague in the Ministry of Defence will read carefully what my right hon. Friend has to say? We always hear from the Government, and particularly from Trade and Industry Ministers, that the problems in shipbuilding have to do with the world recession. They make every excuse, as long as it has nothing to do with the Government. These orders are directly in the gift of the British Government. Is the Minister aware that the first Stena ship floats out of the Pallion yard in my constituency today, that the second goes out in June, that the crane ship leaves North sands in August, and that after that there are no more orders in Sunderland Shipbuilders' yards? Is the Minister aware that over 2,000 jobs could be saved if the Ministry of Defence gets off its backside and places these orders? Will the Minister have words with his colleagues in the Ministry of Defence today and tell them that these jobs are urgently needed in my constituency and in the constituency of my right hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Govan, (Mr. Millan)?

Mr. Morrison: I am aware, of course, that the difficulties in the shipbuilding market are quite intense. I am also aware that, thanks to the enormous strides that have been made by the management and the work force, British Shipbuilders is far more competitive than hitherto. I am sure that the question that the hon. Gentleman put to me today is one that he put to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence yesterday. That matter is my right hon. Friend's responsibility.

Mr. Gordon Brown: In the Minister's discussions with British Shipbuilders about the future work load at Govan and at other yards, what practical initiatives has he considered to secure foreign and merchant orders as well as defence orders to save the 5,000 jobs in British Shipbuilders that are at risk in the coming year?

Mr. Morrison: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that the management and chairman of British Shipbuilders go overseas to seek the orders which the hon. Gentleman would like, which will ensure that those jobs are preserved.

British Design Talent

9. **Mrs. McCurley** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to what extent his Department is encouraging British companies to make better use of Britain's design talent.

Mr. Butcher: All the Department's design activities, incorporating the promoting of awareness of the importance of design in industry and in the education system, and specific measures to help designers, are aimed in some way at making better use of Britain's great wealth of design talent. The extent of the Department's commitment is illustrated by the fact that we have trebled expenditure on design from £4 million in 1982-83 to £12 million in the current year.

Mrs. McCurley: Does my hon. Friend agree that in producing consumer goods in particular, British manufacturers should use designers to greater effect, in view of the fact that there are so many imported goods on the shelves in our shops?

Mr. Butcher: A phenomenon which concerns many people is that so many of our goods, especially consumer goods, are of foreign manufacture. I am delighted to say that out industrialists have woken up to the fact that, by using British design talent, which is the best in the world, they can tackle the huge growth in the range of consumer goods. Currently many British companies do not even begin to address that issue.

Mr. Ewing: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the Post Office uses British design talent in a different design area —to design its British industry stamp? What is the good of asking British design talent to design a British industry stamp for Industry Year when the Government have tried to sell British Leyland to the Americans, and when Government directors on BP's board connived in the selling of the BP tanker fleet to the Bahamas?

Mr. Butcher: The design story is as applicable to the making of stamps as it is to the making of cars. Although I commend the design practice that designed those stamps —I visited that company—I also commend BL's design policy. BL made large investments in a huge computer-aided design facility. The evidence, now on the roads, shows that its design policy is beginning to pay off.

Inner City Areas

11. **Mr. Tony Lloyd** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on his policies for the regeneration of industries in inner city areas.

Mr. Butcher: My Department fully supports and participates in the Government's initiatives in the inner cities, such as the city action teams and the new initiative in the eight inner city areas led by my right hon. and learned Friend the Paymaster General. We are keen to ensure that the inner cities obtain the maximum possible benefit from a number of national and regional schemes in support of industry and commerce operated by my Department.

Mr. Lloyd: How can the hon. Gentleman sound so complacent about the problem when the male adult unemployment rate in and around my constituency is 60 per cent.? Perhaps I should have asked about policies for the reincarnation, rather than the regeneration, of industries. In view of the Government's policy, there is now an industrial desert in our inner city areas. What will the Government do to ensure that there is either public sector or private sector investment in those areas to mop up that great pool of unemployment?

Mr. Butcher: The Government cannot be accused of complacency on inner city programmes. Those programmes are operated by a number of Government Departments. If the hon. Gentleman had done his homework a little better, he would have known that, since the launch of city action teams — they are the main weapon of regional selective assistance — 115 companies have been visited by CAT officers in his area with the objective of stimulating RSA applications.

Mr. Lloyd: How many jobs?

Mr. Butcher: To date, 24 applications have been approved and assistance totalling £1,815,000 has been offered. To answer the hon. Gentleman's specific question, that will create 504 jobs and safeguard 21 more.

Mr. Budgen: Does my hon. Friend not understand how deeply disappointing his answer is to those who hear him encouraging central and local government to spend more money? Would it not be better if my hon. Friend emphasised that lower expenditure in the inner city areas will lead to lower taxes, lower rates and thus lower costs, which may help a few manufacturing industries to survive?

Mr. Butcher: Two policies are relevant in answering my hon. Friend's question. First, there is no point in Governments getting involved in inner city programmes if the cities are politically dominated by those who continue to impose massive rate increases. That would be self-defeating. Secondly, it is surely right that, if the Department of Trade and Industry brings its policies into this initiative, it should ensure that the projects it backs are viable, commercial and geared to promoting employment in jobs with a future. To that extent, that level of public expenditure is working with the grain of market forces and not against it.

Mr. Litherland: Is the Minister aware that one of the last major employers in the inner city area of Manchester, Central—GEC Switchgear—has announced that it will make 300 people redundant and that, in addition, the area has lost 19,000 jobs since the early 1970s? One of the reasons for that is that our industry cannot compete with foreign competitors, which receive advantageous credit and subsidies from their Governments. When will the Government do something for British industry?

Mr. Butcher: If the hon. Gentleman examines the Government's support for that type of major contract business, certainly in terms of export support, he will find that we have a good record. I appreciate that the hon. Gentleman was speaking about another GEC company, but I am sure he will have noticed that GEC Traction at Trafford Park has secured an order worth £35 million to provide 31 high-speed locomotives. That is an example of enlightened public purchasing working towards objectives which the hon. Gentleman should share.

European Community (Internal Market)

12. **Mr. Key** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress is being made towards removing the barriers to trade in goods and services within the European Community?

The Minister for Trade (Mr. Alan Clark): A large number of directives concerned with the removal of technical barriers to trade in goods and services have been adopted. Steps have also been taken to simplify the movement of goods between member states.

Mr. Key: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is intolerable that there has been so little progress towards a common market within the European Community? Although, this weekend, our eyes will be on France and Spain, where we hope the voice of the sensible Right will prevail, will my hon. Friend cast his mind forward to the end of June, when Britain assumes the presidency of the Commission? What steps is he taking to smooth the transition and therefore make a proper common market more likely?

Mr. Clark: Certainly progress so far has been disappointing. That is natural in a Council where there are varying interests and opinions. We have agreed an action programme with the Dutch presidency. I shall be chairing the Council — *[Interruption.]* — for the remaining six months of the year. I hope that, in conjunction with my Dutch colleagues, and the Belgian presidency which follows, we will be able to make more rapid progress in freeing the internal market—an objective that is shared by all member states.

Mr. Tom Clark: Does it not worry the Minister that British Steel has saddled itself with quotas that have led to a two thirds reduction in manpower in the British steel industry since the Government took office? Does it not worry the Minister that men are being made redundant by British Steel while markets are being flooded, especially by the Italians, who seem to pay scant regard to the quotas which this Government are meeting with great enthusiasm?

Mr. Clark: The internal market is not really concerned with quotas, but with barriers to the freer movement of trade, the harmonisation of technical standards, a free internal market in financial services and such matters as my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry digressed on

regarding insurance. With regard to steel quotas, I understand that an extremely good deal was reached before Christmas.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Does my hon. Friend agree that—*[Interruption]* It is only a matter of time before I move up a little. Does my hon. Friend agree that there would be a better movement of goods and services in Europe if all countries obeyed the same rules? Does he agree that we should take a robust stance on the renewal of the multi-fibre arrangement? As it is so important for employment in the European Community, does he not agree that the Community, including the United Kingdom, is likely to be happy to work together in greater co-operation in that regard?

Mr. Clark: There is a lot in what my hon. Friend says, but the mandate for negotiating the MFA has been agreed on the basis of unanimity. There was nothing particularly contentious in that regard, but that could have been traded off. I agree that several barriers remain, especially in financial services and insurance. It is in the interests of all member states, including the United Kingdom, that they should be removed as quickly as possible.

Mr. Norman Atkinson: Does the Minister recall describing as inconsistent nonsense the origin of the report that will be before him when he takes the chair of the committee that is to meet shortly? What will his feelings be when that item comes up?

Mr. Clark: I do not recall that phrase, but I should like to pay tribute to the right hon. and hon. Members, who have been very merciful in not reminding me of some of the more intemperate comments that I made before becoming a Minister.

Electronics Industry

14. **Mr. Kenneth Carlisle** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what financial assistance the Government are providing to the electronics industry for capital investment and product development in the current financial year.

Mr. Butcher: The Department of Trade and Industry's support for research, development and production in the United Kingdom electronics industry during the financial year to date is about £130 million.

Mr. Carlisle: Does my hon. Friend agree that we have the balance right? Is he aware that it is rumoured that some £500 million of support is being asked for for the development of the wing of the new European airbus, but that the electronics industry, which is vital to a far wider range of businesses, is lagging behind? Will he consider a spread of support to industries in technology so that we can be certain to be at the forefront of the electronics industry?

Mr. Butcher: There are two separate heads of account for examining launch aid for projects in the aerospace industry, and the support for innovation account is the most relevant to this question. I am content that we have the balance right in terms of DTI spend when we bear in mind that support for innovation was running at roughly £90 million in 1979 and that it is running at roughly £230 million now.

Mr. Dalyell: How do the Government think that the British electronics industry will benefit from the American strategic defence initiative research? Before my Consolidated Fund Bill debate at 2.30 on Friday morning, may we know from the DTI whether it was consulted about the visit from the United States of Mr. Clarence Robinson?

Mr. Butcher: On the latter part of the hon. Gentleman's question, I refer him to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence gave yesterday in the House. As for SDI, there are enabling technologies, which it is right that we should be involved in. The hon. Gentleman will know of one technology which is close to his area of interest at Heriot-Watt university—light-powered computers. As this is leading edge developmental work, it is right that we should consider the options available to us.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels: Is my hon. Friend aware that both of the electronics companies in my constituency welcome any subsidy, but it is not helpful to them if business rates are now to rise by 80 per cent.? Is there any way in which the subsidies can be reconsidered and pressure put on local authorities to stop slamming the businesses that are providing jobs in the electronics industry in Leicester?

Mr. Butcher: Local authorities which argue that they want a boost in new technologies should give companies a welcome if it is inward investment, or support them on the ground by doing their best, in the interests of job creation and preservation, to keep rate increases down to the absolute minimum.

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: Is the Minister aware that he is appallingly complacent about the level of Government support for the microelectronics support industry? Is he further aware that since 1981 our level of support has increased only very marginally and that we now have a situation in which France is spending five times as much and Germany nearly twice as much as we are by way of Government support for the microelectronics industry? Does he not find this situation, in which we have a large and growing deficit on information technology, very alarming?

Mr. Butcher: The British information technology industry has a number of key strengths, which this Government are anxious to support. Regarding the level of support, we have not been tardy in coming forward with these programmes. It is significant that this is the first Administration to have created the post of Minister for Information Technology. It is this Administration who have shifted their support towards the new technologies, not only in proportionate terms, but in cash terms.

Leyland Vehicles Ltd.

16. **Mr. Robert Atkins** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the current position of Leyland Vehicles Ltd.

Mr. Channon: As I told the House on 5 March, proposals relating to Leyland Trucks and to Land Rover, Range Rover and Freight Rover are being appraised by the BL board. Discussions in relation to Leyland Bus are taking place over a slightly different time scale from those concerning the other Land Rover-Leyland businesses.

Mr. Atkins: My right hon. Friend will be aware, because I have written to him, that there is some concern about property of a community nature rather than of an

industrial or manufacturing nature in the town of Leyland, which is owned jointly by Leyland Bus and Leyland Trucks. Will he recognise that this community property plays a very great part in the community and that if it is not looked at carefully in the course of these negotiations this would generate hostility to any deal, which would be a pity? Will he look at this as a matter of urgency?

Mr. Channon: I shall ensure that this is looked at. It is primarily a matter for discussion by British Leyland with the interested parties, but I take careful note of what my hon. Friend says and will ensure that the matter is carefully studied.

Mr. Willie W. Hamilton: Does the Minister recall that before Westland was taken over by the Americans the Prime Minister and other Ministers repeatedly said that the workers' wishes must be respected? Can he give the same assurance in respect of the future of Land Rover, that before any irrevocable decision is taken there will be a secret ballot of those workers?

Mr. Channon: What the hon. Gentleman is saying about Westland is not exactly accurate, and I think that is within the recollection of the House. Of course the companies concerned are keeping the work force closely in touch, and I hope that all the usual prcedures will be followed.

Mr. Roger King: Will my right hon. Friend, in his negotiations with whatever interested parties there are for parts of the Leyland empire, pay particularly close attention to the future of an inner city company which is operating at a profit and providing 2,000 jobs for the local community? I refer to Freight Rover, at Washwood Heath in Birmingham. We place a great deal of emphasis on inner city developments and the creation of new businesses. We must ensure that we hang on to what we have and is trading profitably.

Mr. Channon: I know of my hon. Friend's very deep concern on that point. That is something that we shall naturally be considering.

Mr. Sheerman: Was the Secretary of State consulted by the chairman of the Conservative party before he made his extraordinary statements to Jonathan Dimbleby on the weekend television programme and compared the possible Leyland buy-out by American interests with the position of the tractor industry in Britain, which he said was 100 per cent. owned by Americans and no one cared?

Mr. Channon: I am in constant touch with my right hon. Friend and will draw the hon. Member's remarks to his attention.

Mr. Grylls: Will my right hon. Friend give an assurance that the merchant bankers representing Her Majesty's Government in this proposed deal are not restricting the amount of information coming from the team representing the management buy-out for Land Rover that is made available to the House, which could be very serious? Will he do his best to make sure that no such restrictions are placed on the representatives of the buy-out team?

Mr. Channon: I am assured by my advisers that that is not the case. However, in view of my hon. Friend's concern I shall have the matter re-examined.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: May I have an assurance that Mr. Graham Day, the new chairman of BL, who is also a non-executive director of Lairds, will not be involved when the decision is taken whether Lairds should be allowed to take over Leyland Bus?

Mr. Cannon: As I think the hon. Gentleman knows, the time scale for Leyland Bus is different from that for the other parts of Land Rover-Leyland. I am trying to proceed with that with reasonable expedition——

Mr. Campbell-Savours: May I have an answer to my question?

Mr. Channon: If I am allowed to answer the question, I did say to the House the other day that Mr. Day will take over as chairman when these deals have been concluded.

Mr. Bowen Wells: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that in the consideration of Leyland's future he will not deviate, in spite of the pressure brought to bear on him from xenophobic sources, from his determination to ensure that future commercial health and the jobs involved in Leyland are put at the forefront of his consideration?

Mr. Channon: We are determined that that should be the paramount consideration in the Government's mind. I am sure that that will be the paramount concern of all those who are involved in the negotiations.

Mr. John Smith: The Secretary of State will have seen from the latest figures that Leyland Trucks came top of the league sales in the year just ended. The prospects for the company are very good. Why should we sell the company to its American competitors?

Mr. Channon: The right hon. and learned Gentleman is seriously wrong in his forecast of the future of the truck industry in this country and in Europe. There is massive overcapacity and there are serious worries. The right hon. and learned Gentleman does no service to the work force or any of those involved in the industry by trying to minimise the difficulties or play them down.

European Community (Trade Deficit)

17. **Mr. Teddy Taylor** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will initiate an inquiry into the reasons for the level of the deficit in manufacturing trade with the EEC; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark: The causes of the deficit, which are many and complex, were examined in a report by the Select Committee on Trade and Industry in June 1984.

Mr. Taylor: As the current deficit, which is almost £9 million, is equivalent to the loss to Britain of almost 1 million jobs, does my hon. Friend not feel that this is a matter into which the Government should inquire ex,tremely carefully, especially in view of the effect that this could have on us when oil revenues diminish or cease? Will my hon. Friend be willing to examine the abuses of Britain's trade and the consequential loss of jobs that stem from the operation by Germany of the inner German trade,, agreement, which is desperately unfair to Britain and British jobs?

Mr. Clark: I know of my hon. Friend's special concern on matters of German trade, and I have written him a letter on various aspects of it. He is right in saying that there is a problem with inner German trade, and it is something to which we should be giving our attention. The outward processing aspect has already been considered in

the course of arranging the mandate for the renewal of the multi-fibre arrangement, and I think that he will be pleased with the results of that.

Mr. Kennedy: Does the Minister agree with the hon. Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor), and others who are critical of our balance of trade position with other member states of the European Community, that one of the major reasons for our unfavourable position is the cut of nearly 20 per cent. in manufacturing investment in Britain since the Government came to office?

Mr. Clark: I do not know whether a cut in manufacturing investment has anything to do with it. However, I am certain that the lack of competitiveness of British goods, which allows such easy penetration of our domestic markets in so many sectors by the products of other member states, is probably at the root of the problem.

Mr. Thurnham: Does my hon. Friend agree that, with the current level of exchange rates, the prospects of increasing our exports to the EEC are better than ever before?

Mr. Clark: Yes, I would hope so. However, it is dangerous to rely solely on the volatility of exchange rates. A lasting improvement will be made only when British goods and services are competitive with the best that Europe offers.

Manufactured Goods

18. **Mr. Canavan** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the latest balance of trade in manufactured goods.

Mr. Butcher: In the context of an overall surplus of £3 billion, there was a deficit on trade in manufactures of £3 billion in 1985.

Mr. Canavan: Will the Minister now tell us the whole truth? Over the past three years there has been an annual average manufacturing deficit of over £3 billion, the worst record in the history of British industry. As it is only North sea oil that is keeping this sinking Government temporarily afloat, is it not about time that the Minister's job description was changed to the "Minister for trade deficits which have arisen from the butchering of British industry"?

Mr. Butcher: The deficit in 1984 was £3·9 billion. I said as candidly as the question demanded, I should have thought, that the deficit in 1985 was £3 billion. The future trend in that set of figures will be addressed when my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer makes his projections in a few days on the future level of output. Within the figures there is another very encouraging figure, that is an 8 per cent. incease in the volume of exported manufactures in 1985.

Research and Development

19. **Mr. Soames** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has any plans to increase the research and development budget of his Department.

Mr. Channon: My Department's research and development budget is forecast to increase from £415 million in 1986-87 to £438 million in 1988-89.

Mr. Soames: I thank my right hon. Friend for that good news. Does he agree that if we are to compete seriously with the Japanese and the Germans we willll have to spend a great deal more money on research and development? May I suggest that for a start he plunders the Ministry of Defence, which has sums of money beyond the dreams of avarice to spend on research and development?

Mr. Channon: I note what my hon. Friend has said. A major increase is already planned in the proportion of my Department's budget for research and development, which will go from 27 per cent. in 1984-85 to 46 per cent. in 1988-89. With increasing company profitability, I hope that the private sector will match that increase.

Mr. Dalyell: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Does it arise out of questions?

Mr. Dalyell: Yes, Mr. Speaker. May I draw your attention to the increasing habit among Ministers of deflecting questions by referring to statements in *Hansard* and to previous answers which in no way cover the question which was asked? May I draw your attention to columns 793 and 799 in yesterday's *Hansard*? Answers by the Defence Secretary on the visit of a senior American official——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I do not think that arises out of questions today. The hon. Gentleman correctly drew attention to his good fortune in having drawn the subject for debate under the Consolidated Fund. I think that we should wait until then to hear the answer.

Mr. Dalyell: It is the habit of Ministers, by sleight of ministerial hand, to avoid answering legitimate questions. I asked for a very simple answer to a question——

Mr. Speaker: Order. What is the point of order for me in that? I cannot be responsible for what Ministers say or how they answer questions.

Mr. Dalyell: The point of order has nothing to do with the substance of the particular issue. A legitimate question was asked as to whether the Department knew about the visit——

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is not a matter for me.

Mr. Williams Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. My hon. Friend has a legitimate grievance——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I must say to the shadow Leader of the House that, although his hon. Friend may have a legitimate grievance, it is not a grievance with me. I cannot be responsible for answers which are given from the Front Bench.

Mr. Skinner Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. There is a matter in it for you. If Ministers fail to answer questions quickly and precisely by saying yes or no, and reel out long evasive statements which refer to other matters, they take up time which could be used by other people.

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is taking time out of an important Opposition day.

Indecent Displays (Newspapers)

3.33 pm

Ms. Clare Short (Birmingham, Ladywood): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make illegal the display of pictures of naked or partially naked women in sexually provocative poses in newspapers.

This is a simple but important measure. I stress that I should like the rule to apply to newspapers and only newspapers. If some men need or want such pictures, they should be free to buy appropriate magazines, but they have no right to foist them on the rest of us.

It is said that we are free not to buy such newspapers, but things are not as simple as that. I have received several letters from women whose husbands buy such newspapers. Those women object strongly to those newspapers and object to them being left lying round the house for their children to see.

I have also talked to teachers, including my brother. He asks children to bring newspapers to school for use in discussing current affairs or for making papier mâché, and so on. Both he and the children are embarrassed by the children's reaction to the page three pictures.

A precedent for my Bill can be found in the Indecent Displays (Control) Act, which provides that public hoardings cannot show such pictures, although they are not illegal when they appear in magazines or when they are seen in private. The same reasoning applies: we should not all be forcibly exposed to them. The argument and precedent are exactly the same.

During the debate on the private Member's Bill introduced by the hon. Member for Davyhulme (Mr. Churchill), I said that I intended to introduce a Bill such as this. Since then I have received about 150 letters from all over the country. About one third of them are from men —*[Interruption.]*— the vast majority of whom agree with me. Of course, I received some obscene letters from men; and Mr. Murdoch and those Conservative Members who keep shouting out now should know that such people support and defend page three.

The letters came predominantly from women, particularly young women. They stressed time and again that they did not consider themselves to be prudes but objected very strongly to such pictures. One letter came from a young woman who worked in an office. She was writing on behalf of quite a few young women. They considered themselves to be young and attractive, but every day they were subjected to men reading such newspapers in the office, and to them tittering and laughing and, making rude remarks such as, "Show us your page threes then". Such women feel strongly that this Bill should be enacted. *[Laughter]*. Conservative Members display their attitudes for everyone to see, and will be judged accordingly.

Many of the letters that I received came from mothers with small children who said that they felt that page three undermined their efforts to instil decent attitudes in their children. Many of them commented time and again on the front-page stories of nasty newspapers such as *The Sun* —*[Interruption.]* It is the nastiest. Such stories deplore some brutal rape or attack on a child. The reader then turns to page three to see the usual offering.

I agree with the women who think that there is some connection between the rising tide of sexual crime and page three. Obviously, that is unprovable, but the constant mass circulation of such pictures so that they are widely seen by children must influence sexual attitudes and the climate towards sexuality in our society. Those pictures portray women as objects of lust to be sniggered over and grabbed at, and do not portray sex as something that is tender and private.

When future generations read that in our day about 10 million newspapers carried such pictures every day to be left around and seen by children and by lots of women who did not want to see them, they will see those pictures as symbolic of our decadent society. That is why we should take action to make them illegal.

3.38 pm

Mr. Robert Adley (Christchurch) *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Does the hon. Gentleman seek to oppose the Bill?

Mr. Adley: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

The hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short) is a prominent supporter of women's rights and her speech was a titillating mixture of politics, prejudice and prurience. It is barely credible that she should come before the House today with such a proposal. Why is she proposing that only pictures of women should be outlawed? Should we not outlaw cheesecake pictures of men? The hon. Lady is clearly proposing to introduce a very sexist measure. Where are we supposed to draw the line?

Writing about her Bill in *The House Magazine*, the hon. Lady refers to

"partially naked women in sexually provocative poses in *newspapers*".

The italics are hers, I imagine. It is fascinating to consider who will decide whether a woman is or is not partially naked, and whether her pose is or is not sexually provocative.

The hon. Lady referred to *The Sun* and to Mr. Murdoch. I noticed that she did not refer—it happened by sheer chance, I am sure—to the *Daily Mirror*. To make sure that I did my job properly in opposing the Bill, I had a look at *The Sun* and the *Daily Mirror* today. I am not sure which of these newspapers would fall foul of the hon. Lady's strictures. Perhaps it is only newspapers owned by Australians, or perhaps by ex-Labour Members of Parliament who are now capitalists.

The hon. Lady does less than justice to her fellow citizens. She would have our newspapers resembling *Pravda*. That would be more in keeping with some of her own political views. Where do we go from here? When the hon. Lady has dealt with the newspapers and expunged from them everything that she finds objectionable, perhaps she and Mr. Livingstone will go round the parks of London doing away with all the statues that she thinks might deprave people. There are few pleasures left to us today. One that I enjoy is sitting in an underground train, watching the faces of the people who are pretending not to be looking at page three of the newspapers. If the hon. Lady has her way, we will be deprived of that pleasure.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): I believe that my hon. Friend should treat this matter seriously, if only because I imagine that neither of us has ever seen the Press Gallery so full.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Member must not interrupt. He knows perfectly well that there can be no

interruptions of the debate on a ten-minute Bill, and that, in any case, he must not refer to those who are not in the Chamber.

Mr. Marlow: I apologise profusely, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Adley: The trouble with the hon. Lady, and those who think like she does, is that she tends to mix only with those who share her views. To suggest seriously, as she does, that these pictures are offensive to the overwhelming majority of women is inaccurate. I suggest that they are offensive to the overwhelming majority of those with whom the hon. Lady is in touch, which is not the same thing at all.

This is a ridiculous proposal. I propose to divide the House so that every Opposition Member can stand up and be counted. I suggest that, of all the measures that have been proposed to the House during this Session, this Bill deserves the booby prize.

Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No. 15 (Motions for leave to bring in Bills and nomination of Select Committees at commencement of public business):

The House divided: Ayes 97, Noes 56.

Division No. 98] **[3.43 pm**

AYES

Alton, David
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Blair, Anthony
Boyes, Roland
Brown, R. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne N)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Caborn, Richard
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Clarke, Thomas
Clay, Robert
Clelland, David Gordon
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Corbett, Robin
Cox, Thomas *(Tooting)*
Craigen, J. M.
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Dalyell, Tam
Deakins, Eric
Dubs, Alfred
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eastham, Ken
Edwards, Bob *(W'h'mpt'n SE)*
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Fisher, Mark
Foster, Derek
Freud, Clement
Godman, Dr Norman
Gould, Bryan
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Haynes, Frank
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart *(Vauxhall)*
Home Robertson, John
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Kennedy, Charles
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamond, James
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McCurley, Mrs Anna
McTaggart, Robert
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Maxton, John
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meadowcroft, Michael
Michie, William
Mikardo, Ian
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Nellist, David
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Pavitt, Laurie
Pike, Peter
Porter, Barry
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Rogers, Allan
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*
Sedgemore, Brian
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Short, Mrs R. *(W'hampt'n NE)*
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Cyril *(Rochdale)*
Spearing, Nigel
Squire, Robin
Steel, Rt Hon David
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Wallace, James
Wareing, Robert
Weetch, Ken
Welsh, Michael
Wigley, Dafydd
Wilson, Gordon
Winnick, David
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Miss Jo Richardson and
Mr. Kevin McNamara.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Atkinson, David *(B'm'th E)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Best, Keith
Bevan, David Gilroy
Body, Sir Richard
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Bruinvels, Peter
Buck, Sir Antony
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S)*
Coombs, Simon
Dicks, Terry
Dover, Den
Dykes, Hugh
Emery, Sir Peter
Fairbairn, Nicholas
Faulds, Andrew
Fletcher, Alexander
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Fox, Marcus
Fry, Peter
Gardiner, George *(Reigate)*
Grylls, Michael
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Harris, David
Hayward, Robert
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(Herts W)*
Kellett-Bowman, Mrs Elaine
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lightbown, David
Lloyd, Ian *(Havant)*
McCrindle, Robert
MacKay, Andrew *(Berkshire)*
McQuarrie, Albert
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Nelson, Anthony
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steven
Ottaway, Richard
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Silvester, Fred
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Wiggin, Jerry

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Edwina Currie and
Mr. Greg Knight.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Ms. Clare Short, Ms. Jo Richardson, Miss Joan Maynard, Mrs. Ann Clwyd, Mrs. Anna McCurley, Mrs. Renée Short, Miss Betty Boothroyd, Dame Judith Hart, Mrs. Margaret Beckett and Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody.

INDECENT DISPLAYS (NEWSPAPERS)

Ms. Clare Short accordingly presented a Bill to make illegal the display of pictures of naked or partially naked women in sexually provocative poses in newspapers: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 18 April and to be printed. [Bill 104.]

Opposition Day

[10TH ALLOTTED DAY]

City of London

Mr. Speaker: I have selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

I draw the attention of the House to the fact that references to proceedings on a Bill in Standing Committee, particularly references attempting to deal with the content of the debate in the Committee are not in order. I draw hon. Members' attention to page 426 of "Erskine May".

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Does that mean that references to the Securities and Investments Board will not be in order? If so, will not that substantially inhibit the nature of the debate?

Mr. Speaker: I specifically do not wish to inhibit the nature of the debate, but I have to draw the attention of the House to the rules on these matters.

3.56 pm

Mr. Roy Hattersley (Birmingham, Sparkbrook): I beg to move,

That this House, deploring the increasing influence of the City over the Government and its policies, calls upon the Government to put aside considerations of political support and personal connection and to introduce a system of regulation of, and supervision for, the financial services which will provide an adequate response to the increase in City fraud, to introduce a stricter system of surveillance of monopolies and mergers, and to adopt economic policies which are to the benefit not of the City alone, but of the whole economy and which will therefore assist in the reduction of unemployment, the rehabilitation of manufacturing industry and the provision of an adequate alternative to diminishing oil revenues.

Today we debate the City against a background of continuing economic crisis. The fact that the existence of that crisis, the truth of the existence of that crisis, will be rejected by Conservative Members who speak underlines the gulf which divides the two sides of the House and the necessity for today's debate. Conservatives judge economic success by the *Financial Times* index. We judge it by different standards, not least the ability of our nation to provide jobs for all its people.

The facts of the economic crisis are that unemployment now stands at between 3·5 million and 4 million, manufacturing trade is in deficit and real interest rates are at record levels. Each of those individual catastrophes has been intensified by the Government's enthusiasm for economic policies which benefit the City but damage the rest of the economy. We have today a Government of the City for the City and, by far too large an extent, by the City.

The connection between the Government and the Tory Benches was on blatant display during the Second Reading of the Financial Services Bill when stockbrokers and underwriters from the Conservative Benches took it in turn to defend their vested interests and to argue against effective Government supervision. It is that close connection that makes a Tory Government certainly unwilling to tackle, and perhaps incapable of tackling, the City fraud crisis by instituting an effective system of regulation and supervision.

Yet rarely a week goes past without the discovery and exposure of some other malpractice and scandal. Indeed, only this morning our newest daily paper, *Today*, had on its front page an exclusive story about what is rightly described as the latest series of dirty tricks.

The normal defence for the City's behaviour and the Government's refusal to act appropriately is the assertion that a majority of City firms is honest. Of course, I accept that, but the honest and honourable majority is not sufficiently determined to expose and act against the criminal minority. I give a current example. Ten days ago, I wrote an article in *The Observer* which spoke of stock exchange fraud. Early this week, I received a letter from Sir Nicholas Goodison, the chairman of the stock exchange, who asked me—I think it was intended to be a challenge—what I meant by stock exchange fraud and what examples I could give him.

I cannot believe that Sir Nicholas does not know the facts of insider dealing, as confirmed on 11 December by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry in an answer given in another place. He confirmed that there were 25 prima facie cases of insider dealing and that 80 cases were referred to the Department of Trade and Industry under section 2 of the Companies Act, and he expressed anxiety about the difficulty of securing convictions in such cases. Yet Sir Nicholas challenges me to explain what I am talking about. I can only assume that Sir Nicholas's definition of fraud is different from mine and different from that of most people outside the City.

Some people in the stock exchange take a stronger and clearer view on these matters than does the chairman. Michael Feltham of the stock exchange finance department wrote in the *Financial Times* earlier this week:

"We can track down the small insider deals . . . but the big fish go offshore."

They go offshore because of inadequate supervision and because too many people in the City who may be honest are not prepared to expose the dishonesty among them. Indeed, the City remains a charmed and closed circle wedded to the misplaced loyalty of a gentleman's club, although the City is clearly no longer the exclusive preserve of gentleman.

The City is incapable of regulating its affairs. Let us consider the alternatives to that, in each area, which are offered by the Government. The Government's remedy for bank fraud is a board of supervision which is almost a sub-committee of the Bank of England. But the Bank of England, especially under its present Governor, is wholly incapable of performing that task, because the Bank of England is not the agent of Government in the City, but the voice of the City in Government. What is more, the new supervisory agency—the Bank of England—was blamed by the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the going was rough and he needed something to hide behind. It was made a scapegoat for compounding the Johnson Matthey affair, yet now the bank must make sure that errors for which it was partly responsible do not happen again.

As a remedy for the City's general malpractices, we are offered the prospect of legislation based on the Gower commission's recommendations. Yet the Government know that those recommendations were made before deregulation increased potential rewards, potential risks and, therefore, the temptation to defraud. As a remedy for Lloyd's fraud, we were offered two conflicting

assurances. The first was that the Lloyd's Act 1982 is sufficient; the second is that a new inquiry will examine whether the Lloyd's Act 1982 is sufficient.

I ask the Chief Secretary two specific questions, although in the light of previous behaviour whether anyone will believe his answer is open to question. What does he think about, in many cases, the absence and, in all cases, the delay and reluctance to mount prosecutions against City frauds? Secondly, how would he react if I were to suggest that we abandoned any hope of pursuing social security frauds, most of which are minute compared with the rewards obtained from City malpractices?

All that being said, and my hopes of an honest answer being optimistically renewed, I must tell the Chief Secretary that the City crime wave is not the most important or most urgent issue that we should debate. The crime wave is only one aspect of a larger problem; the City's view of itself as an independent power that is too big, too powerful, too rich and too international to be supervised by the Government, the Government's craven acceptance of the view that the City can act independently and the Government's agreement that the City can develop a life of its own detached from the rest of the economy.

The United Kingdom is the only country that talks about a separate institution — the City — as though it were not part of the rest of the world, the rest of the economy and the other prospects and hopes for the country. With the City's international connections, only in Great Britain is its interests not so much different from the interests of manufacturing economy, but often diametrically opposed to them. Indeed, as the circumstances and facts of the past seven years prove, as the real economy of investment, output, manufacturing, exports and jobs declines, the City can benefit from that, improve its position, increase its rewards and extend its influence.

The Government's pandering to the City's wishes has meant that, for the past six years, our economic policy has benefited financial services but worked directly against the interest of manufacture, employment and visible trade. The City has benefited from high interest rates, uncompetitive exchange rate and the abolition of exchange control; it has benefited, in part scandalously, from the sale of national assets.

The City has made vast sums from the privatisation programme, and again I ask the Chief Secretary some specific questions. Much of the money—certainly some of it—was made improperly. First, the City prices the assets, or, to be more specific, it underprices the assets. It is estimated that the City underpriced the assets sold by the Government by about £3 billion. Had the Government obtained the proper price, it would have been enough to fund the entire programme of jobs for the long-term unemployed that was recommended to the House by the Select Committee on Employment.

It is worth noting that the Government, composed of City experts—or at least financial journalists—let the City get away with it. I hope that the Chief Secretary will tell us whether incompetence or malice allowed the Government to sacrifice £3 billion to City corruption. It was one or the other. One way or another, the Government lost £3 billion of taxpayers' money and, as the afternoon goes on, the Chief Secretary must choose which it was.

Having underpriced the assets, the City then bought many of them at the artificially low price. Indeed, I understand — I trust that the Chief Secretary will comment on it — that some City institutions bought assets in excess of the amount which they were officially allocated. As well as making that killing on the underpriced assets, the City also charged the Government an unwarranted underwriters' risk premium, when it knew that there was no risk. The City knew that the stock would be sold and that the price was too low, yet it chose to charge the Government a commission which it knew was unjustifiable. Some of the questions that I would have wished to ask this afternooon have, as a result of recent prosecutions mounted and continued this week, become subject to the sub judice rule, but I can at least ask the Chief Secretary this. As it is beyond dispute that many of the assets sold by the Government have been scandalously undervalued——

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): Rubbish.

Mr. Hattersley: Rubbish? We shall hear the Chief Secretary defend that in a minute. Many of the assets sold by this Government have been scandalously undervalued——

Mr. Smith: What about the last issue of Cable and Wireless shares, which was exactly right?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ernest Armstrong): Order. If the hon. Gentleman wishes to intervene, he knows that there is a proper way to do so.

Mr. Hattersley: As it is generally accepted by all those without bias or a vested interest in financial concerns—those who have are showing their spots and colours vividly and dramatically this afternoon—that what I have said is true, I ask the Chief Secretary how he proposes to avoid that scandal in the future, or is he so anxious for a quick sale of public assets to pad the Budget and make future tax cuts possible that he is prepared to sell off national assets knowing that the city is improperly and unscrupulously lining its pockets?

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): My right hon. Friend was challenged from a sedentary position by the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith). I hope that my right hon. Friend will listen to what the hon. Gentleman is saying. Does my right hon. Friend realise that the hon. Gentleman is parliamentary consultant to the National Association of Security Dealers and Investment Managers, and to the County bank, and obviously has a strong interest in this debate and knows what he is talking about?

Mr. Hattersley: I think that the interesting nature of the hon. Gentleman's remarks was not so much his authority, which I do not doubt, but the passion with which he defended the vested interest with which he is concerned.

I concede that, not surprisingly during the past seven years, the City has done very well by its own standards. City salaries have risen astronomically. I know that the Chief Secretary is an expert in these matters. Will he give us his judgment about City salaries and about the society in which we remove the wages council protection from the young but allow City institutions to pay men of 30, 35 or 40 not only £50,000 or £60,000 a year, but a £250,000 signing-on fee—a new phrase in the English language that goes with hello, and which the Chief Secretary knows perfectly well is common in the City? Will he comment not only on the morality and propriety of that, but on how he thinks that it affects the Government's drive for lower wages for those at the lower end of the income scale?

[Mr. Hattersley]

The City has done well, its salaries have risen vastly and City employment has risen while employment in the rest of the economy has slumped. We have to understand — and hon. Members who defend the City have to accept — that the City has not and cannot make up for the matching and related collapse in manufacturing industry. The City cannot fill the gap that will be left in our balance of payments when the oil begins to run out. The British Invisible Exports Council was explicit on this point. It says that it does not see the growth of services

"as being to a major extent a substitute for decline in general industrial activity."

In the words of the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath),

"the service industries have to have something to service."

In the economy in general under this City-oriented Government, it has been seven years of decline, in part because the City has hopelessly failed to provide investment in export promotions, in job creation and in the areas where manufacturing industry might grow and where new jobs might be found.

There are three sectors of particular concern. One is small firms, particularly those that need, and should be provided with, loans and investment at the soft rates common among our more successful creditors. Secondly, there is an important need for but failure in long-term investment—the failure of the City to take a long-term view of these things. Thirdly, there is a desperate need for the City, when it is examining industry, to make a more sensible evaluation of the long-term risks.

One of the reasons why long-term risk evaluation is so often inadequate is that the City does not know about manufacturing industries, is not interested in them and is not concerned in them. In our more successful competitors in the OECD and EEC there are banks that choose to work as part of industry alongside industry and understanding its problems. Here in Britain, the City is different, superior, exclusive and industrially ignorant. However, when charged with failure to provide an adequate investment, the City always gives the same circular, self-righteous, self-serving defence. It is that there is plenty available for suitable investment. I see the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) utter the words as I say them. That is his view, but not that of British industry.

I quote from Sir Terence Beckett, not usually on the side of Labour party economic policy, who spoke to the House of Lords Select Committee about:

"the widespread comments I get from industry, particularly small and medium sized companies who have difficulty in getting finance from banks".

The British Chamber of Commerce was equally conclusive. It said:

"Every bank will tell you that there is money available in all directions — but they have to or feel obliged to put certain criteria on the lending which are somewhat different from our overseas competitors".

The hon. Member for Beaconsfield may laugh at the idea of the British Chamber of Commerce complaining about the absence of investment, but he is laughing about the failure of the Government and the institutions that they support to help small firms to develop and grow.

In any case, what does money available for suitable projects mean in practice? I give the House a definition offered to me by a west midlands clothing company whose highly successful expansion, principally into the export market, was made possible only because of the help that it received from the West Midlands enterprise board. The chairman of that company, who had touted about the City looking for new investment, said;

"If I had wanted to build a casino in Mayfair they would have pressed £5 notes into my hand. But because I wanted to make things and export things, they did not want to know."

They want to know about some things—the merger boom, for example, which occurs under our wholly inadequate competition policy. The City wants to finance takeovers, which have nothing to do with efficiency, output or employment, because this is a sector of easy pickings. It is work with which the real economy has no connection, work that is unproductive in terms of investment, output and jobs.

What is more — and the tragedy and mistake is accentuated by the takeover boom—the stock exchange system as a whole concentrates far too much of its financial attention on short-term profits. Prices are determined by the most recent returns, and so are takeover profits. Now, with more and more successful predators stalking the market, company after company increasingly occupies its time in erecting protection from suddenly being swallowed up. I offer in evidence the comments made in an article in the *Bank of England Quarterly* by David Walker, the bank's executive director. He talked about takeover mania

"re-inforcing in many boards the disposition to be cautious about innovation expenditure which reduces profit in the short term."

The country needs the will to innovate and a willingness to make judgments on the long-term not the short-term profits. Yet the takeover mania, the inadequacies of present competition policy, buttressed by the behaviour of the City, has concentrated industry's mind more and more on the next share price, on the next quarterly profit and on the prospects of being swallowed up while the needs of the real economy are investment growth and jobs. Those needs are forgotten.

Perhaps most important of all, for the City to say that its investment programmes, investment potential and the investment it makes available to manufacturing industry are meeting the economy's needs is for the City complacently to accept an economy in which manufacture collapses, in which there is an incipient balance of payments crisis which will break over us when the oil runs out and in which there are permanently 3 million or 4 million men and women unemployed. That may be good enough for the City, with its vast salaries, its great power and its special relationship with the Government. It is not good enough for the Opposition, and I do not believe that it is good enough for the people of this country.

4.22 pm

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. John MacGregor): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

"recognises the continuing and increasing contribution being made by the financial services industry in the United Kingdom to wealth creation and employment; and welcomes the Government's measures to remove obstacles to the efficient operation of the market in financial services, to improve the regulatory framework in the whole financial services sector and to deter and punish fraud.".

The right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) began by speaking about the damage caused by fraud and other dishonest practices in the City. I agree completely with him. Fraud is morally wrong and wholly unjustifiable. It besmirches the good reputation of

the City, inflicts serious damage on honest practitioners and frightens investors. It is quite unacceptable that fraudsters can—as it sometimes seems—escape justice with the proceeds of their crimes. The Government have been and are determined to ensure that the sternest action possible is taken against fraudsters wherever their guilt can be proved.

However, I part company from the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook on this point. He waxed indignant about fraud, and the Government share that indignation. However, we have matched our indignation with action over a number of years, long before Opposition Members chose to make this a headline-hunting issue. Let me first remind the House of the Government's programme for dealing with cases of serious financial fraud.

On 8 November 1983—long before the hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore) started to take such a close interest in this subject—the Lord Chancellor and the then Home Secretary announced the establishment of the Roskill committee to investigate a range of problems associated with the detection, investigation and prosecution of serious financial fraud. That was a fundamental inquiry, basic to this vital issue of financial fraud, and it has led to wide-ranging and radical recommendations which are likely to have much greater long-term effects than anything else I have seen canvassed.

On 14 January this year, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary welcomed that report. The committee made 112 recommendations designed to make the investigation of fraud more effective, and to remove some of the present obstacles to bringing complex financial fraud cases to court and to a successful conclusion. The debate on the report on 13 February in the House brought some flavour of this complexity which makes big financial fraud so much harder to tackle than the Opposition sometimes pretend. I make no secret of my own leaning towards agreement with Lord Roskill's main recommendations, although I note that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has said that he is consulting on the matter.

I noted that the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) was ready to reject one of Roskill's major proposals — trial by assessors — without a moment's thought. It is of course important to bear constantly in mind that, although it is Lord Roskill's recommendation about trial by jury that has attracted most attention, his committee's report contains a mass of detailed proposals which would dramatically improve the chances of bringing fraudsters to book. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is now urgently considering with colleagues the Roskill recommendations on the preparation and conduct of fraud trials. The Government will return to the House soon with firm legislative proposals.

In July 1984, again well before the Opposition were prompted by the hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch to take an interest in fraud, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced the establishment from 1 January 1985 of the fraud investigation group. That followed months of planning. As my right hon. Friend said at that time in a speech to the Bow group:

"The investing public needs to be assured that wrongdoers and fraudsters will be speedily and effectively brought to book under the law".

Again, that is an example of the Government taking a prompt initiative.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): The Minister has said, over and over again, that the Government are doing something about fraud. Why is it, then, that Peter Cameron-Webb and Peter Dixon are in the United States? Peter Dixon has been served with a writ in connection with a civil action regarding Lloyd's and Lloyd's says that these two people have got away with £39 million. If a civil action writ can be served, why has the fraud squad, which the Government controlled so effectively during the miners' strike and at other times, not been able to put its hands on these people? We have extradition agreements with the United States, so why have not the Government done anything about that?

Mr. MacGregor: As the hon. Gentleman knows, prosecution decisions rest with the Director of Public Prosecutions and with the Attorney-General. They do not rest with the Government. My right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General and my hon. and learned Friend the Solicitor-General have explained the difficulties on a number of occasions. I share the hon. Gentleman's frustration at the difficulties which have been encountered. The various initiatives, including the follow-up of the Roskill report, will make a major advance in enabling us to deal with such problems.

The fraud investigation group is a specialist group supplementing extensive fraud investigation work in police forces all over the country. Its resouces have already been increased during its first year of operation. On 19 December last year my hon. and learned Friend the Solicitor-General told the House that nine professional officers were to be added to the 15 now employed by the Director of Public Prosecutions — a 60 per cent. increase.

Mr. Hattersley: I think that the figure is greater than that, as there were 21 officers before. Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that, while there are 50 officers in the fraud group and while there has been a 60 per cent. increase, there are in the Department of Health and Social Security 176 senior officers pursuing 30 frauds in that Department?

Mr. MacGregor: I said that there had been a 60 per cent. increase, and that is a substantial figure. There was a similar number of officers under the Labour Government. The point is that we are dealing with serious financial fraud cases and there are fewer of these than of any other offences. It is important that we should ensure that there is no shortage of resources to follow up that kind of fraud work. That is why there has been a corresponding increase in support staff.

Nor is fraud solely tackled by the police and the DPP. I shall here discuss the question about relevant numbers of resources raised by the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook. Earlier this year, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry announced an increase of nearly 200 in the investigative staff of his Department. We are not only considering how the law and investigative and enforcement processes can be strengthened; we are ensuring that the extra resources necessary are provided.

One of Lord Roskill's more far-reaching recommendations was that exceptional cases of serious financial fraud —which is what the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook was focusing on this afternoon——

Mr. John Smith (Monklands, East): My right hon. Friend spoke about all frauds.

Mr. MacGregor: But he concentrated on serious financial fraud. Lord Roskill said that these could be handled far more effectively if the resources of the various agencies concerned — the police, the DPP, the companies inspectorate of the Department of Trade and Industry and the revenue departments—were to combine to form one unit, and he suggested that the Government should examine that possibility. I was immediately charged with that task, and I am now urgently undertaking a study in depth with a view to making firm recommendations as soon as possible.

Dealing effectively with fraud is, of course, of crucial importance. That is why I put it first. But we must keep it in context. We are dealing with only a tiny minority of City practitioners. It is, of course, the disproportionate publicity they get and the damage they do that make it so vital to deal with fraud. I want to turn now, therefore, to the more general and regulatory City matters to which the motion refers.

Great changes are taking place in the financial markets. Technological changes are changing businesses beyond recognition. They have made long-established practices, and the institutional machinery to control them, rapidly outdated. They have greatly affected the speed and manner of transactions. They have internationalised the markets even more than hitherto. Of course, they bring the risk of computer and telecommunications fraud, a subject on which the Bank of England issued guidance last year to the managers of financial institutions.

Changes are taking place in the institutions. The new financial conglomerates are establishing themselves in all the major financial centres of the world, not just this one. Changes are taking place in the markets themselves, the instruments that are traded and the ways in which they are bought and sold.

The Government are responding to these changes with a three-pronged strategy.

Mr. Hattersley: How many prongs?

Mr. MacGregor: Three, and they are all vital. First, they have removed a raft of distortions from the markets to enable London to attract a major share of the increasing world trade in financial services.

Mrs. Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Are not the actions of the Opposition astonishing? If they are laughing so much, clearly they are not taking their motion seriously.

Mr. MacGregor: I have been rather surprised at some of the Opposition's points. I agree with my hon. Friend.

We have swept away controls and restrictions through tax changes, through medium-term monetary policies and by opening the door to the stock exchange's own reforms. Perhaps most important of all, we have swept away exchange controls. This has attracted business back to London, and brought new life to Britain's financial markets.

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. MacGregor: I apologise to the hon. Gentleman for not giving way, but this is a short debate.

Let there be no doubt that in these important, swiftly moving, competitive international markets the alternative for the City would not have been an imperceptible lapse into shabby gentility. This is the important point of the first set of changes. There are no comfortable halfway houses. The penalty for failing to compete, with all these changes around the world, would have been swift and sure, and the consequences would have been loss of national income, loss of substantial invisible earnings and loss of international status.

Secondly, the Government are setting in place an effective and comprehensive regulatory system. The Financial Services Bill—I shall skate quickly over this matter—which is the most comprehensive overhaul of investor protection for 40 years, and the Building Societies Bill are before the House. As I have already mentioned, we published a White Paper on banking supervision in December and intend to introduce banking supervision legislation at the earliest opportunity.

In so acting we have drawn lessons from the Johnson Matthey affair and are taking the action needed to strengthen banking supervision promptly. In this the Government have acted quickly and effectively to deal with the lessons for those aspects of banking supervision which are the Government's responsibility. Between December 1984 and June 1985 a full review was carried out of the procedures of banking supervision and the legislative framework in which it was conducted. The review committee's report was published in June as a basis for consultation, and a White Paper on banking supervision was published last December outlining our plans for early legislation.

It is clear from the work of the review committee, and from the JMB case, that there are fundamental shortcomings in the Banking Act which the Labour Government introducted in 1979. That Act created a two-tier system of recognised banks and licensed deposit takers which, as my hon. Friend the present Economic Secretary to the Treasury warned at the time, was bound to lead to problems. One of the consequences was that different standards of supervision were applied to the two categories.

It is not an offence under the 1979 Act for the management of a bank like JMB to have provided incorrect and misleading information to the supervisor. These are among the matters which we propose to remedy in the new legislation. I have no doubt that the new and more comprehensive system of supervision which this will establish will make an important contribution to maintaining the reputation of our banking system and will enable the supervisor to deal with problem cases more readily.

It is not the prime objective of this comprehensive regulatory framework to tackle fraud. But a number of provisions, common to all three pieces of legislation, will make the City a tough environment for fraudsters: businesses will have to be more open with their investors; auditors will be given new powers and responsibilities; and supervisors will work closely together, and co-operate more with their overseas equivalents.

The new legislative framework will be flexible enough to deal with innovation, to avoid overlapping and to close loopholes. It will be backed up by the new supervisory arrangements for financial conglomerates, announced on 21 January by the Under-Secretary of State with responsibility for corporate and consumer affairs—my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkstone and Hythe (Mr. Howard).

This brings me to the third prong of the Government's strategy for financial services. I shall refer to it briefly as I have touched on it already. I refer, of course, to an effective system for the detection, investigation and prosecution of fraud. I have already mentioned much of what the Government are doing in this area. For good measure the forthcoming criminal justice Bill will make it far harder for fraudsters to enjoy the proceeds of their crimes. Not only will proposed changes to the rules about admissible evidence and criminal procedures help to bring criminals to book, but maximum sentences for corruption offences, such as bribery, will be extended to seven years from two at present and we are considering whether to take powers to seize assets derived from very serious fraud.

It took a Labour Government five years from the onset of the secondary banking crisis and under pressure from the European Community to produce the Banking Act in 1979, which is now recognised to be "totally inadequate", in the words of the hon. Member for Thurrock (Dr. McDonald). It is directly contrary to the facts and to the Government's record that the Opposition should criticise the Government on grounds of inaction, tardiness or concealment. That is why I totally reject the allegation by the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook that the Government have not been acting vigorously to deal with all the aspects of fraud that he raised.

The right hon. Member for Sparkbrook has made much of the charge that the City has been failing the nation, particularly in the context of starving industry of funds to expand and invest. He has failed to make his charge stick, and the recent record and present facts belie it. I do not see anything in current Labour party proposals which would improve the range of instruments available to the borrower or help the investor — indeed, quite the reverse.

This constant accusation of the City's failure to provide funds for investment led the last Labour Government to set up a wide-ranging inquiry under the noble Lord, Lord Wilson. They hoped that it would identify this famous financing gap, and they failed to find it. True, they argued that there was a lack of provision of outside equity for the small company. At the time the committee was sitting, I happened to agree with its finding, but it was because of the lack of fiscal and other frameworks to encourage investors to provide it, whether institutional or individual.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. MacGregor: I am sorry; I shall not give way, as this is a short debate.

We have now provided that framework — with great success, as I shall show. True, Lord Wilson's committee queried whether very small businesses, especially those starting up, were held back through lack of bank finance because they did not have a track record. We provided — indeed, I introduced to the House — the loan guarantee scheme to establish the extent to which there was a problem, to provide a new mechanism to help to overcome it and, through it, to encourage the banks to do more.

Mr. Bryan Gould (Dagenham): What is the failure rate?

Mr. MacGregor: That is an interesting question. If the hon. Gentleman thinks that the failure rate is too high, it suggests that in many cases the banks were probably right not to lend. *[Interruption.]* That has not been the case. I believe that the loan guarantee scheme has helped many small businesses and people starting up to get going.

Mr. Dalyell: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. MacGregor: I am sorry; I shall not give way.

But beyond these small and particular areas, the Wilson committee failed to substantiate the charge of a great financial gap which required massive new state mechanisms. It is worth noting in passing that the committee did substantiate — I quote from the Wilson report —

"the pervasive effects" —

I hope that the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook will listen to this ——

Mr. Hattersley: Will the right hon. Gentleman tell us what the real interest rate was when the Wilson committee announced that there were no problems and what the real interest rate is now?

Mr. MacGregor: The right hon. Gentleman is drawing attention to the Government's tremendous success in getting inflation down. That was precisely the point I was making when I was interrupted.

Mr. Hattersley: Can the right hon. Gentleman tell us what the real interest rate was when the Wilson committee said that there was no problem and what the real interest rate is now?

Mr. MacGregor: I cannot remember offhand — I am always honest in answering questions — but the real interest rate would have been lower at that time. That is not the point. The Wilson committee drew particular attention to

"the pervasive effects on the financial system and on real investment of high and fluctuating rates of inflation."

It is worth noting the reference to the pervasive effects of high inflation on real investment.

We have, of course, tackled that problem too. The fact is that our highly sophisticated and comprehensive network of financial institutions offers a broad, flexible, innovative and imaginative range of financing opportunities to British business.

Under this Government we have been rebuilding our overseas assets — even, to use the hackneyed phrase, for the time that North sea oil runs out. But it has not been at the expense of home-based British business and commerce. There has been no lack of supply of funds, whether equity or venture capital or bank lending, for any viable industrial proposal. The figures prove it. British industry has been investing as never before. Business investment in 1984 — the last full year available — was up 15 per cent. to an all-time high. Manufacturing investment was up 14·5 per cent. — an all-time high. If we look at the sources of finance — these are the answers to the right hon. Gentleman's charges — we see that last year over £5 billion of new capital — more than ever before and certainly much more than in any year of Labour government — was raised through the stock exchange for British companies. That excludes the privatisation issues. That is the long-term investment of which the right hon. Gentleman has spoken. Another £157 million was raised through the unlisted securities market. Six years ago that market did not exist. Now some 300 companies are quoted, with a total market capitalisation of more than £3 billion.

[Mr. MacGregor]

The right hon. Gentleman referred to small firms. There has been a dramatic growth, too, in the venture capital market. In 1979, venture capital crucial to the small and dynamic entrepreneur, especially in the expansion phase, was in the doldrums. There were only 20 venture capital funds, which invested less than £10 million between them. Encouraged by the climate set by the Government, including fiscal reliefs, the gap has now been filled in entirely the right and appropriate way for the expanding business. Five years on from 1979, investment during 1984 totalled over £280 million, supporting almost 600 United Kingdom companies. Venture capital activity in the United Kingdom was two thirds of the total in the whole of the European Community. Indeed, as a proportion of GDP our venture capital industry last year was larger than that of the Americans.

I notice that the Liberal party's amendment refers to

"small businesses and local enterprise."

These figures prove that the changes we have introduced have produced the flow of funds precisely to help those types of business. It is a remarkable transformation and is a far better way of encouraging the growth of new and developing companies, hungry for capital funds, and of seeking out the winners than anything the right hon. Gentleman has sought to devise.

The right hon. Gentleman's sole proposal for a national investment bank reveals the Opposition's failure to comprehend that a national investment bank is precisely the wrong way to assist the financing of British industry. Their indifference and often outright opposition to the Government's programme of privatisation—which we saw displayed again this afternoon — the greatly increased range and take-up of direct share-ownership schemes, personal pension plans and so on show their immense underlying hostility to wider share ownership and financial independence for individuals. Similarly, they were at first opposed to the sale of council houses. Their constant emphasis on certain minority aspects of City operations reveals a neurosis about this very successful part of the British economy, and an anxiety always to diminish and denigrate the good, and exaggerate out of all proportion the blemishes.

It would have been much better if the right hon. Gentleman had today also emphasised the very substantial positive contribution which our financial sector, including the City, makes to our national life. The share of financial and business services in output was 13·2 per cent. in 1984 compared with 11·1 per cent. in 1974, representing real volume growth of 73 per cent. Employment in the industry increased by 400,000 to a total of 1·9 million over that period, spread throughout the country. The right hon. Gentleman neglects that important point. Indeed, there was a fall in employment in the City of London during that time.

London is easily the largest international foreign exchange market. According to a recent study by the Group of Thirty, some $50 billion a day is traded in London—a third of the world total. Of $150 billion of new issues of Eurobonds in 1985, some two thirds are estimated to have been done in London. Of new issues of foreign bonds—totalling $9·5 billion—between a third and a half of the business was done in London. Small wonder, then, that the City's earnings from abroad have grown from around £400 million in 1968 to £6 billion in 1984. This has been achieved only by being thoroughly competitive, aggressive, innovative, internationally minded, marketing oriented and determined to provide service and quality. As it approaches the big bang, the City is demonstrating its determination to keep up to date and to maintain London as a leading world financial centre.

These are the qualities denigrated today by the right hon. Gentleman which we all wish to see spread throughout British industry and commerce.

The Opposition motion calls for

"an adequate response to the increase in City fraud".

Long before they took an interest, the Government had recognised the inadequacies of the legislation and the machinery bequeathed to us by the last Labour Government. The roll call of actions is clear. The setting up of the Roskill committee shortly after the last election, the Insolvency Act 1985, the setting up of the fraud investigation group, the Financial Services Bill, and now the proposals to tighten up banking supervision—all of these, plus the increased resources we are putting into the machinery to deal with fraud, demonstrate our commitment.

The entire tone of the motion is an attack on the City. It is shameful that neither in the motion nor in the right hon. Gentleman's speech did he even begin to recognise the achievements of the City, its contribution to our economy and its standing in the world. He ought to have pride in this national asset, not to denigrate it. On both counts, the Opposition's motion falls.

4.46 pm

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil): I listened with care to the speech of the Chief Secretary to the Treasury and, while I do not want to associate myself with all the hyperbole used by the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley), I nevertheless recognise that in the Chief Secretary's speech there was a degree of complacency that was regrettable. I had hoped we would not find such complacency because the problems are much larger — as I hope to show—than he was prepared to admit.

It has been said that the City performs three functions for Britain—two of which are readily recognised but perhaps the other is often overlooked. First, it provides a market for the investor, large or small, which is a valuable function for Britain and the City. Secondly, it provides a useful earner of foreign currency — the money that Britain needs to survive. However, I suspect that its largest function, in respect of the structure of our nation, is to provide the mechanism to raise funds for British industry. We cannot do without that facility.

I have no doubt that the topics of corruption and fraud will feature largely in this debate as it has in previous debates. That is not wrong because they are matters which have recently hit the headlines, rightly so. Such practices have diminished the standing of the City. They have damaged the City and, after the big bang, may well cause it to be unable to earn the foreign currency it has earned in the past.

However, there is a larger scandal which lies beneath the more public scandal on the face of the City. It is a scandal of deficiency on the part of the City, which will have great significance to Britain. Is the City doing its job by Britain? Is it providing the funds that are needed by British industry? Is the City using the nation's money to generate some huge money-go-round primarily for its own

advantage? The City makes money by handling money, and the faster it goes round the bigger the profits are. The signs are not good.

I should like to take up what the Chief Secretary said about small businesses and regional development. A prime pillar of the Government's industrial policy is the encouragement of the small entrepreuneur and small businesses. The Chief Secretary said that there was no problem providing funds in that sector, but that has not been proved. I commend much of what the Government have done to encourage small firms and to establish new institutions for small firm financing. It would be churlish not to recognise that, but it would be inaccurate and, to some extent, complacent of the Minister to continue to believe, as he would have us believe, that matters are perfect. They are far from perfect. There is a large equity gap which he tried to deny, and many businesses are suffering as a result. There is increased centralisation of financial resources to the City, just as there has been centralisation of government.

We should imagine that we are a small firm in the midlands seeking £50,000. The Chief Secretary suggested that such a firm could go to venture capitalists, but their average lending is not £50,000, but £401,000. Very few venture capitalists will now lend less that £200,000. Sums below £100,000 are practically unheard of. So where does our small firm go? To the business expansion scheme perhaps? However, 53 per cent. of the scheme's funds last year were lent into or around the south-east of England. The midlands, one of the areas most devastated by the Government's industrial policies, has taken only 13 per cent. of business expansion scheme financing.

In the end, it is often easiest to go to the clearing banks. Britain has only four, which also are hopelessly centralised. There are about 20,000 clearing banks in the United States. Indeed, a national bank is forbidden by law there, but they have regional institutional banks. Many of the clearing banks have done a great deal to assist small industries. If our small business went to a large bank, however, we would still be asked to put down our house or car as collateral. It is small surprise, therefore, that many small business men seeking relatively small sums of finance now regard the relationship with the bank manager as forming the new eternal triangle—the bank manager, the spouse and him.

The Chief Secretary said that there was a good record on investment. He and the Government carefully omit to mention that that record is measured from last year, the year before or maybe 1983, but never from 1979, as investment in Britain has fallen to about 20 per cent. below what it was when the Government came to power. The Government's offer of assistance to small businesses falls seriously short of what is required at the lower end of the spectrum.

Even at the macro-business level, the signs are disturbing. The right hon. Member for Sparkbrook mentioned mergers. Britain is in the grip of merger mania. There was a day when, if somebody telephoned a City boss or captain of industry who did not want to be disturbed, he would find that a message had been left with the secretary to the effect that he was out getting orders. That used to be the most prestigious thing to say, but now the most prestigious thing to say is that the boss is out fixing up some sort of merger.

What property scandals were to the Heath Government in 1974, merger mania is fast becoming today. All the ingredients are there—the high public profile of the mergers and the people involved in them, big killings, doubtful morality and bizarre behaviour by some who are partaking of the action.

The figures are revealing. There were £1·1 billion worth of mergers in 1981, £2·3 billion worth in 1982, £5·3 billion worth in 1984 and a full £7 billion worth last year—an increase of seven times over 1981. Nearly half the money that was invested in new plant and machinery for British industry last year was diverted into mergers. In the first four months of this year, the value of mergers on the cards and under negotiation exceeds the total spent last year. We have all the unsavoury practices that characterised the property boom of 1974. We have things called poison pills. Distillers has quietly agreed to pay £20 million of Guinness's takeover costs without a word to the shareholders or the workers.

The stock exchange has now addressed the matter and produced a new code of practice which provides that a company cannot devote more than one quarter of its annual profits to so-called poison pill operations. We have the character assassinations. Mr. Jimmy Gulliver of Argyll has found himself the victim of a rather unsavoury and tawdry character assassination by Binns Cornwall and Partners Ltd. in the City. Is that what we expect from an organisation whose success rests on its reputation for probity? I suspect not.

Great and important companies have been unbalanced to meet merger requirements. *Financial Weekly* put it succinctly recently when it said:

"The willingness to divest which, at the best of times, is a sign of flexible and enlightened management becomes worrying for shareholders when clearly inspired by tactical considerations to do with bids. It becomes difficult to assess what the companies are up to.

If every arm and leg of the existing business must be regarded as available for sacrifice on the altar of the big merger, then what *is* the existing business? What is the strategy? Where is it going? How confident can shareholders be that it will bear more than a passing resemblance to its existing shape a year hence?"

The enthusiasm for making a fast buck through mergers is now dominating sensible planning of future business.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ashdown: I am trying to be brief. If I do not give way the hon. Gentleman might be able to speak.

Shareholders are not consulted and work forces are merely bundled up and consigned to a new owner without so much as a word. Unhappily, the City is far too dominated—not exclusively so—by the short term, the turn of a quick buck by tomorrow. Far too often, it is not interested in so-called patient money—investing in the future—which characterises investment in our competitor nations.

Young men, not yet 30, in the City are earning £60,000 or £80,000 a year. I see that the chief executive of Guinness has had his salary raised to £195,000 a year and has received shares worth more than £1 million. As the big bang approaches, such frenetic activity to buy people will get even more frenetic.

Mr. Richard Ottaway (Nottingham, North): Is the hon. Gentleman saying that, if the remote possibility of the Liberals forming a Government was realised, his party would restrict salaries in the City?

Mr. Ashdown: I am not saying anything of the sort. I am merely saying that these are the facts of life in the

[Mr. Ashdown]

City. If the hon. Gentleman is patient enough, he will hear how I believe that the Government have contributed to that. We must encourage an attitudinal change in the City.

I understand that there are young men not yet 30 earning vast sums of money. Some of them—and this will perhaps illustrate the problem of looking at things purely in the short term—are being assessed for bonus calculated over only three days. If they make a profit over three days they get a bonus to increase their salary. That is not the kind of attitude which the City has taken in the past, but it is an attitude that is growing today and of which we need to be aware. The City is a partner in creating what the right hon. Member the Leader of the Liberal party (Mr. Steel) has referred to as the "hamburger-stall economy". It seems to me that there are far too many, in the City and outside it, who do not believe in the long-term future. The prevailing mood, therefore, is fast becoming that of the Roman orgy — eat, drink and be merry and make whatever money we can, because tomorrow things will be different.

This is not surprising, because the City is responding entirely to the tone set set by this Government. We have flogged off our national assets, whatever they may be, to the highest passing bidders, whoever they may be. We have sacrificed long-term interests for a little short-term profit. The Government are not creating an enterprise culture but are rather in the process of creating a finance culture. The Government have stimulated not entrepreneurial skill but the skill of the moneychanger. There are those who are reaping vast rewards, and they are not the hard grafters but the slick operators.

It may be that the banner headlines on this debate will be about corruption, but the real scandal is far deeper, more pervasive and more damaging. The Government have elevated private greed to the level of a public virtue and the City, not unnaturally, has responded with enthusiasm. It has become a partner with the Government in the game of national asset-stripping. Instead of mobilising its huge financial resources and its undoubted human ability in the interest of the long-term economic and industrial health of Britain, far too many in the City now grab at the short-term profit. They are not wholly to be blamed for this, because they are only responding to the climate that has been created by the Government. It is that climate that we would seek to change. We need a new climate if we are to establish the partnership the nation needs for the regeneration of British industry. The City is an essential part of that partnership, but it will need a change of attitude and of operation before it can do the job we so badly need it to do.

5.2 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Rippon (Hexham): This debate shows that there is growing public anxiety about what is happening in the City. Allegations of fraud and corruption may be grossly exaggerated, but I believe that the Prime Minister was right when she said at the Lord Mayor's banquet last year that the City was only as healthy as its reputation.

Today we have to face the fact that a number of major scandals have undermined confidence in one of Britain's most important spheres of activity. The City's very real achievements and its important contribution to the national economy have rightly been underlined by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, but those very achievements and the City's very importance make it necessary for us to understand exactly what is at stake. As the Roskill committee stated at the beginning of its important report:

"If the Government cherish the vision of an 'equity-owning democracy' then it also faces an inescapable duty to ensure that financial markets are honestly managed, and that transgressions in these markets are swiftly and effectively discovered, convicted and punished."

I am sure that the House must welcome the very clear way in which the Chief Secretary emphasised that it is the Government's intention to act on the recommendations in that report and to come forward with firm legislative proposals. I do not think that we can ask for more than that.

I welcome the measures which, as the Chief Secretary has said, the Government have taken and the measures which they propose to take. This is in striking contrast to the way in which the Labour Government treated these matters when they had the opportunity of dealing with them. Whether, however, they will, in the changed circumstances of today, prove adequate has to be considered in the light of what may happen after October, when the so-called big bang occurs.

Huge financial conglomerates are now being created and it may be doubtful whether self-regulation will be enough, especially when the Bank of England stands back and allows unbridled market forces to operate in areas where they have hitherto been effectively controlled. I am all in favour of market forces but I believe that they must be subject to regulation within a clear statutory framework. Whether we can long avoid a statutory body on the lines of the United States Securities and Exchange Commission depends on our ensuring that the Financial Services Bill has strong enough teeth.

Naturally, I am not going to refer to what is happening in Committee. I will confine myself to saying that I hope that the Government will hesitate before ignoring the views expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr. Nelson) and others, because I believe that it is certain that, if there is another major scandal, the roof is going to blow off the City.

I shall now refer to a topic which I touched on in the debate on the Gracious Speech on 13 November—the damaging consequences of the current torrent of takeover bids. In 1969 I said that the country had gone merger-mad in the face of the 1968 wave of takeover bids, most of which proved basically unsatisfactory and damaging in the event, just as I think many of the mergers today will not prove in the national interest. As a Wall street banker said recently:

"When total bids multiply to the level of a roulette table they are better housed in a casino where the only consistent winners are the croupiers."

The hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) referred to the fact that at the end of last year it was estimated that there was over £7 billion wrapped up in bid situations. It was then estimated that 52 out of 300 United Kingdom companies capitalised at over £150 million each were involved in takeovers. This process is continuing at the present time.

I must, of course, declare an interest as the chairman of a company which has recently escaped the clutches of an unwelcome predator.

What is happening in the City today in the sphere of mergers is utter madness. I noted that the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley)

referred to the views of Mr. David Walker, an executive director of the Bank of England. I believe that Mr. Walker is absolutely right when he says that there must be a rethink of our merger policy, and that rethink is urgent as well as, admittedly, very difficult.

The root of the public mischief is that shorter horizons are militating against sensible long-term investment decisions, and are therefore in the long run basically damaging to British competitiveness. Institutional shareholders increasingly regard share certificates as casino chips, and the performance of investment managers is judged on short-term capital gains. The institutional shareholder is therefore no longer necessarily a buttress to a good company; rather, he may be a danger. On the other hand, individual shareholders are much more stable because they understand that they as well as the country are better served in the long term by the steady growth of their company, its profits and its dividends. What is happening today in the City is economically unsound because it is basically destructive and antisocial.

That is why I welcome what the Government are doing to encourage the spread of share ownership. That spread is essential to a free society increasingly threatened by the concentration of power. The concentration of power is not just in the hands of Government or state boards; it can be to an excessive extent in the hands of large bureaucratic corporations.

No one can stop takeover bids and no one would want to, but the message should go out to the City: "For heaven's sake cool it." A distinction must be made between mergers by agreement which stimulate organic growth and hostile bids that are designed to promote egomaniac empire building or disguise indifferent performance by the larger company. We should consider ways and means whereby the public interest and the interests of shareholders can best be protected. It seems that we need some new ground rules. On 7 March an article appeared in *The Times* that referred to

"the deterioration of standards in the conduct of takeover bids."

It noted the readiness of various financial institutions to underwrite to make contested bids possible—it seems that takeover bids offer an alternative way of lending money now; it is no good lending money nowadays to Nicaragua — and to take huge fees and commissions from the companies involved.

Mr. John Ryman (Blyth Valley): I am following the right hon. and learned Gentleman's speech with great interest. He talks about the public interest and concedes that substantial reform is required. Should not the Director General of Fair Trading, some of whose decisions are incomprehensible, be taking the public interest into account when deciding whether to make a reference, for example, in the Guinness No. 1 and No. 2 bids, the Hanson Trust bid, which got away, and various other bids? Surely the public interest is paramount even before there is new legislation.

Mr. Rippon: There is no doubt that the Office of Fair Trading and many other bodies should be much concerned about these matters and that is why I have something to say about laying down possible ground rules. One way of discouraging unjustified bids would be to make the predator who failed pay the costs of the defence. We should also prohibit the growing practice of making unsolicited telephone calls — personal calls — to shareholders urging them to accept bid offers. In the case in which I was involved, I found that elderly shareholders had been harassed late at night by individuals of whom they had never heard, and of whom they had no wish to hear.

On a wider scale, we could study action that is being taken in other countries to regulate mergers. In America, another country which suffers from merger mania, a number of states have begun to take action, including Minnesota, Ohio and Colorado. In Colorado, for example, an independent board of directors has to vet a bid for a financial institution and a 25 per cent. holding is deemed to be a change of control which it will investigate. In Minnesota, the single most important component of its company law is the requirement that acquiring companies should disclose their operational plans for the target company.

In Germany, a company's workers have an absolute right to be consulted on decisions that will have an effect on their future, such as mergers. In Canada, action is being taken to introduce a new trust law that will automatically refer to the equivalent of our Monopolies and Mergers Commission all bids in excess of £250 million. It may be that, instead of the present unsatisfactory arrangement whereby some bids are referred and others are not, it would be better to have some point at which it became essential that the bid should be referred.

As the evidence accumulates of the economic and social damage which is being done by the spate of hostile takeover bids, we must do something before outraged public opinion turns upon the City in fury at its speculative, share-shuffling greed.

5.15 pm

Mr. Brian Sedgemore (Hackney, South and Shoreditch): There was a good deal in what the right hon. and learned Member for Hexham (Mr. Rippon) said with which I agreed, and perhaps that proves the point that Sir Winston Churchill wished to make when he said, "We are all Socialists now." However, I believe that the right hon. and learned Gentleman omitted one precept, which is my contention that we shall never be able to regulate the City unless we can regulate the activities of the inhabitants of No. 10 Downing street in so far as they affect the City. We first realised that there was something wrong at No. 10 a couple of years ago when the Oman scandal came to light. The Prime Minister, in batting for Britain, helped to line the pockets of her son. When the subsequent contract between the Oman Government and Cementation Ltd. was signed, millions of pounds of bribes found their way into the hands of Oman Ministers.

The Johnson Matthey banking scandal——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman knows that this is a short debate — I know that the House does not want to be delayed by interventions from the Chair—and that he should not make accusations of that kind. He should table a substantive motion if he wants to make such accusations.

Mr. Sedgemore: These issues have been raised before on the Floor of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and evidence on them has been given to a Select Committee, notably by myself, which has been published. It is a pity that the Government have not brought the Select Committee's report before the House. However, I shall move on.

[Mr. Sedgemore]

In the Johnson Matthey banking scandal, the Prime Minister found herself in further trouble. Thanks to Price Waterhouse and Co. and a Minister, I have been able to piece together some of the right hon. Lady's personal involvement in not setting up a tribunal of inquiry to consider the matter. When Price Waterhouse was drawing up its original report — the one that has not been published—one of its senior partners, Mr. Brian Larkin, in conversation with another senior member of the firm, Mr. Mark Homan, said as the report was nearing completion, "We had better contact No. 10 and get her to distance herself from him." In this instance "her" was the Prime Minister and "him" was Mr. Robin Leigh-Pemberton, the Governor of the Bank of England. The conversation was designed to suggest that as the Prime Minister was friendly with the Governor and had appointed him, and as he stood most to lose from any sort of inquiry, the Prime Minister should be warned about what was going on.

That fitted in with what a Minister told me when he said that when he read reports he realised that there was fraud. He wanted an inquiry but it was not possible to have one because the Governor of the Bank of England got at the Prime Minister before anyone else could.

I understand now why the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer have been unhappy with attempts to expose what has been going on by people such as Mr. Abdul Shamji. What do we know about Mr. Shamji and what are the objections that the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer have to us talking about him in the House?

We know that in the late 1950s Mr. Shamji was engaged in gold and diamond smuggling in the Belgian Congo, in the area which is now on the Ugandan-Zaire border. We know that a few weeks ago a High Court judge, Mr. Justice Hoffmann, called him a liar when making orders against his company amounting to £21 million. We know that he supplied women and flats to bankers, including Mr. Ian Fraser, of Johnson Matthey Bankers. We know that an Asian woman had to seek protection when she found herself and her family under threat by Mr. Shamji's mobsters because she would not hand over documents relating to JMB.

We know that Mr. Shamji contacted one of my informants and said that he would not expose borrowers and bankers at JMB if I would keep him out of the frame. We know that Mr. Shamji was fined in Scotland recently for breaches of the Companies Act. We know that he stole $3 million in relation to Gomba Exim. We know that with the help of his family he burgled his own safe deposit boxes in London. We know that, when the liquidator went in and some of the safe deposits were eventually opened, works of art were found and there was no record of them in the books. This all relates to the liquidation of JMB.

We know that Mr. Shamji had ships on the high seas which had inadequate lifeboats. We know that when Touche Ross and Co. provided a record of his accounts, it was clear that he was not paying tax. We know that Mr. Ivor Fallon, the deputy editor of *The Sunday Times*, obtained certain favours from Mr. Shamji and that in return *The Sunday Times* wrote some false stories about him.

Why do not the Prime Minister and the Chancellor want those things to be exposed in the House? First, it appears that Mr. Shamji is their kind of person; he is actually one of them. Secondly, it appears that he has given a lot of money through his companies to Conservative party political funds. When I was in Florence recently, someone asked me what the difference was between the British and Italian political systems. I replied, "That is easy. In Italy members of the Mafia are brought to trial, but in Britain they become vice presidents of the Conservative Smaii Business Bureau."

I move to the third inhabitant of No. 10 Downing street who is concerned with massive fraud in the City undertaken by the largest bank in Britain, the National Westminster bank. The matter concerns Mr. Denis Thatcher who is one of the beneficiaries. The victim, who is in the Strangers' Gallery today, is Mr. Alfred Cullinane, and the fraudster is the National Westminster bank. Denis Thatcher owns 3,000 shares in Attwoods, or did according to the last company accounts, and is stated to be a vice-chairman of Attwoods, a firm which deals in sand and gravel and waste disposal. When that firm was recently indicted by the grand jury in the United States of America for price fixing, someone in the company was at pains to point out that it had no connections with the Mafia.

On 30 June 1983 Attwoods took over E.F. Philips, a firm which held 40 acres of land. Not to put too fine a point on it, Attwoods received stolen land. Attwoods and those who have any interest in it are to some extent living off the ill-gotten gains of the National Westminster bank and its wholly owned subsidiary, Lombard North Central.

I have studied bundles of documents and court cases which have finished, and I have found that the conduct of both banks has involved dishonesty, deception and conspiracy with a leading firm of accountants, Thomson McLintock, to destroy Alfred Cullinane's business, and the swearing in the High Court of a false affadavit by a bank manager of the National Westminster bank, Mr. Brian Thomas. The banks stole Mr. Cullinane's land and sold it at a fraction of its value to E.F. Philips, which almost immediately disposed of a dubious title to Attwoods.

Alfred Cullinane is a brillant engineer who developed a new resin coating process. He should be a millionaire today but instead he is a pauper. Over a 15-year period, his life and his business have been destroyed and most of his friendships have been broken up; his wife Eileen has been subjected to cruel agony. He is a 74-year-old man who has tragically been the victim of a land fraud. As it happens, the Prime Minister's husband is one of the beneficiaries of that land fraud. The House should ask what the National Westminster bank, Lombard North Central, and the Prime Minister and her husband intend to do about it.

In 1965 the National Westminster bank loaned Alfred Cullinane a small amount of money and took a charge on some 500 acres of his land. In 1971 Alfred Cullinane wanted to expand his business and asked the bank if it would release 63 acres of that land, valued at £1·2 million, upon which the machinery for his resin coating process stood. In return for that he told the bank that he would give it an extra 40 acres, valued at £800,000, on which it could put a charge. The bank agreed to put the charge on the 40 acres of land, but it did not release the 63 acres which it had promised to Mr. Alfred Cullinane.

When Mr. Cullinane won a case in the Court of Appeal in 1982, the Master of the Rolls, Sir John Donaldson, was bitterly critical of the conduct of the National Westminster

bank. He said that when the bank discovered that it had not released the 63 acres of land it said, "Whoopee, we have got another of Mr. Cullinane's assets." In 1977 Mr. Cullinane's business had been ready to expand, but from that time on the National Westminster bank and Lombard North Central decided not to provide him with any working capital but to pull the plug on him and consciously to destroy his business.

In 1978 Lombard North Central suggested to Thomson McLintock that it should prepare an independent report and that Mr. Cullinane should meet half the cost of preparing the report. Unknown to Mr. Cullinane, the firm prepared a confidential report — I have seen the full report — for Lombard North Central. It presented a slightly different report to Mr. Cullinane and at the same time it offered to help the bank destroy Mr. Cullinane's business. A High Court judge subsequently described that report as not being worth the paper it was written on.

Even more amazingly, while the Court of Appeal was dealing with the case in 1982, Lombard North Central was actually in the process of selling off the 40 acres of land involved in the court case to E. F. Philips, which almost immediately sold it to Attwoods. I find the conduct of E. F. Philips and Attwoods in buying the land at that time, with the litigation in progress, most extraordinary. The title which passed was almost certainly fictitious and false. However, if one is getting a bargain at basement prices, presumably one does not ask too many questions. Perhaps I should point out that by that time Lombard North Central had obtained a charging and possession order on the land on the basis of the earlier shenanigans.

So the largest bank in Britain, with offices in the centre of the City, was responsible for one of the most cruel frauds that we have ever seen. It was not a monetary fraud. The victim is in the Strangers' Gallery. If Conservative Members want to talk to him, I invite them to do so after the debate. On 9 August 1984 Alfred Cullinane wrote to the Prime Minister — I have a copy of the letter — to explain her husband's involvement. She never even bothered to reply. I find that slightly odd.

There are two other odd circumstances in the case. In 1977 a firm called Steetley had agreed to come in with Mr. Cullinane. At the last moment, for reasons no one has been able to find out, it dropped out. Steetley had someone on its board concerned with the National Westminster bank; also, the chairman of Steetley was Lord Boardman, who is today the chairman of the National Westminster bank.

Perhaps even more extraordinary, in 1984, in a letter to Mr. Cullinane — again I have the letter here — a Katangan mercenary, Mr. Einar-Cynewolf, alleged that a Mr. Arthur Young, a regional director of the National Westminster bank, had asked him to kill Mr. Cullinane. Mr. Cullinane sent the letter to Dorset police. The investigation by the police was indeterminate because Arthur Young died. My investigation is complete. I assure the House that no contract was taken out to kill Mr. Cullinane, but we can imagine the pain that that caused to Mr. Cullinane and to his wife. I shall write to Dorset police so that they may deal with the Katangan mercenary as they think fit. My evidence is conclusive. I discovered the facts only on Friday. I immediately telephoned Mr. Cullinane and I shall inform Dorset police. Perhaps Lord Boardman and others concerned with the case will be grateful that I have gone to the trouble to solve that riddle.

I have raised the matter in the debate because the National Westminster bank wants to bankrupt Mr. Cullinane. Then he could not go back to the courts to seek redress on all the curious events so that he may enjoy life in the future. The creditors want to do that on Monday.

Although Mr. Cullinane is 74 years of age, he is very articulate. I might add that he is a Tory, and a millionaire twice over. He has been reduced to a pauper by Britain's biggest bank which would like him to die.

Mr. Alfred Cullinane should not be made bankrupt, nor should he die. The National Westminster bank, Lombard North Central, Attwoods, Denis Thatcher and perhaps even the Prime Minister should use their influence to see that Alfred Cullinane and his wife Eileen have a decent future. We should regulate the City, but in the end it is the ideology that counts. Those at the top of the British establishment bear a heavy responsibility if they produce an ideology that allows the National Westminster bank to act in that way.

5.29 pm

Mr. Anthony Nelson (Chichester): The hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore) seems to make new revelations whenever he speaks on this subject. I have no complaint about his right to do so, using the privilege that we have to expose particular matters, but as none of us are privy to the details of this case, we are not in a position to comment on his allegations. It is, of course, open to the hon. Gentleman to decide whether he should make statements outside the House that are similar to those that he made in the Chamber today.

I return to the thrust of the debate, and should like to pay a compliment to my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary. He struck the right balance in recognising that there are problems with the development of new activities in the City and with the scale of investment and banking transactions. It is right, too, to recognise the City's pre-eminent contribution not only to our national income and to our balance of payments, but to employing people and to invigorating industry in this country. The City has an outstanding record that has been succoured by many of the policies introduced by the Government since 1979. In the forthcoming Budget I hope that there will be yet further measures to liberalise those talents and to promote the profitability not only of the financial services industry in the City but of the manufacturing and services industries that it sponsors.

However, it is no part of my remit or, perhaps that of my hon. Friends to kill the goose that lays the golden egg. In considering very technical reforms and changes in the City, whether to the banking sector or to the investment markets, we must recognise our difficult but proper responsibility to strike the right balance between ensuring that the profitability of enterprises making such a valuable contribution to our economy are not in any way prejudiced.

A banking review is being conducted. I have long felt that the Banking Act was defective in the tiered system that it set up. It is sad that it took the revelation of a financial default to expose that. However, I am glad that we are to return to a much more rational basis for the supervision and authorisation of our banks.

I also welcome the fact that the Government have announced an inquiry into Lloyd's. As I have argued before, that is preferable by far to its inclusion in the supervisory framework of any Bill that the House may be considering. The sober assessment of the review, and the consultation that will presumably ensue, together with the

[Mr. Anthony Nelson]

opportunity that many of us will take to give evidence to Sir Patrick Neill's committee, will ensure that any recommendations that follow, in the form of a private or public Bill to replace the existing Lloyd's Act, or in the form of new regulations promulgated by the Lloyd's ruling council, will stand a far better chance of working and of ensuring that Lloyd's regains the prestige and international reputation that it so richly deserves. In that way, we may be sure that Lloyd's will continue to make a contribution not only to the security of many policyholders and industries that depend on it, but to our national income and balance of payments.

I wish to concentrate on the regulation of the investment markets. The Government have made significant progress in responding to public and parliamentary opinion, and in proposing a regulatory framework that will ensure that many problems that might arise after the big bang do not, in fact, do so. I fear that after the big bang a good deal of shrapnel will fly around, that many people will be injured, and that the streets of the City, which are paved with gold, may also be covered in blood. That may be a rather lurid metaphor to use, but we have a heavy responsibility to get that regulatory framework right. That is within our competence.

I say to Opposition Members and particularly to the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) that much of their dogmatic prejudice, as displayed in their speeches, serves only to fuel the view that the Labour party has moved on little since its ideological views of the 1960s and 1970s. We should be concentrating on those things that Parliament can do, and that are within its competence. For example, we could set up the right framework for the supervision—not the regulation—of the investment industries in this country. I include in that the broad remit of investment activities from the best known broking of stocks and shares right through to more novel markets, such as the futures markets. It is important to get it right, primarily because many more people now have a propensity to save and invest and will, for the first time, be investing, and responding to the overtures of people who knock on their doors, advertise through the press, or invite them by mail to use their services.

In those circumstances, people will be vulnerable. However much we may preach the dictum of caveat emptor, people will undoubtedly lose out sometimes, not only because of their poor investment choices but because there may be bad administration and trusteeship of their funds. We cannot provide by statute any absolute protection against that, but we must do our best to ensure that they are at least provided with information, that the people with whom they deal are authorised and competent, that they have the ability to appeal and to seek redress and restitution if they have been improperly dealt with, and that the system is sufficiently flexible to allow for changes in these markets. The framework provided in the Financial Services Bill achieves that. There is one major area in which change is necessary, however. A slight shift in the balance would ensure that we had a durable and flexible system that would enjoy all-party support rather than sectarian governmental, and possibly only partly governmental, support. My colleagues will know that I refer in particular to the status of the Securities and Investments Board which is now implanted in the Financial Services Bill as a statutorily recognised body.

In the press, to some extent in the City, and also outside the House, there has been a misunderstanding about the implications of that change. The change does not in itself go very far, but it statutorily recognises a body to which, to all intents and purposes, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry intends to delegate his powers. Like me, he has an interest in ensuring that it discharges its functions effectively. The legislation will ensure that the Securities and Investments Board has a place in law and statutory authority to do its important job.

A statutorily recognised Securities and Investments Board will act as a much better defence for the future security of self-regulation in the City than a rather uncertain system of discretion and flexibility which lies in the hands of the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. A future Government of a different political persuasion might easily sweep aside—if the amendment made to the Bill is reversed—the fragile structure of supervision provided in the Bill, as first introduced.

As amended, the statutorily recognised Securities and Investments Board will ensure that we have a bulwark for the system of voluntary self-regulation among the various bodies such as the stock exchange, the Association of Futures, Brokers and Dealers or the National Association of Securities Dealers and Investment Managers, and that we have the independence of a statutory body. It will thus be less subject to the influence of a Secretary of State in any future Government. To that extent, a body recognised in law, with a clear statutory responsibility and accountability, is a preference that the House should consider with an open mind.

There are political arguments for making a change such as this in a way which takes account of what is happening in other sophisticated financial markets. In a world where people can choose in which market they buy and sell their shares, and where they seek common standards of freedom and fairness in the discharge of their contracts and orders, it is important that we pay some regard to the systems that work and that have been introduced elsewhere.

Many of the countries that have recently changed or are changing their systems are introducing statutorily recognised bodies along the lines of the one proposed by the Standing Committee considering the Financial Services Bill. Furthermore, while some Members on both the Government and the Opposition Benches may be suspicious of all-party agreement on these matters, or indeed of the following of a middle way, I believe strongly that in that way we would serve the practitioners in the City and investors outside who want, and are entitled to expect, a durable system which will not be subject to change at the whim of some future Government. We are much more likely to have such a system if the Bill, when it returns to the House, proceeds with all-party support than if we have divisions not just across the Floor of the House, but in the ranks of the Tory party.

We shall have such division, because I will not be a party to a flimsy system that fails to match up to either the pledges that I made to my electorate at the last election or to what many of us have argued for in debates on this subject.

As it stands, such a body, recognised in law, would not amount to the full panoply of an American-style Securities and Exchange Commission. It is for that very reason that

we have sought this limited path of recognition and authority for the Securities and Investments Board. There is no question of that arising, in any case, because the system, for example, of administration of takeovers in this country is largely outside the remit of the Financial Services Bill; and the history of the Securities and Exchange Commission in the United States, built on the Securities Act of 1933 when there was no system of self-regulation in the United States, is radically different and not comparable.

For that reason the rather alarmist approach of previous Ministers at the Department of Trade and Industry and of some commentators in the market towards a statutory commission, for fear that it would emulate the SEC, is misplaced. What is correct is to recognise that opinion in the City and among the public at large has moved not only quite markedly but rapidly on this matter. Most progressive and responsible opinion in the City of London at present recognises either that a statutorily recognised Securities and Investments Board is needed now or that, if it is not needed now, it is inevitable anyway.

If that is the case, surely we ought to grasp the nettle. We ought not to lag behind public and practitioner opinion, we ought to be ahead of it. We can already learn from the experience of the Lloyd's Act 1982. When the Lloyd's Bill was going through the House, and when novel and quite controversial amendments were proposed to that Bill, many of us were castigated by opinion outside, in Lloyd's and in the City, for going too far, for imposing unacceptable changes, yet no one would now seriously suggest, in the light of events, that the Lloyd's Act has gone too far; in fact its provisions are being reviewed.

It is a fateful thing to fall behind public, practitioner and investor opinion by enshrining in law a framework which fails to match expectations and is unlikely to measure up to the challenge.

I turn to a few technical ways in which statutory recognition of the Securities and Investments Board, quite apart from the political arguments that I have adduced, will help it to discharge its responsibilities. It should, first, be able to investigate insider dealing. Insider dealing is an outrageous practice which materially and prejudicially affects the interests of shareholders who are not privy to information, and can involve substantial losses for individuals and shareholders at large. While the Companies Act 1981 made it a criminal offence, the definition of insider dealing had inevitably to be narrow in order for it to be an acceptable criminal offence.

Thankfully, however, the stock exchange and other organisations, in their definition of insider dealing, went further than the Companies Act. This is just one example. When we have established the Securities and Investments Board as a statutory body, there will be every reason for it to have the right to investigate insider dealing. Not only is it not going to do so, it will not be allowed the powers to do so. Yet most people outside the House think that such a body ought to have, and will have, the powers to do so. And so it should.

Nor will the board have the power to investigate unauthorised investment businesses. Why not? Most people outside the House feel that we are instituting or ought to institute a system which will look not just at the good boys and their day-to-day practices, but at the bad boys and whether they are involved in activities in which they should not be involved. The fact that the Securities and Investments Board cannot investigate whether an unauthorised business is acting in such a way, cannot ask unauthorised concerns or people for information about tied agents of investment insurance companies, or indeed ask authorised businesses, is a defect that we ought to put right if we are serious about investor protection.

In this, and a number of other limited ways, we can ensure that not only will we have a framework of a technical and practical kind for fulfilling the tasks set for the board, which I believe all Members would like to see, but that we will be sending the right message to operators in the City and outside and to the country at large that we mean business about investor protection, and intend to stamp out some of the worst practices that we have seen.

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): Would not my hon. Friend agree that, with our hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith), he has done a great service in highlighting this in Committee?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman was here, but Mr. Speaker reminded hon. Members that they must not discuss proceedings in the Committee.

Mr. Dykes: I was in the Select Committee at the beginning of the debate, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and was not aware of that. I apologise. Getting away from that, more and more people in the City appear to support the line taken by my hon. Friend, including members of the stock exchange. As my hon. Friend was beginning to imply earlier on, it does not change the intrinsic basis of self-regulation, but it does provide the extra reserve powers for a body that would be more powerful because it was lodged in statute, so that it could thoroughly investigate, and turf out troublemakers if necessary.

Mr. Nelson: I am obliged to my hon. Friend because he has said succinctly and persuasively what I feel. Like him, I have up to now felt that the Securities and Investment Board was likely to be not so much a toothless tiger as a chained tiger. I do not suggest that if it is statutorily recognised we shall have a wild animal on the loose, but we shall have a body that will be equipped, empowered, recognised and sufficiently accountable to fulfil the remit for which there is a consensus in the House.

With that limited reservation about what I understand to be the Government's present intentions, I reiterate my belief that this Government have done more than any other to ensure that we have a responsible, free and fair market in the City of London, which continue to contribute to the vibrant prosperity of our national income. If the Government will only see their way to making this rather limited but absolutely vital further move, they will enjoy a consensus and a support not only throughout the House but among a wider and deserving public in our constituencies.

5.50 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): The hon. Member for Chichester (Mr. Nelson) has put before the House a thoughtful, well-argued and well-presented case. He will, I hope, forgive me if I do not answer him, because it is to the speech of the right hon. and learned Member for Hexham (Mr. Rippon) that I should like briefly to turn.

I wish not to embarrass the right hon. and learned Gentleman, but if, when I first arrived here in 1962, I had been asked to put money on who would be the leader of a Conservative Government some 24 years later my money

[Mr. Tam Dalyell]

would have been on the right hon. and learned Member for Hexham, who was then, I believe, the Member for Norwich, South. I have always believed him to be, and I still believe him to be, a deeply serious man. Whether or not one agrees with his opinions, they are always put forward in an informed way.

Therefore, I say both to Conservative politicians and to those in the City that they had better read the vehemence with which the right hon. and learned Gentleman made his criticisms this afternoon. It was a devastating intervention, and in my view a justified one. If it had come from this side of the House, the City might have said, "Oh, well, it's just the Opposition at it again." It is not the Opposition at it again. There is real worry in the country. To borrow the phrase of the right hon. and learned Member for Hexham, if there is another scandal, or series of scandals, the top will come off.

I have never been guilty of extravagant criticism of the City of London, and I say bluntly to my hon. Friends the Members for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) and for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore) that I have some friends in the City. But they must take heed of what the right hon. and learned Member for Hexham and other serious hon. Members have said this afternoon. I did not hear Conservative Members giving very much support to the City of London.

I shall stick briefly to one subject that concerns me greatly, the situation faced by the electronic components industry in this country. I say to the Chief Secretary to the Treasury that the industry, which includes firms such as Hewlett-Packard and Ferranti, has briefed us that, compared with its French, American and Japanese competitors, it does not receive anything like the help from the financial institutions of this country that its foreign competitors receive from theirs.

Electronic components are the building blocks from which all electronic equipment is assembled. Electronic components are increasingly the key to the efficiency and competitiveness of manufacturing industry across the board. Electronic components are essential to communications, finance, insurance, retailing and all service industries. Jobs in all these industries, now and in the future, depend on electronic components—half a million jobs in electronic equipment industries, millions more in manufacturing and service industries using electronics, not to mention some 70,000 jobs in the components industry itself. There are jobs in almost every constituency up and down the country.

Britain must have a strong components industry. Without it, electronic equipment makers would be dependent on overseas suppliers, often their direct competitors. British firms would be second in line for delivery of the latest components. They could suffer from political control over the export of technology. Incidentally, our normal defence capability would be at risk.

Above all, our future ability to provide jobs for British men and women would be undermined. The United Kingdom's share of the vast and growing market for components is static. Imports have increased faster than exports. Our balance of trade is heavily in the red. Why is this? What can be done? What can be done concerns, in large part, the City of London.

World markets are distorted greatly to Britain's disadvantage — by structural factors, by deliberate policies of foreign Governments who have understood the critical importance of electronic components to their economic future. The United States has a vast, largely captive, market supported by massive spending on defence and space. The Japanese insulate their home market from competition, and from a basis of strength, particularly in consumer electronics, target their attack on overseas markets.

Equipment and component producers are dependent on one another. It is in the equipment industry's best long-term interests to support the component industry by discussing future needs in good time and looking first to British suppliers. We seem to make these decisions hastily, on an ad hoc basis and higgledy-piggledy.

The attitudes of the Japanese and United States financial communities differ from those of the City of London. They support high technology, they venture capital at high risk and they look for returns in the long term. Normal investment guidelines hardly apply to high technology components. Competitor nations realise this. In 1984, the West German Government's support for investment in micro-electronics was 60 per cent. more than ours, and that of the French Government 400 per cent. more than ours. The German and Dutch Governments are providing £119 million to two firms to develop and make just two devices, compared with the British Government's £120 million over six years to the whole micro-electronics industry. All our competitors' public procurement policies are strongly nationalistic.

The British Government must help to enable our industry to compete on more equal terms by consistent policies that help British industry. Not only must the Government give direct support to micro-electronics on a scale more like that given to our competitors, but they must not put existing jobs at risk by subidising foreign companies to manufacture products which our existing industry can supply. The City has to understand this, because industries, particularly those in the north, will suffer dreadfully if it does not. Not only must the Government use public procurement to support, not undermine, our industry; they must also understand that a healthy electronics components industry is fundamental to our performance as a country. The City has a major contribution to make. Therefore, I hope that the City and the Government will get together on this.

By good fortune, I have tomorrow been allocated a Consolidated Fund debate on the related question of the strategic defence initiative and SDI research and the British Government's attitude to what is seen, by some, as an American crock of gold—albeit illusory. This has to be taken in conjunction with the fact that our capital markets are not nearly so helpful to our industries as the Americans are to theirs. In these circumstances, we have to be wary about Americans coming over here, like the unmentionable Mr. Clarence Robinson.

Frankly, this is all about the way in which Americans, under the guise of making security checks, can take the most advanced developments in British industry, not least in optical electronics and the like. This has come about partly because access to finance in the United States and Japan is so much more favourable than it is in Britain.

Without, therefore, being strident about it, I plead with the City first to take into account the problems of the electronics industry that I have mentioned; and, secondly,

to cast a critical eye over what is happening in this important field of SDI research and a somewhat bewitching American offer.

5.58 pm

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): This debate is not just about the City of London but about the financial services industry as a whole. We have already heard about the number of jobs in the financial services industry. They are in excess of 1 million, a number that has risen rapidly during the past few years. We have also heard from my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury about the overseas earnings that are generated by the City. In 1984 they amounted to over £6 billion. That is another figure that has risen rapidly in a very short period. All hon. Members know that the City serves as the primary capital market for industry and commerce. As my right hon. Friend said, last year new issues exceeded £6 billion.

The right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) referred to current salary levels in the City. I wish to make a few comments about that matter. It is obviously a period of rapid change and great opportunity in the City. The world's leading investment houses are taking advantage of deregulation to enter the London market. As a result, it is a period of extremely fierce competition for business, and, because it is a people business, for people. Inevitably, in those circumstances demand exceeds supply, and salaries have risen accordingly to levels which seem difficult to justify in absolute or comparative terms. However, they are entirely justifiable in market terms because nobody pays a higher salary than necessary to attract the person whom he wishes to employ. After the big bang there will be a major shake-up. It is not to use particularly lurid terminology to talk about there being blood on the floor because that is exactly what will happen, and salaries will fall to more sustainable levels quickly in 1987-88.

Obviously, it is critical that at a time of intense competition and major upheaval we should have adequate regulation of the financial services industry. That will both improve prospects for investor protection and act as positive encouragement to the development of markets. That is why the Government's Financial Services Bill is so welcome. It provides a comprehensive framework of statutory and self-regulation designed to meet both those objectives. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Brittan) said of the City on Second Reading in January:

"there must be no doubt about the integrity of its institutions because once that doubt takes root it is only too easy for the customers of the City to take their business elsewhere."—[*Official Report*, 14 January 1986; Vol. 89, c. 940.]

I suspect that he was referring to businesses which operate in the City, but it is equally true of the institutions that are being set up under the Bill's framework. The key institution to which my hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr. Nelson) and others have referred is the Securities and Investments Board. The SIB will authorise some investment businesses directly, will recognise self-regulatory organisations and professional bodies, and will make model rules for the conduct of business which will apply to all investment businesses. In other words, it will have an absolutely pivotal role. There must be no doubt about its integrity or credibility, yet at present it is envisaged that it will be a private company limited by guarantee. By virtue of its status some powers which should logically be delegated, cannot be. For example, while it would be possible for the board to investigate the affairs of authorised investment businesses, it could not investigate the affairs of investment businesses which are not authorised. That is clearly a major anomaly arising from the board's status.

The Government argue that the board's private status gives the whole structure a flexibility that would otherwise be lost, but that flexibility is largely illusory in practice. Furthermore, those provisions that give it flexibility undermine its independence, which, in terms of its integrity and credibility, is far more important.

My hon. and learned Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry said that the most important and fundamental disadvantage of a statutory commission involves resources. Recently, to prove his point, he gave some examples of commissions which have been set up in other countries. He said that, whatever the theory of the matter, in practice resource constraints always have an impact on public sector statutory bodies. Unfortunately, he completely overlooked the fact that we have a perfect example of such a statutory body, funded entirely by fees and under no resource restraints. It was established by the Government in the Local Government Finance Act 1982, and is the Audit Commission. My hon. and learned Friend was a little thrown by that information since he had said that the most important and fundamental disadvantage involved resources. So when the matter was raised again he shifted his ground and sought no longer to rely on the resources argument, but instead relied on the flexibility argument.

I believe strongly that the status of the Securities and Investments Board is important. I shall not rehearse all the arguments that my hon. Friend the Member for Chicester has already put so eloquently to the House this afternoon. Four points are absolutely basic. First, people in the City believe that a statutory commission will eventually come about. As that is so, should we not recognise the inevitable, and take account of it in the Financial Services Bill? Secondly, there is considerable support among Conservative Members for a strengthening of the board, and we have seen some evidence of that during the debate. Thirdly, my hon. Friend's example of the Lloyd's Act is illuminating. Only four years ago the Bill was going through the House and people were saying that it went too far. Now, presumably, nobody would say that, and most would expect the Neill inquiry to produce evidence to support the strengthening of that Act. Finally, there is the possibility of all-party co-operation. That was one of the major issues to which the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook drew our attention on Second Reading. He drew attention to a number of issues, including the exclusion of Lloyd's, but that issue was the important one and the main reason why he divided the House.

If we could reach agreement, and the City could see that there was all-party agreement for the measure and the status of the board, it would strengthen the Act-to-be and the regulations that would come afterwards. People would know that a message was going out from the House that we meant business. Earlier, I was criticised for having interests, and friends in the City, but I feel strongly that it is in their interests as well as those of investors, that we should make these changes. We have dual objectives: investor protection and market development. Therefore, it

[Mr. Tim Smith]

will be in their interests to have a strong system of regulation, as many of them recognise already. I hope that the Government will provide it.

6.7 pm

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Two or three features of the debate are fairly interesting. One is that hardly a speech of any duration from a Tory Member has supported the Government's line. Yet the Minister said that the Labour party was wrong to table the motion. A succession of Tory speeches have begged the Opposition for consensus. In other words, Tory Members accept that something is wrong and would like us to do something about it together. I hope that my hon. Friends on the Front Bench will not listen to their pleas when they say, "Let us find a sensible consensus—a sloppy approach—to the City, because then we shall play ball and everything will be all right."

The Government would like all-party agreement on City matters, but not on finishing off miners, or getting rid of millions of people in the industrial belts of the north, the midlands and even parts of the south-east. In those cases they want to be brutal and to put people on the scrap heap. Tory Members do not say to Labour Members, "Is it possible to reach all-party agreement to reduce dole queues?", or, "Can we reach all-party agreement not to increase prescription charges?" Yet today at least three of them have been bleating and asking to find such a middle way.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Can I help my hon. Friend by saying that Conservative Members are calling for what we want and for what we are asking? It is not that they are seeking a compromise; they accept that there is a genuine need for a statutory commission. Therefore, I ask my hon. Friend not to see it so much as a compromise.

Mr. Skinner: I am afraid that I cannot agree with my hon. Friend. He sits on Select Committees which have a sloppy all-party approach to everything. I do not get involved in them. I would not accuse my hon. Friend of being a member of a Select Committee in order to go on all-party trips to the Caribbean in the middle of winter because he is not one of those who would do that, but there are plenty who would use them for that purpose and for many others. I shall not get mixed up in the idea that somehow we should bail out the Government because the voters in Fulham are fed up to the back teeth with hearing about the scandals in the City, whether it be from the Back Benches, the Front Benches or anywhere else. Not likely.

The debate has been characterised by another feature as well. I think that I will carry some Conservative members with me when I say that there has been nobody here from the Social Democratic party. Yet I happen to know that the Conservatives regard the SDP as a bit of a problem in the south-east. I do not know why. Throughout the debate not a single member of the Social Democratic party has been present and there has been only one Liberal—Paddy Backdown. Yet Mr. Speaker and every hon. Member will recall when the Leader of the Social Democratic party came here at Question Time and demanded a debate on the City week after week. But when it comes to the hard grind of carrying that out, where is he? He is trying to woo the voters in Fulham—I suppose—with the rest of them.

Mr. Ashdown: There is no point in your trying to do it.

Mr. Skinner: I have been out in Fulham and there is no problem there. I can assure the hon. Gentleman, who speaks for the Liberal party on occasions, and sometimes for the Social Democratic party as well—he is trying to do it today because he has had some advice from the economic spokesman for the Social Democratic party who wrote his speech—that I do not need him to tell me what will happen in Fulham. The people in Fulham know——

Mr. Ashdown: The National Union of Mineworkers does that.

Mr. Skinner: No, it does not do that. Ask the people in the NUM and they will tell you. They will find that fanciful in the extreme. Just look at my voting record on an incomes policy.

Mr. Ashdown: The NUM tells the hon. Gentleman what to say.

Mr. Skinner: I can tell the hon. Gentleman what I am not doing. I am not doing a Yankee speech for Sikorsky like he did. That is what I am not doing. I am not selling off British interests to the Yanks across the water and then coming in here mouthing about the sell-off of British Leyland. The man is a schizophrenic. He does not know whose side he is on.

Mr. Ashdown: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Skinner: No, get down.

Mr. Ashdown *rose*——

Mr. Skinner: Get back.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Ashdown *rose*——

Mr. Skinner: No. Go and see Doctor Death. Go and see Basil.

Mr. Ashdown: The hon. Gentleman is frit.

Mr. Skinner: I am not frit. The hon. Gentleman is in the pocket of those people in that company. I wonder how much money the hon. Gentleman has made——

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is a debate about the City.

Mr. Skinner: He started it.

Mr. Ashdown: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is it not a matter of some considerable concern when an hon. Member makes an accusation, such as that which the hon. Gentleman has just made, that I may have made some money out of that particular deal? Is that not a matter upon which we need your guidance? May I repudiate that unequivocally and say in passing that it is strange to find the hon. Gentleman on the same side as the large financial institutions on the Westland issue and against the unanimously expressed view of the entire work force?

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am sure that the House will agree that the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) is honourable, as indeed is every other Member.

Mr. Skinner: Let me remind the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown), who says that I was on the side

of some consortium, that I made it plain in the House that Westland should not have gone to the Common Market consortium or to his friends in America; it should have been nationalised in the same way as Rolls-Royce was in 1971 when it ran into trouble. That was the answer and that would have provided more jobs for the workers in Yeovil than the tinpot system that the hon. Gentleman backed. In two or three years they will find out the errors of their ways.

Mr. Ashdown: Fifteen hundred to one.

Mr. Skinner: The hon. Gentleman is like the rest of the Tories. He is more concerned about looking after the casino economy than looking after those sections of British industry that have been hammered unmercifully throughout the past seven years.

The debate has been about the fact that the Government have at last acknowledged that in the pursuit of so-called monetarism in the industrial belts of Britain they have allowed the City to ignore market forces and have gone to the extent of intervening in eight or nine different ways so that the City did not carry out the philosophy of the Prime Minister.

We have heard so much about industry not going forward with a begging bowl, yet when it comes to the City the Government do not practise monetarism at all. They never have done. They have rigged the market from beginning to end. The easiest way to rig the market in favour of the City and the bankers is to have high interest rates in which the margin for error is so large that they are bound to make money. That is why bank profits during the past five or six years have been massive in comparison with previous years. That is one of the ways in which the City has never had to practise monetarism like the rest of British industry, the nationalised industries, local government services and all the rest.

The Government have managed to rig the City by intervening on a massive scale when the banks have run into trouble. I do not want dwell on Johnson Matthey Bankers, but the fact is that during that period when the banks were bailed out, especially Johnson Matthey with £100 million of taxpayers' money, the Government were telling the miners that the pits could not be kept open because they were uneconomic. The Government have rigged the market in favour of the City by encouraging the fraud squad to do nothing about following up all the crooks that have been making millions of pounds.

I said earlier that two people from the PCW syndicate in the City—Peter Cameron-Webb and Peter Dixon—are both living in the United States and have got away with £39 million. That is not my figure; it is what the Lloyd's investigation showed. A writ was served upon Peter Dixon a few weeks ago in America, but somehow or other our wonderful fraud squad cannot find that man in order to pursue this £39 million swindle. People on social security are hounded day in and day out by those people, but they cannot find people from the City.

Then there is the hiding of reports on the City. When the auditors went into Johnson Matthey Bankers there was a Price Waterhouse report. No Labour Member has ever managed to see what was in that report. Yet when it comes to Lambeth and Liverpool and an auditor goes in there over a matter of only £250,000 between 80 councillors, when it is not a matter of fraud at all but of supporting the services, what happens? The Government then encourage the district auditor and all their friends in the Tory courts to hammer those 80 councillors because they were looking after their own people.

The Government have rigged the market in favour of the City on privatisation to something of the order of £3 billion. They do not practise monetarism there. There was no monetarism involved in the privatisation efforts. They simply went in there and picked up money for old rope. The abolition of exchange controls also favoured the City. it did not provide jobs in Bolsover, Workington or Yeovil, but it provided jobs overseas and made more money for the City. About £50,000 million was involved.

The Government have rigged the City by giving it many privileges. There are no ballots in the City. Trade unions must conduct ballots on almost every subject under the sun, but when it comes to Lloyd's, the Government say, "It is only a betting shop. We cannot have laws in there. We will have a system of self-regulation. They are all honest men, like Members of Parliament." What a laugh. *[Laughter.]* Hon. Members laugh because they have got the message. They are considered to be honest men, yet they have been making millions for donkeys' years. My point is that, during the past seven years, they have been able to make money more easily. With real interest rates over and above the inflation rate and the highest that we have ever experienced, the City has made money hand over fist.

Hon. Members have talked about insider trading. Let us suppose that workers could play about with insider trading. Can one imagine a trade union being involved in something like that? The Tory press would hammer at it daily — *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) should listen. He is one of those who have made money from the City, as has the hon. Member for Chichester (Mr. Nelson). The latter used to be called one of the Slater Walker young blades. What happened to Slater Walker? The Labour Government picked up the pieces of that secondary banking chaos, but did any people involved with Slater Walker have to pay? Of course not. But the miners have been victimised; 500 or 600 of them cannot find jobs. No one in Slater Walker had his knuckles rapped. Members of Parliament were attached to the myriad of unit trusts that spread from one continent to another. That is why they have been able to rig the market.

One of the strongest weapons used by the Government to rig the market in the City so that it need not practise the philosophy of monetarism and market forces, as the rest of the British economy is expected to do, is that one in eight Tory Members of Parliament is a member of Lloyd's and some of the others are names at Lloyd's.

Mr. Ashdown: What about the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell)?

Mr. Skinner: He answers for himself. It is none of my business.

In addition, my investigations show that one in three Tory Back-Bench Members is connected with the City. Friends of the hon. Member for Yeovil also have connections with the City.

Mr. Ashdown: There is one on the Labour Front Bench—the hon. Member for Middlesbrough.

Mr. Skinner: Listen to this, Paddy Backdown. The latest recruit to the City is the hon. Member for Stockton,

[Mr. Skinner]

South (Mr. Wrigglesworth), who is economic spokesman for the Social Democratic party. He has joined Barclays bank, which is noted for some of the most lurid practices in the dark alleyways of South Africa. The hon. Gentleman is joined with people who support the apartheid system which operates against the coloured millions in South Africa.

One in two members of the Cabinet has had connections with the City at some time. This debate will not receive the reporting that it deserves because the Tory press, by and large, supports the principles put forward by Conservative Members.

During the past few years, not only Members of Parliament have sussed out what is happening. The electorate has suddenly realised that the Government operate double standards — that they have been hammering the workers for seven years, depriving them of jobs, and pushing up prescription charges by 1,000 per cent., while the racketeers and crooks in the City of London get away scot-free. Despite all the rigging, the electorate is beginning to discover the truth. That is why, in Fulham, the Tory party can get ready for the first of many defeats, leading to a general election in which the vast majority of the people will send them packing, as they should have done a long time ago.

6.24 pm

Mr. Richard Ottaway (Nottingham, North): I feel quite exhausted Mr. Speaker. It is worth remembering, when the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) talks about the ease with which money flows among countries, how easy it was for the NUM to move its funds to Luxembourg and Ireland.

Fraud in the City did not start in 1979, when the Government came to power. The first modern fraud was probably the tulip fraud of the 17th century, which was closely followed by the South Sea bubble fraud. The latter was primarily remarkable for the way in which shares increased fom £129 in February to £1,000 in August and down to £190 a couple of weeks later. Many people made money from it and many people lost money. I am told that a major beneficiary was the Prince of Wales. The Prime Minister, Robert Walpole, made enough money to refurbish his stately home. The Chancellor of the Exchequer made about £750,000—this was in 1720. Unfortunately one person who is reported to have lost money was the Queen's physician, who lost £80,000.

If one considers the frauds that have taken place during the past 20 years under Tory and Labour Governments one realises that they are affected not by party politics but by human nature. In 1966, the Stock Exchange Council disciplined six firms for

"facilitating deals which could lead to tax evasion."

They were engaged in bond washing. *The Times* of the day commented:

"Whoever is to blame in this unhappy chain of events, credit must be given to the Exchange for taking action to eradicate this form of tax evasion."

That is a classic example of self-regulation at work.

The most celebrated fraud case of 1967 involved the Ceylonese-born business man, Dr. Emil Savundra. He was arrested in February 1967 and charged with forgery as a result of activities through his company Fire, Auto and Marine Insurance Co. After a long trial, he was sent to prison. That case caught the imagination of the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, the right hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Callaghan), who expressed concern about illegal currency transactions on the free currency markets and pledged measures to reduce them. A day later, in a debate in the House, Mr. Edward Lyons, the former Member for Bradford, East, said that large scale fraud could be "today's fastest-growing industry." That is not a swipe at the Opposition. I mention it simply to show that fraud has continued for decades.

In 1969, several stockbrokers were hammered for conspiracy to defraud. In Scotland, stockbrokers were suspended for the first time in the history of the Scottish stock exchange. In 1974, the Dowgate and General Investments fraud involved £5·2 million. The most sensational case in 1974 and 1975 involved a former Labour Minister, Mr. John Stonehouse. It was announced that year that the head of Scotland yard's fraud squad was to lead the investigation. A series of financial irregularities surfaced, and Mr. Stonehouse was convicted.

In 1975, there were many frauds involving employees of the National Westminster bank, Barclays bank, property companies and gold mining companies. Metropolitan police detectives were found guilty of conspiracy to defraud. Slater Walker is yet another name that features in the history of fraud in the City.

In 1976, as a result of anxiety about fraud and other difficulties in the City, the then Harold Wilson set up a committee to investigate the financial institutions. Later that year, the City of London police annual report said that detectives had handled frauds worth £150 million in 1977, compared with £90 million the year before. The strength of the fraud squad had to be increased by nearly one quarter. The Commissioner of Police for the City of London, Mr. Peter Marshall, said large-scale fraud was an ever-increasing commitment.

I put these examples forward merely to illustrate that whatever party is in power there will always be fraud in the City. I have no difficulty in supporting the Government's amendment.

6.30 pm

Mr. Brian Gould (Dagenham): For good or ill, the City of London has dominated the news headlines for some months past and therefore it is appropriate to debate these matters today. Of all the issues that have been in the news, the most newsworthy has been fraud, although I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) that that is not necessarily the most important of the issues.

It was astonishing that the Chief Secretary's speech appeared to contain no recognition of the sense of outrage that so many ordinary people feel about the scale of City crime and about the greed of those responsible. They feel a sense of outrage not just on those very understandable grounds, but because of their accurate perception that those responsible for these massive crimes have largely escaped unpunished. The most remarkable feature of the past few years is that those substantial criminals against whom important charges could and should be brought have, in effect, escaped completely.

That is bad for public life in general and for the City's reputation, and it has earned for the City of London a reputation as the fraud capital of the world, which does us great damage. The failures that underlie that situation are partly a matter of a lack of commitment and resources

—something that the Government very belatedly and very parsimoniously are attempting to deal with. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Sparkbrook pointed out, there is a sharp and rather poignant contrast with the way in which City fraud is dealt with and the resources devoted to social security fraud. We have made that point before. Partly it is a matter of a simple failure of the regulatory authorities. No one would dispute — it has been conceded even by the Chancellor of the Exchequer — that the Johnson Matthey case was a blatant example of the Bank of England simply falling down on the job.

More worrying that any of these factors is the fact that these failures and frauds have arisen from the prevailing climate in the City. It is a fact that they have arisen as an incidental to the whole business of self-regulation. That is what must concern the House, and it is to that that we are rightly addressing ourselves.

If one were to take Lloyd's as the paradigm of the way in which self-regulation works, we can see that the problem is not just that there are a few criminals on the margins — wherever there are large sums of money sloshing around people will try to break the rules. That is not the explanation of what happened at Lloyd's. The offshore arrangements, the reinsurance deals, the preferred syndicates, the baby syndicates — all those instruments which become the vehicles for fraud—were embraced and taken on by those at the heart of the Lloyd's establishment, who were tainted by those practices. At Lloyd's, the regulators themselves became tarnished by the very practices that they should have been outlawing. It is from that basis that the House should approach the whole question of regulating the City.

In case anybody should argue, as is sometimes done, that these are matters of history, let me emphasis, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Sparkbrook did, that we are still living in a climate in which fraud is endemic and insider deals are reaching epidemic proportions. The practices that accompanied the flotation of British Telecom shares show how easily the City institutions were prepared to cross that line between their professional obligations and their personal deals.

These are the matters that concern us, and form the case for effective regulation. It was that case that led to the request to Professor Gower to produce his report, and to the Financial Services Bill. However, I am afraid that the Bill shows that the Government have not yet appreciated that the concern about fraud was, long before the Financial Services Bill appeared, overtaken by another massive development, the so-called big bang.

That magnifies our concern and makes it even more important that we should get things right. The development was initiated and given an impetus by a deal done by the right hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Parkinson) when he was Secretary of State for Trade, and Sir Nicholas Goodison, which was clearly meant to forestall change. As soon as a glimmer of change appeared, a frenetic pace of activity was engendered.

We now see developing before us a City of London that is quite different from the institution at which Professor Gower looked. It will be dominated by huge, international financial conglomerates where the technological changes will make it extremely difficult to keep track of what is going on. As a result, far from the old institutional safeguards, inadequate though they were, remaining in place to deal with problems such as conflicts of interest in the City of today and tomorrow, conflicts of interest will be there deliberately. They will be deliberately built in as part of the operation of the City of London. Sometimes, I suspect that even the City has not woken up to the new climate in which it will be operating.

All this makes it even more important that we get it right. The City will have to compete internationally— the blast of international competition will be fierce— and an important factor will be the level of investor protection that is offered. The other factors are speed, comprehensiveness, accuracy and price competitiveness. If we fail to meet the standards that are now taken for granted in most of the world's capital markets, we should not be surprised if business leaves London in large quantities. We have already seen, in the example of the collapse of the tin market, that when investors get their fingers burned, whatever the reasons, the knock-on damage is not just on the institution or market that is involved; it has consequences throughout the operation of the City of London. Let that be a warning.

I am afraid that, when the Government approached some of these problems when they introduced the Financial Services Bill, they did so in terms that showed that they were simply not willing to do what is needed, as has been said so often. The problem with that Bill is that when we asked the simple question, "Who is to regulate the City under its provisions?" there was no answer. This point was put extremely persuasively by the hon. Member for Chichester (Mr. Nelson). When we inquired further, we discovered that the body that is to undertake this vitally important role is the Securities and Investments Board Ltd., which is a private company. The fact that it is universally referred to as the Securities and Investments Board is Government propaganda, backed up by a provision in the Bill that will entitle that type of company to dispense with the word "limited" in its title. One can hardly have any more convincing argument about the Government's embarrassment over this than the fact that they have attempted to legislate specifically to conceal the fact that they are giving powers to a private company.

I am extremely disappointed—I make no bones about this, as it is well known to the Minister — by the Government's continuing opposition to putting in place a self-standing, independent and truly effective statutory body to undertake this task. In setting their face against that, Ministers are failing to go as far as even City opinion would now go. The City accepts, if not the desirability, the inevitability, of a statutory commission to undertake this major responsibility.

If the Government persist in their current attitude, the City should understand that it is the Government's intransigence that is condemning the City to a future of uncertainty and instability on this crucial issue. We would be obliged to legislate on that matter when we return to Government and we shall do that.

I would like to refer to another matter which has been in the headlines. That issue was raised extremely powerfully by the right hon. and learned Member for Hexham (Mr. Rippon). He referred to merger mania. I would like to add to the statistics that have been offered so far in the debate. The capital involved in takeover bids since the beginning of 1985—just over a year ago— approaches the £18 billion that we currently devote to the defence budget. That is a measure of the scale of what is happening.

Such a volume of mergers is an indictment of the Government's economic policy. It means that cash-rich

[Mr. Brian Gould]

companies have nothing better to do with their money—certainly they do not want to invest in new productive capacity—than to go hunting for victims in the takeover market.

That development is extremely worrying on a number of counts. It creates that casino atmosphere that so disfigures the City. It is worrying because it diverts management attention essentially to protection and to short-term optimisation of performance and to all the short-term matters which have been the bane of British economic and industrial management for so long. It is also worrying because of the opportunities it provides for abuse.

We do not need to look far to see reports that in the frenetic atmosphere created by takeover bids, insider dealing has again emerged on a massive scale. This time, insider dealing has taken the precaution of operating through offshore companies and nominee shareholders.

I hope that the Minister will answer the following point when he replies. Is it true that when the stock exchange referred some of these matters to the DTI because it felt unable to deal with them effectively, it was told by the Department that it should not be bothered with such matters? That is what press reports have said and I hope that the Minister will take the opportunity to repudiate it.

An urgent reappraisal of that policy is needed now. There should not be a leisurely review which the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry is proposing to embark upon at some point. We need an urgent reappraisal so that we can return and restore some semblance of stability and sanity to the City. I give notice once more that, in the absence of any major changes in Government policy, a Labour Government would be compelled to legislate in that area to ensure that there was a proper inhibition upon ill-founded attempts simply to take over companies for less than obvious and good motives.

What is happening on the takeover front is part of a more general concern which my right hon. Friend the Member for Sparkbrook accurately referred to as the City's role as provider of finance to industry. I do not propose to labour that point but I would be astonished if anybody on the Government Benches could say that they were satisfied by the level and pattern of British investment at present. Any international comparison of merit or thoroughness will show that British investment lags behind. It is not so far-fetched as some Government spokesmen would have us believe to suggest that there may be a connection between our poor performance on the investment front and the means and institutions by which investment is provided as opposed to the means and institutions that apply in other and more successful countries.

The City's traditional defence to that complaint is that it is perfectly prepared to provide the money. It says that there is no shortage of money. The City claims that there is a shortage of adequate projects to which to lend money. If that were true, as it may be, what an indictment that is of Government economic policy. That indictment is lying in the mouths of some of the Government's best friends in the City of London. The Government have so managed the economy that no industrialist worth his salt could find projects worth investing in in the British economy. Presumably that is why that money is flooding abroad in such vast quantities.

Even on that issue, the City cannot escape the blame. The City is an obstacle to sensible macro-economic policy. It willingly embraced monetarism, and said, "Yes, monetarism is marvellous and accords with our political prejudices." The City, perhaps not unnaturally, found it extremely congenial to adopt a policy which said that economic salvation turned on one or two simple measures. It thought that that was a good idea, as those measures were entirely within its control. That is the extent to which, over the past seven years, the Government have abdicated the true control over macro-economic policy in this country.

The next Labour Government will give priority not to the City's interests but to the real economy—to the jobs, output and investment in our real economy. We cannot survive in an economy which is declining at the current rate. The City ought to recognise that it too cannot survive in such an economy as it cannot meet international competition from more powerful capital markets based on much more powerful economies.

The Opposition want to see the City prosper. We recognise that the City, like many other important parts of our economy, earns valuable foreign exchange and provides important areas of employment. Our quarrel in this debate is not essentially with the City. Our charge lies against the Government. The Government have allowed an unhealthy, not to say incestuous, relationship to develop between themselves and the City. The Government are too soft on fraud, and too weak-kneed to take effective regulatory action. They are too tolerant of the casino atmosphere which has developed and are too blind to the City's deficiencies as the provider of finance.

The Government are too subservient to the City's prejudices on economic policy. A Labour Government will insist on a different relationship with the City. We shall insist on a working relationship in which the City would be helped to succeed but in which it would also be required to play its full part as a servant of industry and an instrument of Government and meet its full obligations to the community as a whole.

6.47 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Michael Howard): The debate has been largely about the City. The central point about the City, although one would be hard pressed to detect it from anything said by Opposition Members, is that the City is a success. It is one of the outstanding successes of our economy.

The Opposition constantly tell us how much they care about our national economy, foreign earnings and jobs. Measured by those criteria, the performance of the City is a matter not for the carping criticism of Opposition Members, but for congratulation.

My right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury quoted the figure for jobs in financial and business services. He said that 400,000 extra jobs have been created since 1974 and over 200,000 extra jobs since 1979. He gave the figure for total net earnings from abroad which amounted to more than £6 billion in 1984. Last year, the City raised more than £5 billion for industrial and commercial companies. That figure gives the lie to some of the more extravagant points made by the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) in his closing remarks.

A great deal of that success is due to the City's international competitiveness. More than one quarter of all

international bank lending is arranged in London. One fifth of the total insurance business available on international markets is carried out in London. London is the main world centre for Eurocurrency dealings and it, houses one third of the world's foreign exchange markets and an expanding international futures exchange. It is also the world centre for project finance, shipping and air freight brokerage and many commodity markets.

London attracts huge volumes of business which has no natural reason to come here. There is no law of nature which compels Australian owners to insure the risks that they incur in the United States of America with London insurers or which compels West German purchasers of Japanese shares to deal through London stock brokers or Dutch borrowers to raise Swiss currency through London bankers. That business is conducted in London because the City is efficient, competitive and convenient.

Yet one searches the Opposition's motion and the speeches made by Opposition Members in vain for any hint of recognition of that success. Why should that be so? Is it because the Opposition are so myopic that they do not recognise success when it stares them in the face? Or is it because they do not acknowledge success when they recognise it unless it fits into some Socialist stereotype and represents the world as they would like it to be rather than the world as it is?

The motion calls for an adequate system of regulation and supervision of the financial services sector. Of course that is necessary. That is why we have introduced the Financial Services Bill. We shall no doubt have another opportunity — I am conscious of the ruling that you made, Mr. Speaker, at the outset of our proceedings— to compare some of the things that the hon. Member for Dagenham said about regulation this afternoon and some of the things that he said about regulation in other proceedings.

The Financial Services Bill includes a number of measures which will help in the fight against fraud and malpractice generally. The requirement to be authorised will be extended to all types of investment business. If anyone carries out investment business without being authorised, he will be guilty of a criminal offence. There will be greater potential for the use of non-criminal sanctions where the standard of proof is less demanding and the scope for rapid action greater. There will be a wide range of such sanctions, running from injunctions and restitution orders to suspension and withdrawal of authorisation. Existing powers of investigation will be widened and compensation schemes funded by authorised businesses will protect customers and provide support for rigorous enforcement. The Bill is a comprehensive measure which will provide an effective system of regulation and supervision of the financial services of our economy.

Mr. Nelson *rose*——

Mr. Howard: I am about to deal with some of the points raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr. Nelson). Perhaps he will allow me to deal with them before I give way to him.

My hon. Friends the Members for Chichester and for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) have made cogent points today and in Standing Committee. They differ with me on where the balance should lie in the Bill with respect to the powers entrusted to the designated agency and the powers which the Secretary of State is to retain. Those differences do not affect the powers which the Bill provides. They merely affect the repository of those powers. We have a genuine difference, but we share a common objective of getting the maximum possible investor protection.

As I have explained, I take the view that investor protection is increased if the designated agency is made accountable. I take the view that that leads to a more effective system. If the designated agency is made less accountable, as suggested by my hon. Friends the Members for Chichester and for Beaconsfield, it may have some advantages. I believe that the disadvantages outweigh those advantages. No doubt we shall continue to debate those issues as we have done in Standing Committee.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Is the hon. and learned Gentleman aware of the great public concern about the fact that a private company, SIB plc, will be responsible for monitoring all the powers he has identified during his speech? Does he recognise that the wider public will never understand how it is possible for a private company to secure this police monitoring role of City institutions? Will he reconsider that point?

Mr. Howard: The public concern is for an effective system of investor protection. That is what we must provide. I have explained that, although some hon. Members—admittedly on both sides of the House—take one view as to the best means of achieving that objective, my view is that the best method is the one originally enshrined in the Bill.

The Bill is not the only measure on which we rely. My right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary referred to the Roskill committee and the important changes relating to fraud trials which it suggested. Taking into account the changes made in company law in the early years of this Government, the Insolvency Bill, which reached the statute book last year, the Financial Services Bill and the Roskill committee's recommendations, I believe that the Government have put forward the most comprehensive package of measures for dealing with fraud and malpractice that we shall probably ever see.

I should like to single out one provision to which many hon. Members have referred — insider dealing. Undoubtedly, that is one of the most pernicious practices to blight financial markets. It is by no means unique to London. It is a particularly difficult practice to detect and to deal with. Clause 147 of the Financial Services Bill gives unprecedented powers to investigate allegations of insider dealing. Under that clause, inspectors will have the power to compel a person, on pain of contempt of court, to be examined on oath and to use in evidence against him any statement made by a person in such circumstances. Let no one underestimate the seriousness of this provision. It takes away the right of a person not to incriminate himself. It has rightly been described as draconian. We have been criticised for writing it into the Bill. If ever there were any doubt about the Government's seriousness in dealing with fraud and malpractice, I suggest that the most cursory examination of clause 147 of the Financial Services Bill will put such doubts to rest.

I respond directly to the point raised by the hon. Member for Dagenham. Of course it is not the case that my Department has said that it cannot be bothered with cases of insider dealing. The difficulty at the moment is

[Mr. Howard]

that the powers are not adequate to get the evidence necessary to satisfy a criminal burden of proof in the criminal courts for prosecution. We very much hope that the powers in clause 147 will enable more prosecutions to be brought for that offence.

Any innocent person coming to this subject afresh, reading the motion, and listening to Labour Members could be forgiven for concluding that the Labour party had a monopoly of concern about fraud, a monopoly on the desire for effective action to be taken against it. I always prefer to test the words of Labour Members by their deeds.

It is in that context that I should like to refer to the activities of the hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore). A short time ago, the hon. Gentleman had an exchange of correspondence with the head of the fraud squad, an exchange of which the hon. Gentleman spoke openly to the press at the time. The head of the fraud squad asked the hon. Gentleman to consider carefully the consequences to the police inquiries of publicising evidence which he had passed to the police and proposes to pass to them.

The head of the fraud squad described these consequences. He said:

"Suspects and evidence will disappear: potential witnesses will be identified and pestered by the press so that by the time they have been seen by the police they will have been scared off, or their evidence will be tainted by embellishments suggested by others."

Mr. Sedgemore *rose*——

Mr. Howard: I shall give way in a moment.

The head of the fraud squad continued:

"officers will be (and have been) diverted from high-priority enquiries which have not been publicised to low-priority enquiries which have simply to preserve evidence before it is destroyed or spoiled beyond redemption."

He also said:

"I cannot understand how it can possibly be in the public interest for any such information to be disclosed contemporaneously to the world at large."

Mr. Sedgemore: Will the hon. and learned Gentleman accept that several months ago I made that correspondence public to the press and that, in fact, not only have I been helping the fraud squad since, but I am seeing a detective superintendent next Thursday to help them with their inquiries?

Mr. Howard: I am delighted to hear that. Let us see whether the hon. Gentleman's conduct has matched the warning which he was given by the head of fraud squad.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Withdraw.

Mr. Howard: When the hon. Gentleman was given that warning, did he recognise, in his apparent desire to bring criminals to justice, the damage to that very cause which his activity was causing? Not a bit of it. He replied to the head of the fraud squad by criticising the fraud squad. That poses questions for Labour Front Benchers. Do they approve of the activities of the hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch? Do they approve of his refusal to comply with the request of the head of the fraud squad? Do they really want to see criminals brought to justice? Will they publicly disown the hon. Gentleman's activities? Will they persuade him to co-operate with the head of the fraud squad to ensure that those who have committed offences pay the penalty? *[Interruption.]* I shall happily give way to the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) if he decides to put the record straight without further ado.

Mr. Hattersley: I was hoping that the Under-Secretary of State would make a sensible speech, but my hopes have been dashed.

Mr. Howard: That falls a long way short of answering the question. That is the right hon. Gentleman's response to the invitation I have extended to him. If the right hon. Gentleman is seeking to persuade the British people that the task of dealing with fraud is safer in his hands and in the hands of the hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch than in the hands of the head of the fraud squad, he has a fairly uphill task ahead of him.

The City is a success. The denigration to which it has been subjected by Opposition Members serves only to demonstrate their——

Mr. James Hamilton (Motherwell, North) *rose in his place and claimed to move,* That the Question be now put.

Question, That the Question be now put, *put and agreed to.*

Question put accordingly, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 181, Noes 308.

Division No. 99] **[7.00 pm**

AYES

Abse, Leo
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Bagier, Gordon A. T.
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnett, Guy
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Anthony
Boothroyd, Miss Betty
Boyes, Roland
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'rmline E)*
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Brown, R. *(N'c'tle-upon-Tyne N)*
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Ian
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Carter-Jones, Lewis
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Thomas
Clay, Robert
Clelland, David Gordon
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cocks, Rt Hon M. *(Bristol S)*
Cohen, Harry
Conlan, Bernard
Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cox, Thomas *(Tooting)*
Craigen, J. M.
Crowther, Stan
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(L'lli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Donald
Dobson, Frank
Dormand, Jack
Dubs, Alfred
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eastham, Ken
Edwards, Bob *(W'h'mpt'n SE)*
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forrester, John
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
Garrett, W. E.
Godman, Dr Norman
Golding, John
Gould, Bryan
Gourlay, Harry
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hamilton, W. W. *(Fife Central)*
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Hart, Rt Hon Dame Judith
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heffer, Eric S.
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart *(Vauxhall)*
Home Robertson, John
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Janner, Hon Greville
John, Brynmor
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kilroy-Silk, Robert

Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ronald
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McCartney, Hugh
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McKay, Allen *(Penistone)*
McKelvey, William
MacKenzie, Rt Hon Gregor
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Robert
Madden, Max
Mallon, Seamus
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Maxton, John
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meacher, Michael
Michie, William
Mikardo, Ian
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Miller, Dr M. S. *(E Kilbride)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Pavitt, Laurie
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter
Prescott, John
Radice, Giles
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Richardson, Ms Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, G. *(Coventry NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, J. W.
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ryman, John
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Ms Clare *(Ladywood)*
Short, Mrs R.*(W'hampt'n NE)*
Silkin, Rt Hon J.
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C.*(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(M'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Stewart, Rt Hon D. *(W Isles)*
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Thomas, Dafydd *(Merioneth)*
Thomas, Dr R. *(Carmarthen)*
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Tinn, James
Torney, Tom
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert
Weetch, Ken
Welsh, Michael
White, James
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon A.
Wilson, Gordon
Winnick, David
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Ray Powell and
Mr. Ron Davies.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alton, David
Ancram, Michael
Arnold, Tom
Ashby, David
Ashdown, Paddy
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Atkinson, David *(B'm'th E)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Beith, A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Benyon, William
Best, Keith
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'to'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Boyson, Dr Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brinton, Tim
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Bruinvels, Peter
Bryan, Sir Paul
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon A.
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nick
Butcher, John
Butler, Rt Hon Sir Adam
Butterfill, John
Carlile, Alexander *(Montg'y)*
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carlisle, Rt Hon M. *(W'ton S)*
Carttiss, Michael
Cartwright, John
Cash, William
Chalker, Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Clark, Hon A. *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Cockeram, Eric
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Cormack, Patrick
Corrie, John
Couchman, James
Critchley, Julian
Crouch, David
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Dover, Den
du Cann, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Dunn, Robert
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evennett, David
Eyre, Sir Reginald
Fairbairn, Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Anthony
Fletcher, Alexander
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Freeman, Roger
Freud, Clement
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Gardiner, George *(Reigate)*
Gardner, Sir Edward *(Fylde)*
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Greenway, Harry
Griffiths, Sir Eldon
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John S
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Harvey, Robert
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, J.
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Henderson, Barry
Hickmet, Richard
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hirst, Michael
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Stratf'd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(G'ldford)*
Howell, Ralph *(Norfolk, N)*
Howells, Geraint
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irving, Charles
Jackson, Robert
Jenkins, Rt Hon Roy *(Hillh'd)*
Jessel, Toby
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Joseph, Rt Hon Sir Keith
Kellett-Bowman, Mrs Elaine
Kennedy, Charles
Kershaw, Sir Anthony
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
McCrindle, Robert
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
Major, John
Malone, Gerald
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Mather, Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Meadowcroft, Michael
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Hal *(B'grove)*
Mills, Sir Peter *(West Devon)*
Miscampbell, Norman
Moate, Roger
Morris, M. *(N'hampton S)*
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steven
Onslow, Cranley
Ottaway, Richard
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Parris, Matthew
Pawsey, James
Penhaligon, David
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Pym, Rt Hon Francis
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rees, Rt Hon Peter *(Dover)*
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rippon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*

Robinson, Mark *(N'port W)*
Ross, Stephen *(Isle of Wight)*
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Silvester, Fred
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Cyril *(Rochdale)*
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speller, Tony
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon John
Steel, Rt Hon David
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(Hertf'dshire N)*
Stokes, John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Terlezki, Stefan
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waddington, David
Wainwright, R.
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Wall, Sir Patrick
Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watson, John
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Michael
Wrigglesworth, Ian
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Tony Durant and
Mr. Donald Thompson.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 33 (Questions on amendments)*:—

The House divided: Ayes 243, Noes 34.

Division No. 100] **[7.13 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Ancram, Michael
Arnold, Tom
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Atkinson, David *(B'm'th E)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Benyon, William
Best, Keith
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'to'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Boyson, Dr Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brinton, Tim
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Bryan, Sir Paul
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon A.
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nick
Butcher, John
Butler, Rt Hon Sir Adam
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Cockeram, Eric
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Cormack, Patrick
Corrie, John
Couchman, James
Crouch, David
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
du Cann, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Dunn, Robert
Dykes, Hugh
Emery, Sir Peter
Evennett, David
Eyre, Sir Reginald
Fairbairn, Nicholas
Favell, Anthony
Fletcher, Alexander
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Freeman, Roger
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Gardiner, George *(Reigate)*
Gardner, Sir Edward *(Fylde)*
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Gorst, John
Gower, Sir Raymond
Greenway, Harry
Griffiths, Sir Eldon
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John S
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Harvey, Robert
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, J.
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Henderson, Barry
Hickmet, Richard
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hirst, Michael
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Holt, Richard
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Stratf'd-on-A)*
Howell, Ralph *(Norfolk, N)*
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Irving, Charles
Jackson, Robert
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Joseph, Rt Hon Sir Keith
Kellett-Bowman, Mrs Elaine
Kershaw, Sir Anthony
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lightbown, David
Lloyd, Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
McCrindle, Robert
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
Major, John
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Mather, Carol
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Hal *(B'grove)*
Miscampbell, Norman
Moate, Roger
Morris, M. *(N'hampton S)*
Nelson, Anthony
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steven
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Pawsey, James
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Pym, Rt Hon Francis
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rees, Rt Hon Peter *(Dover)*
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rippon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Robinson, Mark *(N'port W)*
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Silvester, Fred
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speller, Tony
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stokes, John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman

Temple-Morris, Peter
Terlezki, Stefan
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waddington, David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watson, John
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Tony Durant and
Mr. Gerald Malone.

NOES

Alton, David
Ashdown, Paddy
Beith, A. J.
Bruce, Malcolm
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Carlile, Alexander *(Montg'y)*
Clay, Robert
Deakins, Eric
Freud, Clement
Heffer, Eric S.
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Jenkins, Rt Hon Roy *(Hillh'd)*
Johnston, Sir Russell
Kennedy, Charles
Kirkwood, Archy
Loyden, Edward
Maclennan, Robert
Madden, Max
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Meadowcroft, Michael
Michie, William
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Penhaligon, David
Ross, Stephen *(Isle of Wight)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Cyril *(Rochdale)*
Steel, Rt Hon David
Thomas, Dafydd *(Merioneth)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Wainwright, R.
Wilson, Gordon
Wrigglesworth, Ian

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John Cartwright and
Mr. James Wallace.

Question accordingly agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House recognises the continuing and increasing contribution being made by the financial services industry in the United Kingdom to wealth creation and employment; and welcomes the Government's measures to remove obstacles to the efficient operation of the market in financial services, to improve the regulatory framework in the whole financial services sector and to deter and punish fraud.

Student Support

7.24 pm

Mr. Giles Radice (Durham, North): I beg to move,

That this House deplores the Government's announcement of only a two per cent. increase for next year in the student grant, which is a further cut in real terms in addition to the 17 per cent. reduction in value since 1979; and condemns the Government's policies of restricting the access of students to the social security system whilst failing to make up the losses, which will be severe for students who have no other form of income.

The Government's record on student grants is widely recognised to be deplorable. Since 1979 it has steadily and consistently eroded the student grant system, which was, I would remind the House, established by a Conservative Government in 1962 and supported and developed by subsequent Conservative and Labour Governments. Hon. Members are only too familiar with what has happened. By next year the real value of the student grant will have fallen by about 20 per cent. The level of the parental contribution has increased sharply. In addition, students have lost their right to be reimbursed for their travel costs —and I see that the hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Crouch) is in his place.

Mrs. Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): That is very cryptic,

Mr. Radice: It is not cryptic, because Canterbury university is in the hon. Member's constituency and I know that there have been many protests from the students of that university about their travel costs.

One of the most depressing features of the Government's policies is that, as local education authority spending has been squeezed, the number and value of the so-called discretionary grants provided by local councils have also fallen significantly.

On top of all this, the Government announced in their White Paper "Reform of Social Security" that they propose to amend the existing regulations on entitlement to supplementary benefit and housing benefit for students, to remove all full-time students' entitlement to supplementary benefit and unemployment benefit in the short vacations, to remove entitlement to housing benefit for students in halls of residence, and to modify and reduce entitlement to housing benefit in all vacations. These proposals, it was said, were seen as a first step towards removing students from entitlement to social security as a whole.

It is true — I fully accept this — that some compensation for the loss of benefit is to be introduced. Students living away from home will receive £36 a year.

My hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) will be dealing in more detail with what the Government are proposing. I merely draw attention to the Prime Minister's reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett), when she made it clear that at least half the students are likely to face a loss of income. The National Union of Students believes it would be even worse.

No wonder that the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals has said that the system of student financial support is now in an advanced state of decay. No wonder that the rector of Glasgow University, the vice-chancellor of East Anglia and the vice-chancellor of Durham have all separately warned about the consequences of Government policies. The vice-chancellor of Durham has told parents

[Mr. Radice]

that financial difficulties are now driving some students out of higher education, while the vice-chancellor of East Anglia and the rector of Glasgow have both said that financial hardship is having an adverse effect on some students' academic performance. I am merely quoting what vice-chancellors have said, and I should have thought that Government Members would also take some account of this.

It is no wonder that, shortly before Christmas, the hon. Member for Cambridge (Mr. Rhodes James)—the hon. Gentleman has courteously informed me that, although he is not able to be present for the beginning of the debate, he will be present later—resigned as the Government's higher education officer. He told the Prime Minister when he resigned:

"the squeeze on university finances has now become intolerable, and the last straw was the decision to give a 2 per cent. increase in student grants coupled with removing all benefits."

He added:

"Students have suffered cuts in real terms of something like 19 per cent. since the Tories came to office."

He continued:

"I have always seen it as my job to encourage young people to go into higher education and I fear that what the Government has done, and is doing, is in absolutely the opposite direction."

That is what the hon. Gentleman told the Prime Minister, and all credit to him for his courage in saying openly what many Conservative Members are saying in private.

I agree with the hon. Member for Cambridge that the Government are moving in the wrong direction. However, at times it has been difficult to discern exactly what the Government's policy is on student financial support. The House will remember that, at the end of 1984, the Secretary of State found himself in rather a mess with Conservative Back Benchers over his plan to make tuition fees liable to parental contribution. In announcing his climbdown to the House, he spoke of his intention to review the system. He said specifically that the review would include an examination of the feasibility of replacing student grants with student loans.

We were told by the press during the summer of 1985 that the Cabinet had vetoed the Secretary of State's pet proposal that the review should recommend the introduction of student loans. If those reports were not accurate, I have no doubt that the right hon. Gentleman will tell us when he speaks. After that, the right hon. Gentleman was clearly at a loss to know what to say. After months of prevarication he announced that the promised review would not be published and that he would not be bringing forward proposals for reforming the grant system. After all that, the right hon. Gentleman is left with a policy of cut, cut and cut again.

The Secretary of State told me in January—this was in justification of his position—that he thought it right that students should share with other responsible adults some of the burden of holding down public expenditure, thus helping to regenerate our economy to the ultimate benefit of everyone, including students and their families. In other words, students should have to pay for the failure of the Government's economic policy.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. George Walden): No, its success.

Mr. Radice: The Under-Secretary of State with responsibility for higher education says that he wants students to contribute towards the success of that policy. I rather doubt whether cutting student grants will help to do that.

In a gloss on the same argument the hon. Gentleman, whom I welcome to the debate, has argued that the student body should have to help pay for the increased numbers of students in higher education. That is an odd argument. Why should existing students have to pay directly for an increase in the student population, which should be to the advantage of the entire community? What is the Secretary of State's strategy on grants? I know that many Conservative Back Benchers would like to ask him that question. Does he propose to continue cutting their real value?

Mr. Roland Boyes (Houghton and Washington): Of course he does.

Mr. Radice: If so, perhaps he will tell the House that that is his intention. Alternatively, does he intend to rely on a de facto loan system continuing through the banks? After all the heavy weekend briefings that we have had on vouchers and all the other pet items on the agenda of the reactionary tendency—I see that a representative of that tendency, the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey), is in his place — is the right hon. Gentleman proposing that loans should feature on the agenda?

Mr. Ken Weetch (Ipswich): Does my hon. Friend realise that, throughout the country, students are getting in serious debt because the banks, in an irresponsible way, allow students to run up quite large overdrafts? Does he know that I have been involved in cases where banks have allowed students' overdrafts to run up to £5,000 or £6,000? Is this not a back-door way of forcing through a loans policy?

Mr. Radice: My hon. Friend has outlined clearly what is happening. It would be useful if he sent some examples to the Secretary of State, or perhaps to the Under-Secretary of State, so that the latter can find out for himself what is really happening in higher education. I often doubt whether either Minister knows. The Secretary of State should tell the House what the Government intend to do to remedy the highly unsatisfactory state of student financial support.

The Labour party rejects the Government's policy. Even the *Daily Mail* has described it as "shabby". We believe that students deserve better for themselves and for the sake of the nation. As a community, we need a sustained and increasing supply of skilled, adaptable and creative graduates. The community should have responsibility for supporting them adequately. As the National Advisory Body for Public Sector Higher Education has said——

Mr. Martin Brandon-Bravo (Nottingham, South) *rose——*

Mr. Radice: No, I shall not give way for the moment.

The national advisory body has said that the system of student financial support is central to the debate on the future demand for higher education places. The decision whether to enter or to continue in higher education depends in part on access policies, and I hope that we shall be debating those policies in future. The decision depends

also on the level and availability of financial support. The 17 per cent. decline—it will almost certainly be 20 per cent. by the end of the coming year—in the value of student grants since 1979 is causing many students hardship and may well have discouraged qualified young people from going into higher education.

As evidence of that, I quote a written answer of 10 March in which the Under-Secretary of State with responsibility for higher education stated that the proportion of qualified young people—those with two A-levels—entering higher education had declined since 1981. I refer to the qualified participation rate.

Mr. Walden *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Radice: Unfortunately, that is the fact. Therefore, the Labour party proposes that the value of the student grant should be increased. We also believe that mandatory grants should be extended and that assistance should be provided for part-time students, who are very important for the nation's future.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: I hope the hon. Gentleman will quantify his remarks. He will recall that yesterday there was an altercation in the House about the famous list of Labour spending of the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley). The right hon. Gentleman said at the Dispatch Box that the list was false and that only two items were true. He named them, and they did not include additional provision for students.

Mr. Radice: I am not sure whether the hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Brandon-Bravo) was listening yesterday when I said that the Chief Secretary had multiplied by five the amount we proposed to spend on schools. Of course everyone would like to be able to spend five times as much on improving the quality of education, but we are a responsible Opposition and we were not putting forward irresponsible proposals. Unfortunately, the Chief Secretary totally misled the House and some of my hon. Friends about what would happen in their areas. That is deplorable. I am surprised that the hon. Member for Nottingham, South should have made such an intervention.

We shall also introduce a system of maintenance allowances for those who are in full-time education after 16. If we want more young people to go into higher education, we must encourage them to stay on after 16. As a nation we have a very low ratio of those staying at school. That is one reason why we need maintenance grants.

Mr. Patrick Thompson (Norwich, North) *rose*——

Mr. Radice: I am not giving way, because I am coming to the end of my speech.

Maintenance grants would be an investment in our young people and adults who want to take part in higher and continuing education. It would be an investment worth making and the benefits would easily outweigh the cost of not having a skilled and competent population. We reject the Government's short-sighted, wrong-headed policies on students, just as we reject their cuts in higher education as a whole.

I invite Conservative Members who have been so clear in private about their opposition to what the Government have done about student financial support, and who write letters to the National Union of Students to point out that they are on the side of the students, to join us in the Lobby to vote for the motion.

7.42 pm

The Secretary of State for Education and Science (Sir Keith Joseph): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

"recognises that more students than ever before are receiving higher education; appreciates the need to hold increases in student grant rates to levels which the country can afford; welcomes the Government's current efforts to rationalise and simplify some aspects of the provisions of the social security system as it effects students; and notes that the Secretary of State for Social Services expects shortly to receive the advice of the Social Security Advisory Committee on his proposals to this end.".

The Government wish to listen carefully to the debate, and I have listened carefully to the speech of the hon. Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice). We accept that there is anxiety in the student population and no doubt among their families about what the Government's proposals may mean. I emphasise straight away that the Government's decision to remove students from the social security system will be implemented over the medium to long term. As a first step to disentitle students from certain identified social security and related benefits the Government intend that a sensible rationalisation should take place in the near future.

Because the Government recognise that the alterations may influence student intentions and student lives, we embarked upon consultation, which has recently come to an end. We hope in the next few weeks to receive the report from the Social Security Advisory Committee. I assure the House that the Government will study the report carefully and sympathetically. The House cannot expect that in anticipation of the report the Government will announce this evening what should be done to achieve the sensible rationalisation steps that we propose.

We expect to learn from the advisory committee that some students will not be affected by the proposed short-term changes and that some will be slightly affected. We expect that some students might, unless suitable arrangements are made, be more severely affected. Until we get the report, we cannot identify the scale and the impact of the proposals that we have in mind, nor can we decide on the optimum compensation arrangements.

Mr. David Crouch (Canterbury): My right hon. Friend has referred to a study which will reveal the implications for students. Will he also consider the implication that that might reveal, that some potential students will not become students because they feel that their parents could not afford it? I put the point seriously, having talked to many students about that possibility.

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): Will my right hon. Friend take a second point before he replies?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. We cannot have two interventions on the trot.

Sir K. Joseph: The answer to the question put by my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Mr. Crouch) is yes. We shall certainly consider whether there is any reason to expect that possible changes would discourage potential students from going forward, although my hon. Friend will realise that we are in the realm of conjecture. Often allegations are made but it is hard to establish

[Sir K. Joseph]

evidence. I shall come later to the nearest to evidence that we have, namely the age participation index, which is so far very encouraging.

Mr. Cormack: My point follows on from what my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Mr. Crouch) said. Will my right hon. Friend bear in mind that parents are exceptionally concerned? Will he reaffirm that it is the policy of the Government, as he told the Select Committee in the last Parliament that it was, that over a period they will phase out the parental contribution, bearing in mind that young people become adults at the age of 18? He told the Select Committee some years ago that that was the Government's long-term policy. Does it remain so?

Sir Keith Joseph: I am sure that my hon. Friend is quoting me accurately, but I am slightly nervous to think that I used the mode of a future definite in what I said to the Select Committee. No doubt any Government would want to phase out the parental contribution, but I doubt whether I actually said that the Government will phase it out. Alas, I do not see that as an immediate prospect for any Government. That we should like to do so I can confirm.

Into the sympathetic reception with which the Government wish to greet the expression of anxiety by hon. Members on both sides of the House, I must insert a couple of realistic points that need to be borne in mind. It has been the policy of all Governments in recent years to consider that students should look to a combination of sources from which to draw their income. For example, they should look to student awards and to their parents. That has been the common policy of both Labour and Conservative Governments. They should also look, although to a lesser extent in many parts of the country than a few years ago, to occasional part-time earnings. Moreover, they should look to some extent to the savings that they may have put aside, and even to loans individually contracted with their families or banks.

The hon. Member for Ipswich (Mr. Weetch) intervened with a story about an overdraft of thousands of pounds being run up. If it will not breach confidence to do so, I hope that he will send the information to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State or to me.

Mr. Weetch: Perhaps I should tell the Secretary of State that I have already written to his Department and have had a reply from one of the Ministers, who said that the problem would be borne in mind. I hope that that is indeed so.

Sir Keith Joseph: I shall make it my business to look at the case so that I can bear it in mind. However, it seems a little imprudent to run up such an overdraft unless there are exceptional circumstances.

Mr. Michael Shersby (Uxbridge): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Sir Keith Joseph: Yes, but I must limit the number of times that I do so.

Mr. Shersby: In talking about the various ways in which students can be supported at university, will my right hon. Friend say something about the possibilities of encouraging industrial sponsorship? Will he recognise the problems experienced by students at sandwich universities, such as Brunel in my constituency, as the cost of accommodation in west London is very high?

Sir Keith Joseph: I am cursing myself for omitting business sponsorship from the list of sources to which students can turn. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for reminding me of it, as I should have included it.

Thus, there are various sources which, in combination, Governments have considered as potential providers of revenue. But I say, on behalf of the Government, that we certainly do not want to defeat the legitimate expectations of students entering higher education to a degree that would alter their intention. That is not what we want. Consequently, we shall study the consultation report very carefully. Obviously, the Government do not for a moment wish to discourage students from poorer households. In response to the hon. Member for Durham, North, I should say that we do not want to discourage the admission of those who are qualified for higher education.

We take particular pride in the fact that there is a record percentage of a record age cohort in higher education now. There are nearly 80,000 more students in higher education than in 1979. There are slightly fewer students in universities, but many more in the polytechnics and colleges. The degree to which the number of students from polytechnics and colleges has risen is shown by the net increase in higher education. The figure in total is nearly 80,000 more, which is over 15 per cent. more than the number in 1979. That is a record number and a record proportion of a record age cohort.

I say gently to the hon. Member for Durham, North that there were fewer students in higher education in 1979 than in 1975. Before he adopts too sanctimonious a tone, he should recognise that fact. Indeed, the qualified age participation index—the proportion of those who are qualified for admission to higher education—is better now than in 1979, when the Labour Government left office.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): Will the Secretary of State accept that he has got the figures wrong? Between 1979 and this year the qualified participation rate has fallen. But the more worrying factor is that in the early 1970s there was a qualified participation rate of about 97 per cent. The figure is now down to 81 or 83 per cent. Is there not a clear correlation between the way in which grants fell during that 15-year period and the proportion of people with qualifications going into higher education?

Sir Keith Joseph: This is rather technical stuff—*[Laughter.]* Before Opposition Members crow too much, I should add that the technicalities are against them. It is true that in the early 1970s the age participation index was 0·1 per cent. higher than it is now. But that was because at that time it included people going on to teacher training with only one A level. Therefore, on a comparative basis, the age participation index is at a higher level than in 1979. I think that the hon. Gentleman must be working on a quite different definition when he talks about 97 per cent.

Dr. Alan Glyn (Windsor and Maidenhead): My right hon. friend rightly said that no one from a poor background should be prevented from embarking on further education. Does he agree that those who are

qualified and whose parents refuse to pay are automatically disqualified from any form of higher education?

Sir Keith Joseph: I must accept that in such circumstances that is so, unless the potential student can find other resources. But I very much doubt whether there are many such examples. The latest survey to be given to us shows that those parents who fail to pay are, on average, failing to pay only a small fraction of the sum ideally due from them.

Students in this country receive all their tuition fees from the taxpayer and ratepayer. Those tuition fees vary from about £3,000 a year for a humanities course, which normally runs for three years and thus totals about £9,000 in subsidies from the taxpayer, to perhaps about £7,000 or £8,000 a year for a medical or veterinary course, which lasts for perhaps five or six years. I am not quarrelling with those figures but merely reminding the House of them. So in the case of veterinary or medical courses, the subsidies from the taxpayer and ratepayer are very large, amounting to about £40,000 for the course.

Mr. Mark Fisher (Stoke-on-Trent, Central): A very sensible investment.

Sir Keith Joseph: The hon. Gentleman says that quite rightly. I am not judging those facts but simply explaining the extent to which the taxpayer and ratepayer subsidise students. I do not quarrel with that. But I must point out that that subsidy is paid by a taxpayer who lives, alas, in a much less prosperous country than many of his continental neighbours do. However, I shall speak about relative prosperity in a moment.

Mr. John Powley (Norwich, South): Given the level of funding that Governments put into student benefits or higher education, are we not entitled to expect a reasonable standard of conduct from the students who have the advantage of being educated? Is my right hon. Friend aware of the actions of the student union at the University of East Anglia in my constituency, which yesterday effectively banned Conservative students from operating within the university in anticipation of a visit from my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, North (Mr. Carlisle) to speak? That means that the local Member of Parliament is also effectively banned from speaking to students at the university.

Sir Keith Joseph: I was not aware of that until my hon. Friend told me just before this debate. If the facts are exactly as he has been informed, I am considerably worried by that news and will make inquiries.

Mrs. Kellett-Bowman: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the students at Lancaster university met and, by a vote of two to one, decided to give entirely free speech at the university, which is as it should be?

Sir Keith Joseph: Quite right too; and Lancaster is by no means the only one. Yet there is all too much evidence that some higher education students do not behave in that civilised way.

As the hon. Member for Durham, North reminded the House, it was a Conservative Government that introduced student grants. The maintenance grant now provided is not quite as much as some students would like, but it is a great deal more generous than that provided by much more prosperous countries.

I have been given some evidence relating to the difference of opinion between Members on the Front Benches. I stand corrected in the correction that I tried to introduce. It appears that the figures used by Opposition Front-Bench Members were of qualified participation rates, that is, the proportion of people with qualifications for entry to higher education, whereas I was talking about the age participation index. That explains the difference between us. I apologise to the hon. Member for Durham, North, but his figures do not support his arguments, because the age participation index is substantially higher than when the last Labour Government left office.

Mr. Radice: I quite accept that the age participation rate is higher now than in 1979. It is a very good thing that it is. What I was saying was that the qualified participation rate—that is, the percentage of qualified people going into higher education—is now lower than it was in 1979. I am quoting now from a reply which the Under-Secretary gave in the House on 10 March. It is the Minister's own Department's information.

Sir Keith Joseph: I call that roughly deuce.

The maintenance grant may not be as much as some hon. Members would like, but it is a great deal more generous than that provided in more prosperous countries which, on the whole, provide maintenance through loans rather than grants and which generally leave students to earn or borrow at least part of the money for their own maintenance. Not every student feels that the maintenance grant is inadequate. Letters have appeared in the press, pointing out that for some it is perfectly adequate. It is also considerably more than a single pensioner tends to get.

I must also remind the House that most students are on their way to relatively prosperous and satisfying careers. It is quite true that what they do is not only for their own benefit but potentially benefits the country. Nevertheless, the people who pay the maintenance grants and tuition fees are, in most cases, on average, poorer in their careers and in their earnings than students will be.

Nor is it enough to assume that the more students we have in higher education the more prosperous the economy. Higher education is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for prosperity and full employment. We need enterprise, we need risk-taking and we need, above all, to be competitive, as well as to have qualified people.

Although our economy is considerably stronger than it was, although we are substantially more productive than we were in 1979, and although there is better understanding in the country of where jobs and prosperity come from than there was in 1979, the countries which compete with us are also improving their performance and, compared with them, we are still considerably less prosperous. It is by an improving but still substantially less prosperous economy that students are supported, with all their tuition fees paid and a very substantial amount available for maintenance.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield) *rose*——

Sir Keith Joseph: No, I will not give way. I think that I am coming by chance to the very points that my hon. Friend wants to make. But I cannot give way even if I am not.

Of course, we regret having to ask the more prosperous parents for the contribution that we seek from them. I do

[Sir Keith Joseph]

not foresee that any Government will be able quickly to dispense with that. I must remind hon. Members that the contribution to maintenance by those parents, even those who pay the full amount and for whose children there is no maintenance grant, amounts to only half the average subsidy provided for the tuition fees. In the context of an economy which is improving but which is still not as prosperous as we would like, I do not think it entirely wrong that students should not look to the taxpayer for total protection in every circumstance, bearing in mind that the average taxpayer is considerably poorer than most students will be in the course of their careers. That is no reason, however, for the Government to impose severe and unexpected costs beyond the scope of students to meet, so we shall consider very carefully the report which is due to be put in Government's hands in the next few weeks.

I hope that the House will reject the motion and accept the amendment.

8.6 pm

Mr. Clement Freud (Cambridgeshire, North-East): We are tonight debating the Government's policy on student grants and student benefits, if "policy" is not too strong a word for what the Government have in mind. The official Opposition, from the good motion on the Order Paper, are obviously unhappy about what the Government are doing, and we in the Liberal and Social Democratic parties totally agree with the official Opposition. [HON. MEMBERS: "Where are they then?"] I imagine that my colleagues are in roughly the same places as most other Members' colleagues who are not in the Chamber.

The Opposition parties are solid in their disagreement with the Government, although different parties will have different views about the remedy. It seems to us—by "us" I mean virtually all Members of the House—as if there is some hidden agenda which the Government have in respect of students and about which they have not told us. The Secretary of State speaks of a record proportion of students. I would like to remind him that there is also a record amount of apprehension among students who do not know what is to happen next. This benefits no one. The accepted status of the student appears to be under attack. First, the Government are doing all in their power to reduce their numbers, unless they happen to be financially independent; and, secondly, they say that if anyone manages to buck the system and manages to get to university, polytechnic or college of higher education, they will lose their entitlements, both legal and financial, although I suppose that they will still have their health care entitlement.

These changes are being introduced with no explicit admission that the basis of entry to further and higher education is to be changed, or that the choice about institution or course is to be shifted. I should like the House to look briefly at the proposed changes. I refer first to the withdrawal of supplementary and unemployment benefits during short vacations, as a prelude to complete withdrawal, as is stated in the social security Green Paper.

Apart from our general concern that the Government are making the existence of students even more difficult, my main concerns are the inability of students, parents and, indeed, the teachers who prepare students to plan ahead, and the inherent wrongness of what is proposed. We have rules about benefits. The rules are that if one pays contributions one receives unemployment benefit. Now one can pay contributions and receive no benefits if one is a student. The point about supplementary benefit was that one received it according to one's needs. That is why it was called supplementary benefit. Now, with the proposed compensation, we shall have to tell students if they are in need—as were 275,000 students; to quote the number from a reply given by the Prime Minister to the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett)—that they are not covered.

The Secretary of State said that some students will be unaffected. He is wrong. The 140,000 students—I use the same reply by the Prime Minister—who claimed nothing at all will now receive £36 a year. This scheme makes the equalisation of the reimbursement of students' transport costs look, by contrast, like enlightened legislation.

As for housing benefit, students need it because there is no standard housing cost for students. We as a nation are proud that there is no standard housing cost. Different universities and colleges have different types of accommodation to suit different types of students. I refer to the different situations in different areas — from private landlords to medical students postgraduates who work a longer student year, mature students as well as conventional undergraduates who live in college accommodation. Housing benefit was the only mechanism that recognised that different students had different needs and it catered for those needs. The housing benefit review team which advocated the removal of housing benefit from students made it clear that this should be dependent upon a thorough overhaul of the student grant system. The Government have taken note of the first comment, but they have ignored the second.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Does the hon. Gentleman share my hope that the Secretary of State and the Government will heed not only the report of the Select Committee on Social Services about a review of social security but that they will also, and even more importantly, pay attention to the report of the Social Security Advisory Committee—which the Secretary of State said is expected soon—and that if they highlight examples of genuine hardship amendments will be introduced by the Treasury Bench during the passage through the House of the Social Security Bill?

Mr. Freud: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. I hope that the Secretary of State will heed all advice and that he will stop heeding solely the advice that he receives from the Treasury.

I have said in the past that this Government have no education policy, simply a financial policy in which education has to fight for survival. Now we see benefit changes determining education issues. If the Government want students to work their way through college—the increased earnings limit as well as ministerial exhortations, suggest that, and we have heard the Secretary of State refer to occasional part-time earnings—I wish the Secretary of State would say so. I wish he would say that unless one goes out to work one cannot go to university.

I put it to the right hon. Gentleman, first, that there are no jobs and, secondly, that in evidence given to the Select Committee the opinion of many academics was that it is completely unhelpful to our kind of university and

polytechnic education, in which high quality courses are given within a short timespan, to have students seeking employment elsewhere. I use the word "seeking" advisedly because it is the search for work which takes time, is dispiriting and unhelpful to someone's pursuit of a degree.

If the Secretary of State wants students to study only at local institutions and to live at home, I wish he would say so. I believe the strength of our system lies in the fact that one can select a course, even if, in the end, it tends to be the computer that selects the student.

If the Secretary of State wants students to have loans, I wish he would say so, rather than hide behind the claim that a loan is a private arrangement between the bank and the customer.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: Is the hon. Gentleman able to say whether the policy of the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen) is being considered by the Liberal party as well as by the Social Democratic party, or has it been rejected?

Mr. Freud: The right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen) referred to student loans and said specifically that it was not the policy of the two parties but that the possibility of student loans ought to be investigated. The two parties have the same goal but different routes to reach it. There must be minor changes in approach to policy.

What dialogue has the Secretary of State's Department had with the National Union of Students to try to simplify matters? The official justification for the changes has always been that it involves a high administrative cost. We are apprehensive about that. Rather than wipe out whole categories of claimants just because it is administratively difficult, the Secretary of State ought to take more advice from more people and find out to what extent the administration can be simplified. I accept that there are instances where the cost of administering it is absolutely unwarrantable. Each student fills in a different form each term, printed in different colours, to be signed by different people. I maintain that it would be far more sensible to take advice and to try to eliminate this unwarrantable expense rather than eliminate the payment.

It seems that the number of claims has increased because the grant has fallen and students are in need. This is the direct result of Government policy. However, we believe that to maintain the present system by putting more money into it, which is the Labour party's approach, will not solve the problems or meet the new demands of the 16 and 19-year-olds. [HON. MEMBERS: "Rubbish."] If the Labour party has new ideas to put forward, it has not made them very clear. The changes that we are discussing are symptoms of a system that is on the edge of collapse. Tinkering with it will not, therefore, do. The structure has to be recast so that it can work properly.

As with the tax credit scheme, we seek to integrate student grants, taxes, benefits and housing needs. We would give a student grant by virtue of studenthood, with additions according to need. I am opposed to the idea that because one is a student one fails to qualify for benefit. We contend that to be a student is a worthy calling and that students should not be eliminated from benefit, which this policy seeks to do. The system needs recasting to give it the stability and integrity that has been lost. The Government believe in a ritual of hardship, with the only escape route being rich parents or sacrificing study for work.

Mr. Powley: The Government have to find the money, but the Opposition do not.

Mr. Freud: Yes; but the Opposition must point out their priorities. Both Opposition parties see the need to build up a skill base over the coming decades, and give that much more priority than the Government do.

The basis for our motion, had it been our turn to table one, which, sadly, happens seldom, would have been to occasion a full and open review between Departments, local government and others with interest, such as the NUS and the college authorities, to find a new integrated structure. That structure would benefit further and higher education, and provide more places for our youth to acquire skills. My right hon. and hon. Friends——

Mr. Powley: Where are they?

Mr. Freud: They will be here — will vote for the Opposition motion.

8.21 pm

Mr. J. F. Pawsey (Rugby and Kenilworth): I was a little disappointed that the hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Freud) was not somewhat more forthcoming about the policy of his alliance partners. How far, for example, would they follow the loans route? Are they arguing for total loans or for interest payments on loans? I would not dream of implying that the hon. Gentleman is two-faced, but, as usual, the alliance seems to be facing two ways. It seems a pity that for once we did not receive a straightforward statement about its policy.

No one likes to see his income reduced, even if that reduction might seem to be justified on the grounds of fairness. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, student support in the United Kingdom continues to be the most generous in the western world. It is significant that neither of the Opposition Front Bench spokesmen has denied that. Clearly, the House must therefore accept that our student support continues to be the most generous in the western world. That point at least should be remembered when the rhetoric has been forgotten. Other countries apparently believe that when students graduate they can expect to receive substantially higher incomes than those who are not graduates.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): If they can find a job.

Mr. Pawsey: The hon. Gentleman will have the opportunity to make a speech and to put his points as he thinks fit.

Those who graduate from university will have the opportunity to earn substantially higher incomes than those who leave school at 16, 17 or 18 and then go into industry, and help, through their tax payments, to fund students. Clearly, most students will earn substantially more than many who leave school early. It may be for that reason that many countries insist that advances made to students are repaid. But, whatever the reason, no other nation treats its students as generously as we do.

It is worth recalling that the cost of student support, excluding tuition fees, now totals about £500 million. If one considers the total value of awards, including fees, one

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sees that in 1978-79 they totalled about £528 million and that by 1985-86 the figure had increased to £815 million —a substantial sum, no matter how one looks at it.

I regret that the promised review of student support has been abandoned. That is particularly unfortunate as it raised expectations which, sadly, have not been fulfilled. It proposed to address itself to the question of loans. I was interested to hear the comments of the hon. Member for Ipswich (Mr. Weetch) about loans which students receive from banks. Clearly, if loans are of the magnitude which he suggested, it would be more logical to introduce a more formalised system of which students may take advantage.

Certainly no one advocates a complete system of loans, and if they were introduced, there should be a basic grant which could be topped up by a loan to the extent to which a student feels is appropriate. Interest rates should be lower than those paid through the clearing banks. That would represent a step forward. It is unfortunate that the review did not reach a conclusion. Indeed, it suffered a somewhat abrupt termination.

The problem which faces my right hon. Friend and Governments of all colours — it certainly faced the Labour Government between 1974 and 1979 — is that the taxpayers' pound can be spent only once. There is nothing magical about it. It can be spent, for example, on social security, student support or the police. Opposition Members are beginning to accept that. If one votes additional funds for students, one must ask where the additional funding will come from. It will come from extra taxation which, for example, will be paid by exactly the same parents who are at present expressing anxiety about the level of grants.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: My hon. Friend is talking about producing additional funds and asking where they will come from, but we are also talking about taking away money of which students have had the benefit in recent times, through supplementary benefit and housing benefit. Does my hon. Friend agree that, if the Government are changing the system, perhaps the Department of Health and Social Security should pass certain resources to the Department of Education and Science so that student grants can be increased by the amount by which assistance is being reduced under the social security and housing benefit reductions? Does he agree that that is justice? It is both wrong and hard to take from people something which they had, and which they took into account in deciding how to pay for accommodation, maintenance and so on at university.

Mr. Pawsey: I thank my hon. Friend for his typically thoughtful intervention. I agree that it is always difficult to remove a benefit which someone has enjoyed for some time. I shall refer to housing benefit and supplementary benefit later in my speech. I am sure that my hon. Friend will join me in welcoming our hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security to the debate. When he replies I am sure that he will deal in detail with my hon. Friend's question.

Mr. Radice: Cop-out.

Mr. Pawsey: I thought that the hon. Gentleman copped out in his speech once or twice. The alternative to increased taxation would be to increase borrowing, which leads to additional inflation or to cuts.

Labour Members know a great deal more about cuts than we do. Let me refresh their memory about an extract in Barbara Castle's diary. [HON. MEMBERS: "Boring."] I am sorry that this does not please Labour Members. Boring or not, they will have to listen to it; they do not even know which extract it is. It reads:

"All things bright and beautiful
All projects great and small
All things wise and wonderful
Denis Healey cuts them all.
Healey cuts the old age pension
Although he cuts by stealth
And when he looks for savings
Healey cuts the National Health."

That is the record of Labour Members. It really is a cheek for them to tell us about cuts and to grumble about the amounts that we are seeking to adjust.

Labour Members, in the clear knowledge that they will not be forming an incoming Administration, can promise anything they wish. They have said that they will increase levels of student support. That promise, added to all the other promises that they have made over the past six or seven months, would undoubtedly represent a substantial increase in taxation.

Mr. Freud: Why is the hon. Gentleman defending cuts when the Secretary of State said that there were no cuts?

Mr. Pawsey: My right hon. Friend has been saying that one is seeking to adjust levels of student support. He has been careful to point out to the House that the number of students has increased dramatically. He gave a figure of some 80,000. Clearly, when one adds in those 80,000 additional students, what cut can there be in the totality of student support?

Let me return to my theme that Conservative Members are not unsympathetic to students. It might help to put matters into perspective if I quote from *The Listener*. *The Listener* is not usually regarded as being an organ of the Conservative Party but it really answers the question posed to me a moment ago by the hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Freud) and he might find it helpful if he listened rather than thumbing through the book on his knees. It said:

> "The fact is that after five years of what we are repeatedly told have been 'savage cuts', there are more students in higher education now than ever before. The polytechnics are booming: graduates and first-year entrants both stand at record levels; applications for this October"—

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"are officially described as 'buoyant'."

There is not much gloom and doom in that article.

The Government have a duty to protect taxpayers, parents and students. They must strike a balance. I understand that changes in supplementary and housing benefit are unpopular, but we should remember that the social services were designed to help the poor, sick and elderly, and not those who will be tomorrow's highest wage earners.

8.33 pm

Mr. Derek Fatchett (Leeds, Central): The hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) left me somewhat confused. I am not clear whether he was advocating the abolition of student maintenance grants and the support of loans or whether he was trying to redivide the cake, and in the process pretend that he is not enhancing misery by cutting the income available to individual students, or whether he was totally confused by his arguments and the facts available to him.

Mr. Pawsey *rose*——

Mr. Fatchett: No, I shall not give way to the hon. Gentleman immediately.

Mr. Pawsey: The hon. Gentleman does not wish to be unconfused.

Mr. Fatchett: No.

Mr. Pawsey: I rest my case.

Mr. Fatchett: I suspect that the hon. Gentleman will not be able to unconfuse me, if his track record over the past few minutes is anything to go by.

It might be useful if the hon. Gentleman were to have a look at one or two other facts after flicking through Barbara Castle's diaries. He might be interested to know that the real value of student maintenance grants increased under the Labour Government between 1974 and 1979. If the hon. Gentleman wants to check that fact, he will not find it in Barbara Castle's diaries but in a parliamentary written answer of 28 January 1985. When he criticises the Labour Government's record on student grants, let him get the facts right, not work on prejudice. He should look at the record of that period.

If the hon. Gentleman could come to the House and say that the Government have a similar record to that of the Labour Government, his arguments might have some credibility. But the reality of tonight's debate is that it is taking place against a backcloth on which we have seen student incomes deliberately cut by the Government. Everybody accepts, as did the Secretary of State, that the real value of student grants has been cut by 19 per cent. during the Government's lifetime. He was shocked when he thought that he heard my hon. Friend the Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice) say 90 per cent. He probably did not feel that it could have gone quite that far but was happy with 19 per cent.

The announced increase in student grants — this massive figure of 2 per cent. — will mean a further decrease in the real value of student grants. That is the backcloth and those are the facts. The hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth should recognise that. He should have the courage to tell the House, students and parents, that the Government are cutting the real value of student grants because they do not want to spend as much money on student maintenance. That would be an honest argument. The hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Brandon-Bravo) agrees with that. He wants to cut back and I suspect that he will be going round Nottingham university and Trent polytechnic telling students and their parents that he will expect them to welcome that policy.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: I have done just that. Honesty is the only policy in this debate.

Mr. Fatchett: If one has a short life in politics it should be a sweet life. I doubt whether the hon. Gentleman will be here after the next election and I am sure that the students will welcome his honesty in that respect.

We have those cuts which have already taken place, and now we have the further cuts that are likely to be implemented as a result of the changes in the social security regulations. I do not want to go into detail, but I recognise, as I think other hon. Members have, that the proposed cuts in housing benefit will have a deep effect upon student incomes and living standards. It will be difficult for students to secure tenancies in a city such as Leeds and to maintain those tenancies without the benefit of being able to claim housing support through the social security system.

The changes that the Government are proposing and discussing will adversely affect students. I have no faith in what the Secretary of State said about consultations having taken place and the Government listening to the comments and advice before making decisions. Students, like everybody else, know that consultation with the Government is a one-way street. They listen, but simply do not heed the comments coming forward. If I were a gambling man I would suggest to the Minister that what will emerge from the consultation process will probably take a similar shape to the proposal currently on the table. Students will suffer severe cuts as a result of the proposal.

The Minister for Social Security (Mr. Tony Newton): Obviously, I want to assure the hon. Gentleman that we shall look at the consultations. But, leaving that aside, I am sure that he would not wish to mislead the House. He did rather convey the impression that he did not recognise that the proposals currently on the table, to which he referred, do not change the right of students to claim housing benefit for privately rented accommodation at any time during the year.

Mr. Fatchett: I recognise that point——

Mr. Newton: If they are living there.

Mr. Fatchett: That is right. The Minister's final qualification will cause difficulties to students.

We have a backcloth of cuts in students' living standards. I wish to develop the argument, because the debate is not only about social security or student maintenance. It is about access to higher education. We have an elitist system, whether we like it or not. It is structured so as to broadly discriminate against women, to discriminate strongly against the ethnic minorities, and even more strongly against those who come from social classes IV and V. No hon. Member could be satisfied with our participation rate from those sectors.

What will happen in the future? Ministers often say that higher education is an investment, that we should invest in skills in new technologies, and that we need brains and students who are trained. I agree with those arguments, but our record in that respect compares unfavourably with the record of all our major competitor countries. We must spend more to bring us in line with other countries. The Secretary of State said that spending money on higher education is not a sufficient condition for improved economic performance. No one would disagree with that. He also said that it is a necessary condition for improved economic performance, and I share that view. But if it is a necessary condition for improved economic performance, we must widen access and make it possible for all sections of society to obtain higher education. By adopting the Government's policies on students, we are curtailing the possibility of investment, restricting access to higher education and reinforcing the elitist system.

The major criticism of the Government's attitude to students and higher education is that they have pushed back all the possibilities of opening up our higher education system. It was clear from the arguments between the Secretary of State and my hon. Friends the Members for Durham, North, and Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) that, under the Government, the

[Mr. Fatchett]

participation rate of those who qualify for higher education has declined. That is a serious indictment of the Government's education policies.

The hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Freud) said that the Government's policies are unclear. He asked whether they want to introduce loans by the back door and whether that is why they are forcing more parents to make contributions. I do not believe that the Government's policies are unclear. They want to cut student maintenance and the opportunities for people to enter higher education. Society will condemn the way in which they have treated people with ability and potential. Britain will condemn them for the fact that they have made it impossible for many students with qualifications and ability to benefit from higher education. Unless we reverse those policies, our higher education provision will decline further and we shall have an even stronger elitist system. I object to that, and I hope that, at some stage, the Government will recognise the danger, not just to individuals but to the education system.

8.43 pm

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): Two things are clear from the speech of the hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett). First, his speech was completely sincere and doubtless he completely believed what he said. The problem is that he painted a version of the facts that is so wholly at variance with the real facts that there is a danger that the criticisms which could be levelled at the Government will be entirely missed. The Government's record on higher education generally and on student grants specifically is creditable. I say that even though, in 1984, it took a fairly hefty effort from Conservative Back-Bench Members to keep it that way.

Whatever may be the long-term benefits of investment in higher education, the simple fact of life is that the money must be found from somewhere. The only place where it can be found is in the nation's taxes. The money cannot be said to be self-generating. If the history of post-war Socialism as practised by both main political parties has taught us anything, it is that the mere idea that we should spend money on things simply because they are worth while——

Mr. Robert Rhodes James (Cambridge): Was it a waste of taxpayers' money to invest in the Spitfire?

Mr. Nicholls: I do not know how my hon. Friend plans to bring Spitfires into the debate. After that encouraging taste of what is to come, I await his speech with interest.

My point is that we cannot spend money on something simply because it is a good idea. If we adopt such a policy, it leads to nothing worth while, only to conversations in car parks at Heathrow airport, with the Chancellor of the Exchequer being turned round and forced to return to give an account of himself to the International Monetary Fund.

Investment in higher education must reflect those economic facts of life. Indeed, it must go further than that. The Government's problem is that they lack flexibility in their attitude to the funding of student grants. The mere fact that the system for funding student grants worked well in the 1950s does not mean that it will work well in the 1980s. The Government have got it wrong in that respect because they are not maintaining the flexibility of approach.

It will not be enough to continue saying, true though it may be, that we have the best system of student maintenance in the Western world. That is not the point, and that is not the standard by which we shall be judged. We shall be judged by the fact that, compared with what we have done for our students in the past, what we are doing now is not good enough. It is not much consolation if one's Rolls-Royce is misfiring to be told that the man down the road has only a mark II Cortina. Such arguments do not answer the point.

My hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security, who will reply to the debate, has drawn the short straw. Between 1978-79 and 1985-86, the real value of student maintenance grants has decreased by about 10 per cent. My hon. Friend's difficulty is that, while acknowledging that that is the position, the Government have not yet decided what to do about it. The Government seem to have headed for a desert island, marooned themselves there, and broken their lifeboats. There was a way out for them. They could have done what it looked as though they would do, and said, "The system is no longer sufficient. We shall have to consider student loans." It looks as though they will not do so.

It is not for me in a short debate to set out a blueprint of how student loans might have operated. Suffice it to say that there are enough examples worldwide on which we could have drawn, but because we have abandoned any such approach, we have landed ourselves in the worst of all possible worlds. No Conservative Member can be happy with the position into which the Government have locked themselves. We seem to have cut off any opportunity of extricating ourselves from that position.

There is no doubt that the Government's record on funding higher education is creditable. That is why it will be no hardship for me to support the Government tonight. But the system to which we have nailed our colours does not allow us to tell the public that that is the way it really is. If my hon. Friend could mention a radical initiative or hold out some hope that a system which is beginning to fail can be brought up to date, we could tell the public the undoubted truth—that we have a creditable record. If we lock ourselves into a situation in which we are obliged to decrease the student grant, when we have cast away any possibility of doing something about improving that situation over the 1980s and 1990s, then truth and logic will still be on our side, but there will be a grave danger that people outside the Chamber will simply not realise it.

8.50 pm

Mr. Jim Craigen (Glasgow, Maryhill): I hope that the hon. Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) sends a copy of his speech to every student in his constituency. When I listened to the speech of the Secretary of State for Education and Science I thought that there was, after all, something to be said for the Scottish Office taking further, higher and university education under its wing, especially when the Secretary of State was replying to my hon. Friend the Member for Ipswich (Mr. Weetch). It was like trying to squeeze a dry sponge—no matter how hard one tried, nothing of substance came out.

The Government have a cheek to table such an amendment to our motion. In the numbers game, how honest are the Government being over the figures that have been bandied about? Surely in the 1980s it is not too much to expect that a greater proportion of our post-school population might usefully, if not enjoyably, benefit from

higher education. Surely in the 1980s, with higher hopes and ambitions than in the 1970s and 1960s, we can achieve more.

If there were the same level of participation in higher education among 18-year-olds as there was in 1973-74, another 40,000 people would be in higher education. Does the Secretary of State not know that between 1973-74 and 1983-84, the proportion of 18-year-olds in the United Kingdom rose by 25 per cent.? He must recognise that not only have there been demographic changes but that there is greater competition to get into higher education.

Moreover, the Government should recognise that there should be some scope for older people who wish either to take up for the first time, or augment, higher education studies. There are also quite a number of young people who because they cannot get a job as a result of the economic recession, are filling in at least a part of their unwanted leisure time by attending university courses. A slight problem sometimes arises, about which the Minister will be aware, that such studies must be for under 12 hours, and the students must be available for work. I have one or two constituency cases that have, fortunately, been sorted out.

The change in housing benefit will be the most savage aspect of the Government's package. Notwithstanding the intervention that the Minister for Social Security made in the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett) many young people are distraught about what faces them as a result of the proposed housing benefit changes. If young people are able to get private rented accommodation, they will not easily be able to say to the landlord that they will not be there during the summer months, and therefore do not want to pay, because they will be staying with their parents, but they expect the accommodation to be available when they return in the autumn. The Minister should understand that the whole character of parental support has altered. Far more families have at least one member unemployed, and there are far more single-parent families and families in which the income is not particularly substantial, so there is not the secondary support available for those students who, perforce, are living away from home.

How honest are the Government being over the uprating of student grants? Did not the Department of Education and Science say in negotiations that it was taking account of the present social security system when it uprated by only 2 per cent.? Now, it is proposing that the massive changes in the social security system will be ignored, and the students will still get only a 2 per cent. uprating. The Government are failing to recognise the cost of accommodation, which is one of the biggest outlays that students have to face.

I listened to the Secretary of State's speech intently. I do not often listen to him because much of the education system in Scotland comes under the Scottish Office. It surprised me that a Government made up of so many people whose curriculum vitae shows that they enjoyed the benefits of higher education are so reluctant to see present and future generations benefiting from higher education. The Secretary of State does not need to pass a law to increase the number of drop-outs in our system. The pincer action that the DHSS and the Department of Education and Science have in mind will do that for us. By grant erosion and social security exclusion, we shall create more drop-outs in the higher education system.

I listened to all this business about loans. There will be the introduction of a pawnbroking economy with the higher education system that the Government propose. We have just finished a debate on the City of London. Presumably the loans system is to breathe fresh life into the financial institutions. The students will not have any say in what the rate of interest will be. It shows up the Government's ineptitude in managing the economy that interest rates are so high.

The Secretary of State for Education and Science has much to answer for. It strikes me that the hand of Joseph has been disastrous wherever it has touched. As an example of that I need only look at the Health Service and see the bureaucracy that abounds there because of the right hon. Gentleman's previous influence. The state of industry in this country is another testimony to the right hon. Gentleman. Half the problems which must now be solved in education are due to the declining fortunes of industry in this country.

What a record the right hon. Gentleman has. Since Victorian times this country was able to export more manufactured goods than it imported and now, under this Government, the exact opposite is the case. I hope that the Secretary of State for Education and Science, who is on his way out, does not take the whole higher education system with him in his passage.

9 pm

Mr. Robert Rhodes James (Cambridge): I thought we were supposed to be debating higher education tonight. I apologise to you, Mr. Speaker, and to the Minister of State and the Secretary of State for being absent at the beginning of the debate for reasons which I hope will be understood.

The House will be aware that, in December, I resigned from my position in my party on higher education matters for a combination of events. I regretted the so-called 2 per cent. increase in student grants. I also regretted the benefit proposals made for students. I regretted also the abandonment of the grant review in which I was involved and the failure to deal with the threshold of parental contributions. All these matters dealt with the future of higher education.

I hope that I have made clear my profound affection and admiration for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. Although we disagreed, we did so on a matter of principle, and we disagreed sincerely. I once wrote to my right hon. Friend in a memorandum and said that it was possible that he might be right.

When one looks back at the sad situation of higher education, one realises that we have failed to grasp the problems of the way we fund research. We have failed to grasp the topic of higher academic salaries which has led to a real and serious brain drain. In fact, a constituent of mine who is a plasma physicist earns less than a secretary working in London.

The situation has deep-rooted problems and dates back to the Green Paper "The Development of Higher Education into the 1990s" which was published last summer. In retrospect, I should have protested more strongly than I did at the time about the Green Paper. I described it as illiterate, innumerate and philistine. I recently reread it and was reminded of that famous phrase: "I am astounded at my own moderation."

I feel very deeply about that Green Paper. Paragraph 1.3 of it states:

[Mr. Robert Rhodes James]

"The Government is particularly concerned by the evidence that the societies of our competitors are producing, and plan in the future to produce, more qualified scientists, engineers, technologists and technicians than the United Kingdom."

Why is that so? It is because our competitors have invested in higher education. They are the recipients of investment made in the past.

The Green Paper is wrong because my right hon. Friend starts from a position of defeatism. His principle is that, because our competitors are rich, they can afford these luxuries. They are not luxuries; they are the future of our nation. The Japanese, Americans, Germans, South Koreans and everyone else understands that. Why do we not understand that?

There is a real brain drain and underfunding. However, the problem is not simply one of funding. If one could throw money at the problem to resolve it, it might be resolved, but it is more complex than that. I would like to make a proposal to my right hon. Friend. I do not believe in Royal Commissions. However, given the fact that the Robbins committee has unhappily been proved wrong, could we not have a real working group which involves people from industry and business, higher education, the state and independent schools, the universities, polytechnics, Government and local authorities?

Cannot we get together and ask ourselves, "What is higher education for?" The answers we give may differ, but that is the key question. We need a small element of humility. During the 1960s, we made several assumptions, most of which were proved wrong. There was a huge expansion of higher education which was ill thought out. We then went from the euphoria of expansion to total disillusionment, which was also wrong. More did not mean worse, but it did mean disappointment.

We should have the finest higher education system in the world, but we have not. Regardless of party and attitudes, we should ask ourselves why and where we have gone wrong. What can we do to make the system right? We have moved from dangerous euphoria to perilous disillusionment. We should return to the middle way and try among ourselves to provide the finest higher education system in the world. This is needed not just for the present generation or for our children; it is critical for our country's future. We survive on our brains and our ability, not on our brawn. That is what is at stake.

Several Hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. It might be convenient to the House if I say that I understand that the first of the Front-Bench speakers will seek to rise at 9.40 pm. Four hon. Members who have been present during the debate would like to take part. Perhaps hon. Members would bear that in mind.

9.6 pm

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): The Government's proposals are yet another sign of the sort of society that they are attempting to create—one with decided class divisions wherein opportunities in education, as in health and social services, will depend on how much people have in their pockets rather than on their qualifications, abilities and talents.

There can be no doubt about the reality of the Government's proposals. Since the Conservative party came to power in 1979, there has been a real cut of 20 per cent. in the value of student grants. As well, many potential students have found that they remained potential students because they would not be able to study in the lower levels of education. Discretionary grants have been cut or have been completely abolished by local authorities which have had their rate support grant reduced from 61 per cent. to 46 per cent. of current expenditure. In many parts of Britain local authorities have been rate-capped.

What chances do young people in my constituency have? In one part of my constituency in Liverpool 94 per cent. of young people are unemployed. What chance do they have even of starting on an ordinary A-level or O-level course? The local authority cannot afford much by way of discretionary grants. We need not look for poor young people entering higher education in two, three or four years, because they will not be there. They will not have had the wherewithal even to obtain A-levels and O-levels.

Any increase in the university student population will not come from the ranks of those living in Norris Green, Croxteth and the poor areas of Liverpool. If parents, most of whom are unemployed, struggle to get their offspring through sixth form, through their A-levels and O-levels and through colleges of further education and if those young people are able to go on to university, with what will they be faced? Under the Government's proposals students will be faced with a reduction in housing benefit and they will find that supplementary benefit is denied to them during their vacations.

When the Minister replies I hope he will tell me what encouragement there is in his proposals — he is proposing to deny social security benefits to students— for the parents in the poor areas of Liverpool and elsewhere to struggle to get their children an education. Conservative Members have referred to loans, but such loans must be repaid. There are many young people who have struggled to get to university but then find they cannot get a job. How does an unemployed graduate pay back a loan to a bank, the Government or any other institution?

Mrs. Kellett-Bowman: I feel strongly about loans. There would clearly have to be a provision whereby one did not start to repay the loan until one was earning a certain amount. That would thus rid us of the great problem of the reverse dowry on girls. This works well in other countries. Such a policy would give youngsters more independence from their parents and they would not run up haphazard bank loans.

Mr. Wareing: The future of the young people I am discussing is a future of unemployment. However, it does not mean that, because they have the prospect of a jobless future they should be denied the possibility of securing educational qualifications. They are denied this because few young men or girls whose fathers or mothers are unemployed and who live in deprived conditions would borrow money from a bank to get their education.

Mrs. Kellett-Bowman: There would be a proper scheme.

Mr. Wareing: Under this Government few young people would have the prospect of being able to repay that loan. More is required to deal with the problems of further and higher education. Successive Governments have not

dealt with the problems. The next Government — the Labour Government — will, I hope, act in a different way from the previous one.

I wish to refer to the payment or non-payment of supplementary benefits to young people who, during a period of unemployment, enter colleges of further education on a full-time course to gain qualifications. It would be interesting to know from the figures bandied about concerning the increase in the student population, what proportion of those students are involved in courses which lead to Mickey Mouse qualifications — the type that this Government have introduced. How many colleges of further education for example, are dependent upon courses which are provided through the Manpower Services Commission?

Unemployed youngsters may wish to use such time to study and gain qualifications. Those who study for O or A-levels will find that, because they are on a full-time course or are studying for over 21 hours a week, they will be denied a discretionary grant from the local authority for the reasons I have mentioned, and also denied supplementary benefit. I admit that the same was true under the Labour Government, but that does not make it right. It is ludicrous that supplementary benefit can be paid to somebody who decides to languish at home, but that it is denied to somebody who steps through the door of a college of further education.

Much more should be spent through the Department of Education and Science. I do not want the Department of Health and Social Security to be involved. There should be a mandatory grant paid through the DES. Some Conservative Members are loth to spend more money on grants. They talk of the poor taxpayer. "It is not our money," they say, "it is the taxpayers' money." Meanwhile, they are helping out some of the rogues in Johnson Matthey and spending money on Trident as if there were no tomorrow. They do not refer to the taxpayer then.

We should ensure that the future is prosperous. We can do that only by making real investment in people. That means expenditure on higher education. It is no use saying that other countries are richer than us and that they can therefore provide more. Our future riches depend on what we invest in our young people today.

Access to education should not be based on class. It should not be a matter of whether a parent can afford to send a youngster to university. However, during the past six years, the parental contribution to students' upkeep has increased by 170 per cent. To a poor family—and there are more poor families under this Government — to a family in which the breadwinner is unemployed — and there are more unemployed breadwinners under this Government—that is the toll which tells.

I do not believe that the exercises and policies of Ministers and their Departments have anything to do with education or health. Everything is aimed at reducing expenditure, so that the Chancellor can provide more than the £2·5 billion that he has already provided for his rich friends through tax cuts during the past six years. That is what it is all about. As soon as people realise that that is the reality, they will not be fooled by arguments about the Government being interested in education.

I am only sorry that the hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Freud) was unable to spell out Liberal policy. I hope that his party's policy would be more beneficial than what we experienced under Liberal control in Liverpool between 1973 and 1983. During those years, we had the first cuts in discretionary grants. Even under Tory administrations in the 1950s and 1960s, there were generous grants.

Our only hope is that enough Conservative Members who share the anxiety of the hon. Member for Cambridge (Mr. Rhodes James) will have the guts to defy their Front Bench.

9.20 pm

Mr. Martin M. Brandon-Bravo (Nottingham, South): My constituency is proud to contain two most excellent institutions of higher educaton — Nottingham university and Trent polytechnic. I am not sure of the precise figures, but I estimate that our city must have some 20,000 students within its boundaries. It would be comparatively easy and perhaps convenient for me to court popularity with such a large electorate—almost as easy, perhaps, as the promises made by the Opposition and certainly easier than the promises made by the Liberal and Social Democratic Members on the remote possibility that they could, or even would, deliver.

I have enormous respect for Nottingham's student population and I believe that they have a more practical grasp of the problems before us than many people are giving them credit for. Like most colleagues in this place, I have had much correspondence on the subject. Sadly, most of it has consisted of identical letters worked from a common draft. All too rarely—and, bearing in mind that we are discussing higher education, I think it is fair to say this — has a letter been about the needs and problems of the student writing. What makes it even worse —and I think that this should be pointed out—is that one of those letters that I received this morning reads as follows:

"Dear MP,
I note with great concern . . .
I urge you to reject the Government's proposals which could mean that I will have to find another £800 a year to keep my child/children at University."

Clearly, if the person signing it does not know whether he or she has a child or children at university, I question whether the £800 a year is a fact either. In case the hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett) thinks that I am fooling, I am more than happy to lay this letter before the House. I believe that one of my colleagues on the Front Bench has had a similar pre-printed letter.

My understanding from the discussions I have had with many students in Nottingham indicates quite the reverse of the position described by the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing), because it is the student coming from a very humble background who gets the full grant. That student is not the one who is harmed by these provisions; he is covered. Equally, it is true that the student who comes from an affluent household and whose parents are generous will manage.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett *rose*——

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: I am sorry; we are very short of time.

It is indeed the student who comes from a so-called middle-class family background and whose parents are not making the presumed parental contribution who seems to be in trouble under the present system. It was for that reason that I wrote to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State over 12 months ago saying that in my view the

[Mr. Brandon-Bravo]

only way out of that problem was to have, on top of the basic grant system, a loan system that could be guaranteed in some way in order to ensure that all students, whether they came from a humble background or a very rich background, were not denied access to higher education.

It really amazes me that Opposition Members always have to presume that Conservative Members come from other than a humble background. I will not waste the time of the House replying to idiotic comments on these lines. I support the view that the generality of the welfare state, the DHSS, is not, and never was intended as, a primary source of student support. I do not say that it does not have a role, and I hope that the report to which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State referred earlier will address itself to some of the problems that I know concern us all. I believe that student support should come from grants, loan, parental contribution, and vacation earnings.

The student body produced a list of what it wanted and it was clearly expensive. I believe that the total was about £500 million, and it may have been more. I have had to say to students—they have accepted the comment with good grace—that if I had £500 million to spend on education, I could produce a long shopping list of items on which I would want to spend the money in our universities and polytechnics before I increased maintenance grants to students. I realise that I am representing a highly marginal parliamentary seat and I have already told the hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett) that I am prepared to stand my ground. I would rather be honest than go for the flannel that comes from Opposition Members.

Liberal Members complain about the loss of transport cost provision and imagine that all students were against its withdrawal. I shall quote from one of the letters that I received from a student body on that issue. It reads:

"the majority . . . will be better off with a flat rate of £100",

which was the decision at that time. The letter continues:

"Even under the old system it was not possible to be able to claim daily travel unless you lived outside a three mile radius from the university . . . Although the new system will mean rough justice for some, it will not be open to the flagrant abuse of the old system".

Apparently, the Liberal party wants to return to the flagrant abuse of the old system.

Under the changes that are being proposed, benefits will not be given during short vacations. If a student returns home for Christmas, he surely cannot claim to be unemployed over the Christmas period. The long vacation is different and I understand that provision will continue to be made. I understand also that there are some students who will be forced to pay rent for their accommodation when they return to their home base. Those students will undoubtedly have a problem, and I hope that my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Treasury Front Bench will consider that most carefully. I would not wish to find students unable to return to their universities because their accommodation had been let.

With so large a student body in my constituency it would be convenient for me to criticise the Government, but given the generality of the financial constraints that we are facing, I believe that they are being extremely fair. On that ground I am happy to join my colleagues in supporting the Government.

9.29 pm

Mr. Patrick Thompson (Norwich, North): I am grateful to have the opportunity to speak briefly on student support. I have calculated that I have precisely six minutes in which to make my contribution and I shall try to get as much into that time as I can.

I am happy to support the Government's amendment because I believe that it recognises the realities which any Government would have to face. Throughout the debate the Opposition have been courting popularity in various ways. Indeed, they have admitted that openly during the past few minutes.

Education and training are the keys to our future, and they must have priority. I have regular discussions with students who live in my constituency and I have great respect for the work that they are doing at the university of East Anglia. Like hon. Members on both sides of the House, I have an understanding of the problems that they face.

The Government are right to be wary of the indiscriminate call for extra resources. I am sure my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench will not be shaken by the gloomy alliance between vice-chancellors and student union representatives. Only the other day the newsletter published by the university of East Anglia contained a joint statement issued to parents, signed by the acting vice-chancellor and the president of the students union, which said:

"the measures proposed by the Government are going to face you with impossible choices. The student support system in this country is now grinding to a halt."

Without doubt, problems exist for students, but however great they are, if that is not an overstatement, nothing is. I do not think it helps the cause of higher education for any of us to go over the top about it.

We must think about priorities. When we are talking about student support, it is not good enough, as university teachers and students often do, to say that we want more money for this, that or the other. With finite resources we have to make a choice between money for student support, money for teaching salaries, and facilities, and money for research. Many students tell me that they are not happy with the quality of their lecturing, and members of staff at the university of East Anglia have told me, rightly, that they need more funding for research. I hope that the Government will make it clear what the priorities are for higher education and what their policy is before they deal with funding.

What I want to drive home is that we must decide on future policy for universities before responding to calls for more funding. Yes, I believe in a higher priority for education, but I also believe that we must consider what our universities are for, and whether we want universal entry to universities, which many Opposition Members call for, or whether we want centres of academic excellence with high quality research, which many university staff call for. Those are hard choices which neither the Government nor the Opposition can escape. All too few hon. Members have addressed the matter of choice and priorities.

In regard to student morale and motivation, I am one of those hon. Members who are sorry that the Government have deferred the review of the student grant system. Indeed, I still think it worth while to consider at least a partial loan system. We could have tackled the problems head on by examining the whole system of student support

rather than reacting, as we are now, to the mail which we are getting from so many unhappy students and their parents. We must consider thoroughly the whole question of student support. I support my hon. Friends who have suggested that in the debate.

We are used to being lobbied by the National Union of Students. Some of the lobbying is sensible, and some not so sensible. I am particularly unhappy about the way in which over the years students unions have been politicised. It is a sad fact with which we have to live but it is not doing the universities any good. The recent scenes of disorder in many universities have not helped their cause. Therefore, it is particularly sad that today in the university of East Anglia intolerance has reared its head yet again, with the National Union of Students saying that it intends to withdraw support and funds from the Conservative association in the university. That is just the sort of thing that does not help those of us who support the cause of higher education. My constituents know that I am fighting for education, but I am not helped by the attitudes that are, unfortunately, all too often displayed. The Opposition offer £24 billion of spending—much of it on education—yet that will solve nothing because they are not addressing the priorities. We must decide what those priorities are and consider the future of higher education clearly and sensibly.

I support the amendment.

9.35 pm

Mr. Gerald Bowden (Dulwich): For the 12 years immediately before entering the House in 1983 I was a lecturer at a polytechnic not very far away. During that time I came to know many students, with many of whom I am still in close contact. The views ascribed to students by Opposition Members do not wholly accord with my experience of student feelings. The students came from varied backgrounds, and part of my job was to try to encourage those whose families did not have any experience of higher education and to show them that there was something for them in higher education within that polytechnic.

There were very few elitist courses such as the hon. Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice), my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I shared at the same institution of higher education. There were several day-release courses. Students worked for four days a week and were released to study for one. That needed great motivation, because they needed to study for about six years before they obtained their degrees. They had both the motivation and the maturity. As a result of working with students of that calibre, others gained the ability to see that there was work to be done and that there were ways of supporting themselves other than solely on a state grant.

I was most involved with a "thick sandwich" course. The students were in college for two years and then spent the next year gaining work experience in a professional firm, returning to college for a fourth year. There is no doubt that that year's work experience gave them a new approach to their studies. There is every advantage in having a diversity of funding and of student support instead of a straight handout from the taxpayer or ratepayer.

I have no hesitation in saying that the proposals being put forward are a step in the right direction towards finding that diversity of support, and I welcome what the Government are doing.

9.37 pm

Mr. Stan Thorne (Preston): I wish to make a few brief points that have not yet perhaps been raised. I shall concentrate on mature students. In common with many others, I have lost jobs. In 1966 I lost a job, and at the age of 48 I undertook four years' full-time study at a university. As a result, my wife and two children went through a very difficult period. That was in 1966, but things must be much worse today for many of those who have been made unemployed and who would like to go back to school to equip themselves for other things.

Students are often young people and we should give them a full opportunity to educate themselves without any hardship. However, hon. Members should also bear in mind mature students. I believe that hundreds and thousands of married men with children would return to full-time education as long as they did not have to inflict additional hardship on their families and children. That is a brief but important point to bear in mind when considering the education of our people.

9.39 pm

Mrs. Margaret Beckett (Derby, South): In the Green Paper on social security the Government said that they believed that it was right in principle to return to the situation which had existed before 1966, in other words, to dependence for students on grants; in the subsequent White Paper, they said that they remained committed to the aim of removing students from dependence on social security benefits. We could all, in a sense, support that aim, that students should be dependent on grants rather than on benefits, but this depends on the grants being sufficient for students to sustain a reasonable standard of living and to study.

The Government seem to have drawn substantially on the comments of the housing benefit review, which suggested that there should be an option of excluding students from housing assistance, without going on to read to the end of the paragraph where the review team said:

"We do not underestimate the effects of this; it would require complete overhaul of the student grant provision for housing costs."

This is precisely what the Government have not provided. Apart from the fact that the Government have failed to provide what the review team saw as a prerequisite for the kind of change to be introduced, the changes are being made, in higher education as elsewhere, against a background of cuts.

The Secretary of State was kind enough to say in his opening remarks that he recognised the anxiety among the student population. From other remarks that he has made, it seems that the Secretary of State may not be aware that there is not only anxiety but debts in the student population —substantial debts, even now, before the cuts that we are debating tonight. The anxiety which already exists is fuelled by the Government's overall record in higher education support. The Secretary of State described a situation in which there should be a balance of support for students, some coming from their parents, some from the state or perhaps, on occasion, even from the earnings of the students themselves.

[Mrs. Margaret Beckett]

Unfortunately, however, that balance has already shifted substantially. The level of assessed parental contributions increased from £84 million in 1979-80 to £230 million last year. In cash terms, that is an increase of some 270 per cent. or, in real terms, as has already been identified this evening, some 70 per cent. It is, in any case, a substantial shift in the burden away from the state towards parents.

I noted that the hon. Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack) asked his right hon. Friend about some comments that he thought he had heard about the long-term phasing out of the parental contribution, and based his question to the Secretary of State on the premise that, of course, at 18 individuals were adults. It is rather unfortunate that elsewhere, in the Social Security Bill, a fact which the hon. Member for Staffordshire, South may not have observed, the Government make it very plain that at 18 one is not an adult and that, until they are 25, people will receive a lower rate of benefit. That ties in with the way in which, for students, they have moved the contribution towards the parental side.

The Secretary of State also referred to the potential for support from student earnings, but these days it is much more difficult for students to supplement their financial support from earnings. As I understand it, the Department of Employment's figures show that between 1979 and 1985 the proportion of students unemployed in the long vacation rose to 70 per cent. There are figures to show that, no matter what region is surveyed, the extent of student unemployment in both the long and the short vacations is unprecedented in recent years. Here again, it appears that students cannot look for the support that the Secretary of State implies. In fact, although the Department of Education and Science implies that it expects students to support themselves from their earnings, the Department of Health and Social Security puts all its emphasis on their not having earnings and on their being available for work if they are to be able to claim benefit.

In this context, one of the more unfortunate effects of the proposals is that some students will lose their entitlement to unemployment benefit. The Secretary of State says that students can supplement their income from earnings, either as mature students before they go to university or during the vacations. However, one of the side effects of student earnings is that students may have built up an entitlement to unemployment benefit. However, even if they have built up an entitlement to unemployment benefit that is sufficient to meet the additional condition that students have to fulfil in order to draw such benefit in the short vacations, their entitlement, for which they have paid, will be removed by these proposals.

Apart from the shift of the contribution from the state towards parents, there have been other changes and cuts. The minimum award has been abolished. It was worth £410 in 1982-83. It was halved by 1983-84. Then it was abolished altogether. As the hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Freud) said, changes have also been made to the travel grant. The hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Brandon-Bravo) suggested that some of the students who attend the university in his constituency may not have been troubled by this abolition. I have received letters from constituents who attended colleges or universities all over the country in which they say that they suffered from that change.

The hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East asked the Secretary of State to be honest. The whole history of the Government's policy in this, as in so many respects, is not one of honesty but of a rather shoddy and undercover set of shifts and compromises. My hon. Friend the Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice) referred to the cuts in support from public funds and to the way in which the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals and others have drawn attention to the serious consequences for students. They are serious indeed when one hears that the grant has dropped by 20 per cent. since 1979.

The Government appear to be claiming that part of the problem is that students are making increased claims on housing benefit. Of course, 90 per cent. of the savings that the Government are hoping to make will come from housing benefit. The Government say that these claims show that students are too dependent on benefit. But if students are too dependent on benefit it is because of the tremendous increase in costs, particularly in housing costs. It is because students need these additional resources that they have been forced to claim benefit. Heaven knows, the Government have done everything they can to reduce the generosity of the housing benefit scheme year by year. It is not only students as individuals but the whole community in which they live who until now, and also in the future, will be impoverished by the increased poverty among students. To suggest that £36 will be adequate compensation for the loss, in total, of between £20 million and £25 million in student support is insulting, even if all students were to receive compensation, which they will not.

Accommodation costs have risen by between 68 per cent. and 73 per cent. in the university sector. The Government's answer to that is to say that they will cut the entitlement to benefit and that instead they will give £36 to students. However, students who are without grants will not receive £36. As we read the Government's proposals, a number of groups of students are to be credited with the same resources as grant-aided students, but because they are not receiving grants they will be affected by the reductions in benefit. Any housing benefit claim that they may make will be subject to the special student deduction. We understand that even the partner of a claimant who is not a grant-aided student will be affected by such deductions; because they are not grant-aided they will not receive even the paltry £36 that the Government have proposed.

In this respect, the Government's policy approach seems to be that students should be supported from public funds so that they will not be entitled to benefit, even if they are not supported from public funds. The Secretary of State may be able to see the logic in that, but the Opposition cannot see it.

Students on discretionary awards in particular may be hit. The National Union of Students has produced figures for the losses that students are likely to face. A London student who is resident throughout the year in his own accommodation will lose about £209 a year. Students who go home during the vacation will lose about £150 in an academic year, and £514 or more in a full year, particularly because they are likely to face the loss of housing benefit in the long vacation. Even students out of

London face losses of about £300. Those are substantial sums for groups whose grants have been reduced by 20 per cent.

Will the Government tell the House the time scale of the future changes? The Secretary of State made it clear that, irrespective of whether students will be compensated by the Department of Education and Science, they will lose entitlement to benefit from the Department of Health and Social Security in the medium to long term. He said that we could not expect to decide tonight exactly what compensation was appropriate because we were waiting for the report of the Social Security Advisory Committee. If that is so, why are the changes in housing benefit during the vacation to take effect in June? We are not waiting very long, are we? We already know the date for that, although the report is not even written, never mind before the House. If June 1986 is, to be charitable, the short term, what is the medium term for the complete removal of benefit? Is it October 1986, December 1986, or January 1987?

There is no question but that the Government are, in effect, and probably by design, introducing loans by the back door. The British Medical Association has written to us, drawing our attention to the whole range of problems that medical students face, particularly in central London, which are coming to a peak in the sense that students are facing loans of about 20 per cent. of income. In other words, they must now make up from loans what the Government have withdrawn in benefit. One wonders how they are to manage.

The Secretary of State made a remarkable statement when he said that there is no reason for the Government to impose severe cuts which are beyond the means of students to meet. We agree, and hope that the Minister will tell us why the Government are doing that. In view of the Secretary of State's remarks, we expect to see him with us in the Lobby tonight.

9.51 pm

The Minister for Social Security (Mr. Tony Newton): I am never sure what the rules of the House require about declaring direct personal interests as distinct from commercial interests. Perhaps I should tell the House that I have a daughter who expects to go to university this autumn, and another daughter who expects to go the following autumn. Therefore, I can be seen to have a direct interest.

Perhaps I should begin by restating briefly the Government's general position, which is that in the long run it is not sensible that students should be subject to two separate but intertwined systems of support. It has been clear from tonight's debate that that view does not necessarily depend on sharing the precise view about the right balance between grants, parental support and vacation earnings which the Government have put forward in the Green and White Papers. It is necessary to accept only that it cannot be satisfactory as a deliberate and permanent arrangement for students to be wholly or partly dependent on a system, which is primarily designed for those who, for various reasons, cannot work, rather than for those who have withdrawn voluntarily from the labour market to study, and which is not and cannot be sensibly equipped to make judgments about for whom and for what courses studies should appropriately be supported by the community.

Mr. Wareing: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Newton: I shall not give way because the hon. Gentleman made a constructive point, and I have little time.

The hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) and, implicitly, the hon. Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice) acknowledged that the basic proposition that it would be better if student support and social security were separate was not one from which they would dissent. I accept that they expressed considerable and strong reservations about the particular policy proposals before the Social Security Advisory Committee. That view would be shared by many of my hon. Friends who have spoken, including my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Brandon-Bravo), and certainly my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Mr. Rhodes James), who made a most thoughtful speech to which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will pay careful attention.

Having said that, let me make it clear that our belief that it would be right to work towards a position in which the systems of student support and social security are once again separated out is, as we have repeatedly said, a long-term aim and not a current proposal.

That brings me directly to the points that the hon. Member for Derby, South made in her closing speech.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: When?

Mr. Newton: I shall come to that in a moment.

Despite what we have said from the outset about what our current proposals do not do, they have been widely and persistently misrepresented, as my hon. Friends have found from much of the correspondence that they have received. The most recent and notable example that I have seen was in *The Times* last Saturday, 8 March, in its section on family money. Among numerous inaccuracies —I shall quote only the most sweeping and glaring—it said:

> "All students will lose all benefits by academic year 1987-88."

From that basis it went on to make suggestions of potential losses of £1,100 in London and £840 elsewhere. There is no foundation for that statement whatever.

The specific proposals on which we have been consulting do not affect students' entitlement to supplementary benefit if they cannot find work in the long vacation, which is far and away the biggest element in the social security help which students receive. Nor do they affect any entitlement that there may be to unemployment benefit in the long vacation. Nor, as I told the hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett) do they remove the right to claim housing benefit in respect of privately rented accommodation in which students live at any time during the year.

Any major specific proposal on those matters would require further consideration within Government involving both the grant and the social security systems. They would require further consultation with the Social Security Advisory Committee, and, if they affected housing benefits, with the local authority associations. They would require fresh regulations to be brought before the House, and, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has made clear, such proposals are not an immediate prospect. Nor—I wish it to be clear—will they be found in the Social Security Bill.

The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) asked me to say when, and I have no doubt that many of my hon. Friends would wish me to make that clear

[Mr. Newton]

as well. The public expenditure plans in the recent White Paper covering the three years 1986-87 to 1988-89 include continued provision for social security benefits for students on the basis only of the limited changes in the current consultative proposals. Having, I hope, made that clear, let me deal with the limited and specific proposals themselves.

The first point, which gives further emphasis to what I have just said, is that the proposals concern only a relatively small part of the current social security entitlement of students. Taken together they would affect some £40 million to £45 million of social security expenditure. Of that, £10 million to £11 million would go directly back into making one aspect of the housing benefit rules more favourable. So the net reduction in social security would be of the order of £30 million to £35 million. Of that, £10 million or £11 million would go back in the proposed £36 a year grant increase to students living away from home which is over and above the general grant increase announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science.

The net overall saving for the budget for social security benefits is therefore between £20 million and £25 million and that may be compared with present benefit expenditure on students of around £120 million. I hope that that puts the nature of the proposals in perspective.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: If the SSAC reports examples of hardship to students, will my hon. Friend consider introducing some form of amending legislation so that students do not lose overall the cash they are receiving at present?

Mr. Newton: I am happy to assure my hon. Friend that they are consultative proposals on draft regulations, that we shall consider the results of the consultation constructively, and that we shall take into account the points made by my hon. Friends and other hon. Members during the debate. However, we shall also consider them against the background of a student grants system which is one of the most generous in the Western world and of the recognition that the bills must be paid and student benefits weighed against the claims of pensioners and many others in the community.

I invite the House to reject the motion.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 193, Noes 258.

Division No. 101] **[10 pm**

AYES

Abse, Leo
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Atkinson, N. *(Tottenham)*
Bagier, Gordon A. T.
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnett, Guy
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Bennett, A. *(Dent'n & Red'sh)*
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Anthony
Boothroyd, Miss Betty
Boyes, Roland
Brown, Gordon *(D'f'mline E)*
Brown, Hugh D. *(Provan)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne E)*
Brown, R. *(N'c'tle-u-Tyne N)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Buchan, Norman
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Ian
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alexander *(Montg'y)*
Carter-Jones, Lewis
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Thomas
Clay, Robert
Clelland, David Gordon
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Conlan, Bernard
Cook, Robin F. *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cox, Thomas *(Tooting)*
Craigen, J. M.
Crowther, Stan
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(L'lli)*
Davies, Ronald *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'ge H'l)*
Deakins, Eric
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Donald
Dormand, Jack
Dubs, Alfred
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs G.
Eastham, Ken
Edwards, Bob *(W'h'mpt'n SE)*
Evans, John *(St. Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, T. *(L'pool Broad Gn)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forrester, John
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, J. *(Norwood)*
Freeson, Rt Hon Reginald
Freud, Clement
Garrett, W. E.
Glyn, Dr Alan
Godman, Dr Norman
Gould, Bryan
Gourlay, Harry
Hamilton, James *(M'well N)*
Hamilton, W. W. *(Fife Central)*
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harrison, Rt Hon Walter
Hart, Rt Hon Dame Judith
Haynes, Frank
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heffer, Eric S.
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart *(Vauxhall)*
Home Robertson, John
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Douglas
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Janner, Hon Greville
Jenkins, Rt Hon Roy *(Hillh'd)*
John, Brynmor
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kilroy-Silk, Robert
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Lewis, Terence *(Worsley)*
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Edward
McCartney, Hugh
McDonald, Dr Oonagh
McKelvey, William
MacKenzie, Rt Hon Gregor
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Robert
Madden, Max
Mallon, Seamus
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael
Mason, Rt Hon Roy
Maxton, John
Maynard, Miss Joan
Meacher, Michael
Meadowcroft, Michael
Michie, William
Mikardo, Ian
Millan, Rt Hon Bruce
Miller, Dr M. S. *(E Kilbride)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Park, George
Parry, Robert
Pavitt, Laurie
Pendry, Tom
Penhaligon, David
Pike, Peter
Powell, Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Radice, Giles
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon M. *(Leeds S)*
Richardson, Ms Jo
Robertson, George
Robinson, G. *(Coventry NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, J. W.
Ross, Ernest *(Dundee W)*
Ross, Stephen *(Isle of Wight)*
Rowlands, Ted
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon R.
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Silkin, Rt Hon J.
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'bury)*
Smith, Cyril *(Rochdale)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(M'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Steel, Rt Hon David
Stewart, Rt Hon D. *(W Isles)*
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Thomas, Dafydd *(Merioneth)*
Thomas, Dr R. *(Carmarthen)*
Thompson, J. *(Wansbeck)*
Thorne, Stan *(Preston)*
Tinn, James
Torney, Tom
Wainwright, R.
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*

Wareing, Robert
Weetch, Ken
Welsh, Michael
White, James
Wigley, Dafydd
Wilson, Gordon
Winnick, David
Wrigglesworth, Ian
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Allen McKay and
Mr. Allen Adams.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Ancram, Michael
Arnold, Tom
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert *(South Ribble)*
Atkinson, David *(B'm'th E)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Benyon, William
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Biggs-Davison, Sir John
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'to'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Boyson, Dr Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brinton, Tim
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thpes)*
Bruinvels, Peter
Bryan, Sir Paul
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon A.
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nick
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Rt Hon Sir Adam
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carlisle, Rt Hon M. *(W'ton S)*
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Clark, Hon A. *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon
Cope, John
Couchman, James
Critchley, Julian
Crouch, David
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord J.
Dover, Den
du Cann, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Dunn, Robert
Durant, Tony
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evennett, David
Eyre, Sir Reginald
Fairbairn, Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Anthony
Fletcher, Alexander
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Fraser, Peter *(Angus East)*
Freeman, Roger
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Galley, Roy
Gardiner, George *(Reigate)*
Gardner, Sir Edward *(Fylde)*
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Glyn, Dr Alan
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Greenway, Harry
Griffiths, Sir Eldon
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsm'th N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John S
Hamilton, Hon A. *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hargreaves, Kenneth
Harris, David
Harvey, Robert
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, C. *(High Peak)*
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, J.
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Henderson, Barry
Hickmet, Richard
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hirst, Michael
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holland, Sir Philip *(Gedling)*
Holt, Richard
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Stratf'd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(G'ldford)*
Howell, Ralph *(Norfolk, N)*
Hubbard-Miles, Peter
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert *(Herts W)*
Joseph, Rt Hon Sir Keith
Kellett-Bowman, Mrs Elaine
Kershaw, Sir Anthony
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'field)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knowles, Michael
Lamont, Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawler, Geoffrey
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
MacKay, John *(Argyll & Bute)*
Maclean, David John
Major, John
Malone, Gerald
Marland, Paul
Mather, Carol
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Merchant, Piers
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miscampbell, Norman
Moate, Roger
Morris, M. *(N'hampton S)*
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Page, Richard *(Herts SW)*
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Parris, Matthew
Pawsey, James
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Powley, John
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rees, Rt Hon Peter *(Dover)*
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Rippon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Robinson, Mark *(N'port W)*
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Thomas
Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Silvester, Fred
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speller, Tony
Spencer, Derek
Spicer, Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis *(Nuneaton)*
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andrew *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Ian *(Hertf'dshire N)*
Stokes, John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Terlezki, Stefan
Thatcher, Rt Hon Mrs M.
Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
Thompson, Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(N'ich N)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
van Straubenzee, Sir W.
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waddington, David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side N)*
Wall, Sir Patrick
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, C. *(Bexhill)*
Watson, John
Wells, Bowen *(Hertford)*
Wells, Sir John *(Maidstone)*
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Raymond
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Michael
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Francis Maude and
Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 33 (Questions on amendments), and agreed to.*

MR. SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House recognises that more students than ever before are receiving higher education; appreciates the need to hold increases in student grant rates to levels which the country can afford; welcomes the Government's current efforts to rationalise and simplify some aspects of the provisions of the social security system as it affects students; and notes that the Secretary of State for Social Services expects shortly to receive the advice of the Social Security Advisory Committee on his proposals to this end.

Fulham By-election

10.14 pm

Mr. Clement Freud (Cambridgeshire, North-East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. During the Division in the Aye Lobby, an hon. Member held up a notice which read, "Your help is urgently required at the Fulham by-election". Is it in order for an untruthful notice to be displayed? When I offered my help, it was refused. Secondly, is there any limit to the advertising that one might carry out? My daughter needs a British car with low mileage. I wonder whether it would be in order if I held up a notice to that effect during the next Division.

Mr. Speaker: I thought that the hon. Gentleman said that he would raise a genuine point of order. I am not certain that his point of order is all that genuine, but it has the ring of truth about it.

Mr. Richard Hickmet (Glanford and Scunthorpe): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Would it not be in order to make the point that the Liberal party in Fulham needs all the help that it can get?

Mr. Speaker: I think that we should proceed with the next debate.

European Community (Coal and Steel)

10.14 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry (Mr. Peter Morrison): I beg to move,

That this House takes note of European Community Documents Nos. 8293/85, a communication by the Commission to the Council concerning the organisation of the steel market after 1985; 9300/85, a communication by the Commission to the Council on the introduction of a system of production quotas under Article 58 of the Treaty establishing the European Coal and Steel Community after December 1985; 9301/85, a communication by the Commission to the Council concerning rules on aid and financial transfers to the Community Steel Industry after 1985; 8779/85, proposals for Council Decisions concerning contributions to the European Communities to finance measures connected with the restructuring of the coal and steel industries; 5194/84, a communication by the Commission to the Council on the General Objectives for Steel 1985; and 4493/86, a proposal by the Commission for a Council Regulation establishing quantitive restrictions on imports of certain products orginating in the United States of America; and welcomes the agreement by the Government in the Council of Ministers to a further limited period of European Coal and Steel Community market organisation measures beneficial to the United Kingdom, and to the ending of most forms of state aids to the Community steel industry.

The purpose of the debate is to take note of the seven European Community documents relating to the steel industry as recommended by the Select Committee on European Legislation. I apologise to the House for the fact that it has proved necessary to agree to the adoption of two of the documents in Brussels before a debate could be arranged.

I informed the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) about the October measures at the time and subsequently explained the reasons for my decision in my written replies on 11 November and 16 December 1985. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State wrote to the hon. Member for Newham, South on 24 January about the Community retaliation measures against the United States. I should like to thank the hon. Gentleman for the understanding of his Committee in the special circumstances which I have explained. I assure him and his colleagues on the Committee that I was and am concerned to respect the resolution of the House of 30 October 1980.

The House last debated the international aspects of the steel industry in November 1983. Since then, a good deal of progress has been made towards solving the problems of overcapacity and weak markets, although much still remains to be done. Demand for steel in the Community in 1985 was about 4 per cent. higher than the depressed levels of 1983. Output has therefore risen and firmer prices have been possible. Coupled with major reductions in costs, this in turn has allowed steel firms both in the United Kingdom and in the Community generally to reduce losses or to move into profit.

The British Steel Corporation, having made £21 million of profit in the first half of this financial year, expects to be in profit for 1985-86 as a whole—the first overall profit it will have recorded since 1974. I hope that all hon. Members will agree that this is a major achievement for all of those who have worked at BSC. I should like to take this opportunity to pay tribute in particular to Sir Robert Haslam, who is about to leave the chairmanship of BSC, for his leadership of the corporation during the past three years. He is to be succeeded by the present deputy chairman, Mr. Bob Scholey, who has worked closely with Sir Robert and his predecessor to bring about the present improved performance.

The Government remain committed to further progress by the corporation towards sustained profitability. It has cost the taxpayer a great deal of money, and we want that dependence on the taxpayer to be left behind for good. The corporation expects to demonstrate that financial self-sufficiency can be achieved by the end of the present three-year plan.

Turning to the European scene, we can now see that the measures of the past five years have had an impact. Some 32 million tonnes of capacity have been closed since 1980, bringing the total down to about 140 million tonnes of hot rolled capacity. That achievement owes much to the Community regime on state aid. All Community members have contributed to this closure programme, contrary to what some hon. Members believe. The French have closed about 6 million tonnes of capacity, the Germans nearly 7 million tonnes and the Italians more than 5·5 million tonnes while the United Kingdom has closed just less than 5 million tonnes.

The document on general objectives for steel to 1985 has been superseded by a new document "General Objectives for Steel in 1990". In this new document the Commission estimates that steel production levels achieved in the Community in 1984—about 103 million tonnes of hot rolled products — are not likely to be exceeded between now and 1990, even if economic conditions are favourable. Production in 1990 is therefore estimated at 103 million tonnes on a best case assumption and 94 million tonnes on a worst case assumption. This picture of stable or declining steel output is reflected in all industrialised countries, and the United States and Japan face similar pressures.

Despite the closures that have already been made, the Commission concludes that an excess capacity of about 24 million tonnes still exists in the Community. Last October I attended two Council of Ministers meetings which discussed the Commission's proposals for the shape of the Community steel regime after 1985. As the House is aware, we have had for the last few years an elaborate system for production quotas and minimum prices to keep allowed supply in balance with demand. These largely succeeded in their objective of maintaining prices while excess capacity was cut out and the level of state aids cut back. The Commission proposes that this system should continue for a further three years because of the continued fragile nature of the steel market and the continued overhang of excess capacity.

The Commission also proposed the progressive liberalisation of the system to reflect the improvements now being seen in the market and designed to pave the way towards the return to a free market in 1988 or 1989. The Council of Ministers——

Mr. Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): Will my hon. Friend tell me what he means by a free market? Will he confirm that the Commission will retain the guidance prices system which will ensure that any importers will have to charge a certain price? When my hon. Friend speaks of a free market, does he mean that imports which are not dumped will be allowed in at their market price?

Mr. Morrison: A free market means what it says. I am sure that my hon. Friend will accept that it is important to make sure that it is free in every sense of the word—that there is fair competition at the same time.

Mr. Taylor: What does that mean?

Mr. Morrison: It means precisely what it says. It is important to ensure that there are no hidden subsidies, because if there were such subsidies it would not be the free market which I hope my hon. Friend and I would want it to be.

Mr. Taylor: Will the guidance pricing system continue to operate?

Mr. Morrison: My hon. Friend will understand that it is a little early to say. We are speaking about two or three years hence and there will be significant negotiations and developments which will take place between now and then. I have listened carefully to what my hon. Friend says, and I have absolutely no doubt that he will keep me closely up to the mark on this issue as the situation develops.

Mr. Richard Hickmet (Glanford and Scunthorpe): Whether there is a price guidance regime or not, will my hon. Friend accept that, with respect to European steel producers, the British Steel Corporation is best placed to produce steel competitively and cheaply and to succeed in every competitive free market which may be established following the phasing out of the quota regime?

Mr. Morrison: I agree with my hon. Friend. I know that he has a close interest in BSC and watches carefully what it does. I think that the achievements of BSC so far have been remarkable. It has made itself into a viable and competitive industry after starting, some 10 years ago, from a low base. I entirely accept what my hon. Friend says.

Mr. Stan Crowther (Rotherham): Is the Minister giving the House a cast-iron assurance that the hidden subsidies which have operated for years in West Germany, for example, in the subsidisation of coking coal and of freight-rail transport, will be ended? It has been impossible to give such an assurance in the past.

Mr. Morrison: The assurance that I can give the hon. Gentleman is that nobody is keener than me, and during my time at the Department of Trade and Industry nobody has been keener than me, to rifle out unfair competition. I will chase it for all I am worth. If the hon. Gentleman or any other hon. Member has any specific evidence which he thinks may not be available to me, I hope that they will come to me fast and give me that evidence. I will take the appropriate action. I feel strongly that competition should be free and fair. The two go together. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will take me up on that as and when he has specific examples which I may put to the Commission so that it can do its job and rifle them out.

On 29 October, the Council of Ministers agreed to the Commission's proposals with some modification. The Council agreed to the suspension of the minimum price system, but it took a more cautious view than the Commission on the appropriate pace for liberalisation of the quota system. Only coated sheet and reinforcing bar were liberalised at the start of 1986, although the Commission may make proposals for further liberalisation in 1987. These are early days, but the initial moves do not seem to have led to any serious price weakness in the liberalised categories. We shall keep a close watch on developments this year and in the future.

Mr. Ian Wrigglesworth (Stockton, South): Before the Minister leaves the question of excess capacity of 24 million tonnes which he mentioned, can he tell us what the Community is doing, as there is great anxiety about capacity in Third world countries such as Korea, where substantially increased capacity is being prepared or coming into production while we are apparently closing down capacity?

Mr. Morrison: The hon. Gentleman will appreciate that the Community watches these matters carefully, not least because it is important that there is a free market and fair trading. I am aware of the problems and will ensure that the Community is, too. I appreciate that the ramifications of what the hon. Gentleman said are potentially crucial to steel capacity and to employment in steel here and elsewhere in the Community.

Mr. Richard Caborn (Sheffield, Central): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Morrison: I am happy to go on giving way, but there is limited time for the debate and I want everyone else to have an opportunity to catch the Chair's eye.

Mr. Caborn: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way. At the meeting in Luxembourg on 29 October, was there any discussion about setting up an investigation into hidden subsidies, which my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Mr. Crowther) mentioned? Which country initiated that move? Were the British supportive of setting up an investigation into hidden subsidies?

Mr. Morrison: The hon. Gentleman might have heard about that meeting. I arrived at 10 am, and the meeting did not finish until 3 am the following morning. He will appreciate that my recall will not be 100 per cent. accurate. I hesitate to say that I put in the point about watching matters carefully so that, if there were problems such as the hon. Gentleman mentioned, the Commission could operate immediately. I think that it was me, but I certainly supported it strongly when we discussed the matter at, I believe, 2 am. Hon. Members have my sympathy. More than that, I shall happily be nudged, goaded and a few other things by them to ensure that we achieve what they want. I hope that we can all agree on the general approach.

In October, the Commission also made proposals for the successor to the steel aids code, which expired at the end of 1985. For the next three years, the major forms of aid—operating aid, investment aid and regional aid—are banned. Aid for research and development and for environment protection will be allowed on broadly the same terms as for other industries. Limited closure aid is permitted, but only for redundancy payments or for firms leaving the steel industry altogether.

This restrictive approach to state aids should protect United Kingdom steel firms in both the public and private sectors against the threat of extensive subsidies to their continental competitors.

It is essential that other Community members do not try to block the further reduction in capacity that will be necessary to bring down the still substantial level of excess

capacity. Only if this is done are we likely to succeed in returning to a more normal free market in steel in two or three years' time.

It is sometimes suggested that the problems of the steel industry could be solved if only exports outside the Community were increased. As the Community's general objectives paper makes clear, the problem will be to keep net Community exports up to present levels, let alone achieve an increase.

Exports to the United States of America have been subject to greatly increased restrictions over the last year. As the House knows, the EC/US steel arrangement, which limits exports to the United States and dates back to 1982 was recently extended and modified; 33 steel products are now restricted as against the 10 originally covered in 1982.

The major problem we and the Community faced in negotiating the new agreement related to exports of semi-finished steel. We were concerned to protect a major new long-term export contract which BSC had negotiated with Tuscaloosa Steel. The result was that last December the United States gave assurances to Tuscaloosa which substantially safeguarded the corporation's interests. However, the overall level of exports which the United States could accept was not enough to satisfy the Community as a whole. As a result, the United States restricted imports unilaterally. In consequence, the Commission made further proposals for retaliation. These proposals, for quotas on the import from the United States of coated paper, bovine fats and fertilisers, were agreed by the Council of Ministers and were introduced on 15 February 1986.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: Could my hon. Friend tell us what reasons the United States gave for imposing these restrictions? Is it not the case that we had come to a voluntary agreement with the United States on a specific tonnage and had in fact greatly exceeded that?

Mr. Morrison: It is not for me to comment on the specific reasons which the United States might give. I might be able to muse about them, but I think that my hon. Friend will appreciate that it is not for me to comment on what motivation the United States Government might have for any move they make.

Following the counter-retaliation by the United States against the Community, which included what we believe to be wholly unjustifiable discrimination against other United Kingdom exports of semis, contacts are taking place between the Commission and the United States to explore the possible scope for a negotiated settlement of the dispute about semis. The United Kingdom would, of course, welcome such a settlement, provided that the corporation's Tuscaloosa sales were not impaired and that discrimination against other United Kingdom semis was removed.

I turn to the social measures set up to deal with the problems caused by the restructuring of the steel industry. Two of the documents to be debated tonight cover Commission proposals in this area, and from my personal experience, living as I do a mile away and having a constituency interest, I am fully aware of the serious hardship which is created by steel closures.

One document notes the continuing restructuring process in both the coal and steel industries in the Community and the consequent unemployment and social hardship. It concludes that the programme of special social measures should continue. This involves payments to member states for schemes to finance early retirement and redundancy payments. In recent years, these measures have been financed by transfers from the general budget of the Communities to the European Coal and Steel Community, and the document recommends that this practice should continue.

There is no agreement at present among member states on the principle of these proposals, on the details, or indeed on the method and level of financing, and I will take careful note of any views expressed in the debate this evening.

The second document puts forward suggestions for stronger Community structural measures to assist steel areas. The Commission has proposed that there should be an integrated approach in a limited number of areas where losses in steel are most serious. The idea is that it might be possible to improve the effectiveness of Community and domestic resources by improving co-ordination. The Commission indicated that it intended to develop these proposals in consultation with the member states concerned and we stand ready to consider this further with the Commission.

I hope and trust that the House will welcome the support given by the Government for the measures taken by the Community towards the restoration of a free market in steel. We believe that the measures adopted last October provide a sound framework for the restoration of a viable and competitive steel industry in Britain and in western Europe generally. I commend the documents to the House.

10.35 pm

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): I do not intend to deal in detail with the individual documents, because I think that the essence of the package is that the Government have been sold a pup, and I do not think that they realise it yet. The only paper to which I shall refer is that which deals with sanctions against the United States. We, the Opposition, want to lend support to the action that has been taken in that regard.

When I consider the potential of the package of documents which is before us, I must warn the House that I regard the prospective impact on the steel industry as extremely serious, and possibly very damaging. The essence of the forward projection is that there is 25 million to 30 million tonnes of excess capacity in the industry in Europe. As we well know, and as we have often protested, over the past decade—a period when we have been cutting back on capacity — Italy, West Germany, Belgium and France have been building up capacity. They have been creating the surplus capacity problem and we have been carrying the cost and the cuts. After a decade of virtual attrition in the industry, West Germany has returned to the 40 million tonnes that it previously produced. It seems to be in a position to benefit from a shift in cuts from general capacity to hot-rolled capacity.

Mr. Hickmet: Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that over the five years since 1980 the Germans have cut capacity by nearly 7 million tonnes, the Italians by 5·5 million tonnes and the French by 6 million tonnes—these have been cuts from a similar level of that of the United Kingdom—and that United Kingdom cuts have amounted to less than 5 million tonnes? Where do these figures fit into the case that the right hon. Gentleman is presenting to the House, or does he not accept them?

Mr. Williams: The decade has to be taken as a whole if we are to see the true outturn. The Germans have been building up capacity—*[Interruption.]* I have no doubt that the hon. Gentleman will participate in the debate if he is fortunate enough—and we are unfortunate enough—to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I ask him to allow me to make my own speech while he is seated. If he wishes to intervene again and he rises to do so, I shall give way.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman will agree that a helpful guide to hon. Members is the information that was published by the Department of Employment under one of its prominent Ministers, who has sinced moved to another Department. It shows that since 1979 the reductions in the numbers employed in steel in Britain have been double the average for the rest of the Common Market.

Mr. Williams: That is right. I shall be coming to figures for the decade, which show a similar pattern. I do not want to anticipate that part of my speech now.

Mr. Hickmet *rose*——

Mr. Williams: The hon. Gentleman must remember that many hon. Members wish to contribute to the date. I have hardly done more than complete the first couple of sentences of my speech. I am glad, of course, to be followed so assiduously.

It is important that the Minister and the Government tell our EEC partners clearly and categorically that Britain has already had more than its share of cuts. If they are talking of further cuts in the next four or five years, tell them that they need not look in this direction. We have done more than our share. It has been suggested that as many as 80,000 jobs may go throughout the planning period. It would be interesting if the Minister would hazard a guess at the job loss in the United Kingdom under the cut in capacity that is intimated.

I fear the implications of the policy underlying the documents. At last the British Steel Corporation has become competitive with the rest of Europe and its great plants are now as efficient as those of any of its competitors throughout the EEC. Just as we can boast about that, the EEC is changing the rules, and, astonishingly, we are agreeing to that. As the Minister has indicated, there is no longer to be any direct as sistance. He put that as a defence of BSC's interests—a peculiar argument if one considers the pattern of assistance over recent years.

Document 9301 says:

"Aid to cover operating losses and aid for investment, even under regional aid schemes and even where the aid would not help to expand capacity, will no longer be permitted."

That is clear; there will be no more direct aid. So BSC will have to compete without direct Government assistance.

What about indirect assistance? I raised that at Question Time earlier today. The Minister and his officials are well aware of a report by the National Economic Development Office.

On figures which are admitted to be slightly out of date and which are probably less unfavourable, whereas BSC receives an indirect subsidy of just over £1 a tonne, in Italy the subsidy is £6 a tonne, in West Germany it is £8 a tonne and in France it is £8·3 a tonne. Those are indirect subsidies which will still be available. BSC's continental competitors never received direct subsidies, but the subsidy to our industry helped to counterbalance the concealed benefits which our continental rivals were getting.

Concurrent with our industry receiving no assistance while its continental competitors still receive indirect assistance, the safety net of minimum pricing is being removed. Having put our continental competitors in the position of having a major subsidised cost advantage, we will maximise their opportunity to exploit that cost advantage by taking away the safety net.

Another element in the package to make absolutely sure that Britain gets it wrong is that at the same time we will phase out the quotas. So there will be no element of fair play left within the system.

Mr. Peter Morrison: I listened carefully to what the right hon. Gentleman said at Question time. He will not be surprised to hear that when I went back to my Deprtment I asked for a check to be made. So far as we know, there has been no complaint in regard to Italy or any other European country. As I said to his hon. Friends, I shall be happy to chase up specific complaints and wish to do so at the earliest possible opportunity. But since the Steel Council liberalisation to which I referred in my opening remarks, no complaints of the sort the hon. Gentleman is making have been received.

Mr. Williams: With respect, who does the Minister expect to make complaints other than Britain? What is wrong with the NEDO report? It specifies it. Just having got to a state of parity, BSC will be put at a major, artificial disadvantage. It will have to prune its margin so far to sustain its market share that it will have to trade at a low profit or at no profit. Even if it trades at a low profit, where is the self-sustaining investment to come from, which the Government said that in future BSC would be responsible for providing? They have actually signed a death warrant for BSC.

The Minister made a lengthy speech. He knew, from Question time today, that I was slightly agitated on this issue. No doubt he could have demolished me in his speech, had he had the evidence to do so. He says that there is no evidence. Let me take the article in the January edition of *The Engineer*. It gives examples from the report of the National Economic Development Office of the sort of subsidy enjoyed by our competitors. It claims that in 1983 the West German industry, which seems to enjoy the biggest indirect subsidies, received £245 million in indirect subsidies, offsetting labour and transport costs. By the way, £74 million of that was for labour in various forms of indirect subsidy. The corresponding figures for France were £120 million and for Italy £130 million. The report claims that evidence is now available to NEDO which suggests that Italy is offering electricity to its steel industry at 20 per cent. below the United Kingdom rate.

If the Minister does not know about these things, why is he not following up the reports, which are readily available to agencies that report directly to his Department? These indirect subsidies will inevitably distort trade. What is the EEC doing about it? What are the Government doing about it? They are doing nothing about it. They do not even admit that it is happening. They do not even seem to know what is going on. Not that that comes as a great surprise to most of us; it is just one more area in which they do not know what is happening.

What is the EEC doing about it? Absolutely nothing. Or if it is doing something, perhaps the Minister will tell

us what it is doing and when it intends to take action. Those who wrote the article in *The Engineer* spoke to a senior member of the Commission's competition directorate, the people in charge of ensuring that there is equal and free competition between all member countries. What did this senior official say when confronted with the possibility of these indirect subsidies?

"If individual governments were to increase indirect aid it would indicate that those subsidies were becoming much more specific and they would then fall foul of the steel aids code. We would step in and stop it".

Fine, that is wonderful. But it will apparently happen only if the subsidies are increased. As long as they are kept at £8 in France, £8 in Germany and £6 in Italy, it seems that the EEC, the competitions directorate and this Government's Ministers are perfectly happy to allow them to continue, regardless of the effect upon the British Steel Corporation.

If there are to be these 25 million to 30 million-tonne cuts, therefore, where will they fall? If the subsidies are taken from our industry, and if our continental colleagues are allowed to keep their subsidies, the answer must be absolutely clear: we are the people who are in line for the cuts. As the hon. Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor) said earlier, we have already done more than our share when it comes to accepting job losses.

In the decade to 1984, Britain took 37·9 per cent. of all the job losses throughout the EEC—nearly two-fifths—in steel. We lost over that 10-year period 68 per cent. of our steel jobs. The corresponding figure on the continent was 44 per cent. So our steel areas have already been devastated. We already have the black spots, the high unemployment, the empty shells of the old steel works. Now, having suffered most, having had to endure most, with people in steel areas who have already been out of work for two, three or four years, we find that there is a new aid scheme coming in to help the areas of steel unemployment.

But what do we find? We find that under the new aid regime the United Kingdom is not expected to be a net beneficiary. Although the United Kingdom has already taken the lion's share of job losses in European steel, this country is expected yet again to take the lion's share of job losses and is not expected to be a net beneficiary. The United Kingdom's labour force is already in grave imbalance because we tried to accommodate so many job losses through premature retirement and voluntary redundancy. The result is that 70 per cent. of the work force is in the age band 25 to 50. This means that the scope for early retirement to accommodate further redundancies is limited.

Future redundancies will probably have to come from among the young and the younger middle-aged groups —from among those who will not want to have to regard themselves as redundant and forcibly retired at 35 or 40. We find that at the time when this age group will be hit we shall not, according to the aid regime, be net beneficiaries.

The Minister of State said that under the new aid regime the Community wants to adopt an integrated approach to unemployment and redundancy in the steel areas. That is great. Why, then, are the Government allowing British Steel Industries to be wound down? It was set up in the 1970s to deal with the problem of unemployment in the steel areas, but MacGregor, having chopped the jobs, also chopped the job-creating agency. The axe came down in 1984. British Steel Industries was told that it could continue to recycle the funds that it already had, but that it would get no new funds. Although we are trying to develop an integrated Community approach towards steel closures, British Steel Industries is being closed down and we shall not be net beneficiaries of the aid regime.

The projections upon which these documents are based have been invalidated by events. For example, it was presumed that there would be virtually no change in oil prices, but we have just seen the collapse of oil prices. Has the Department made an assessment of the impact that the change in oil prices will have on demand and the exchange rate and what effect both will have on sales of British steel? The estimate of future demand for British Steel Corporation steel is that it will be virtually static. MacGregor pointed out that two thirds of British steel goes into capital goods and that it directly reflects manufacturing investment. If the demand for BSC steel that is reflected in these documents is valid, it throws grave doubts on the Government's claim about their intention to achieve economic growth, since there is nothing in the documents to suggest that the Government will achieve the rate of economic growth in manufacturing investment to which they have referred. There is nothing to support their projections for steel demand in the United Kingdom.

The Government have been conned. The Europeans must be rolling about holding their stomachs, wondering how the Brits could be so daft yet again. The Government are turning a blind eye to indirect aid which will make BSC uncompetitive, concurring with the removal of the minimum price regime—the safety net to stop unfair competition — and phasing out quotas, intended to ensure a degree of fair shares all round. The outcome of that incredible incompetence is that the United Kingdom will lose, and we will be cheated of steel jobs and capacity.

We are about to enter a free-for-all in the steel market. The House will note that the Minister is falling about with laughter at that prospect. I trust it will be clearly recorded that he thinks that that is funny and does not understand what the Government have entered into. They have started on a European free-for-all in steel, but he is unaware of it. His Government are so inept that they are not aware that, in that free-for-all, all the cards are stacked against the BSC.

10.56 pm

Mr. Richard Hickmet (Glanford and Scunthorpe): I imagine that my hon. Friend the Minister was falling about with laughter at the travesty of the truth that the right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) has just given the House. The United Kingdom was required to lay off more steel workers than any other country because in 1980 it took 14·5 man hours per tonne of liquid steel whereas in Germany it took something over seven. The British Steel Corporation was overmanned and unproductive because the Government between 1974 and 1979 put the Beswick report on the shelf, and did not have the guts to walk into the steel towns and say, "Look boys, the party's over. We must get production to competitive levels."

During the past five years we have doubled productivity. We produce as much steel in my constituency today with 7,000 men and one steel works as we did in 1981 with 17,000 men and two steel works. That cannot be said of any other steel industry in Europe. I remind those who say that the United Kingdom has cut more steel capacity than any other European country that

[Mr. Richard Hickmet]

since 1980 the French have closed 6 million tonnes of capacity and the Germans 7 million tonnes. The Italians, who have been building capacity all the time, if we believe Opposition propaganda, have closed 5·5 million tonnes. We have closed just under 5 million tonnes. Those are the figures that the right hon. Gentleman failed to give. I do not suppose that my hon. Friend the Minister shouts this when he attends steel councils, but we have capacity in the system to produce as much steel as we did in 1979-80, if we manned up to the appropriate levels.

One of the Government's great success stories has been the recovery of the BSC. In 15 years, the BSC has received 12,000 million good English pounds. In 1980-81, it lost £660 million. Today, it has brought in a £21 million profit in the first half year. That is the first profit since 1972, but we did not hear a word of commendation or congratulations. The right hon. Gentleman merely said that that was all history and that we should not examine it — yes, the previous Labour Government's history. That Government were responsible for those losses. It was not only one of the least profitable and efficient of the major steel industries in Europe, it was one of the least efficient in the world. It was incapable of producing a product of the right quality, on time, at a price which customers were prepared to pay. As I have said, the BSC has more than doubled its productivity in five years.

When one bears in mind the miners' strike and the fact that the cornerstone of Scargill's policy was to close Scunthorpe, Ravenscraig and Llanwern, putting 30,000 steelmen out of work, it is even more remarkable that the BSC has arrived at that position.

Where was the concern of Labour Members then, when Scargill had 10,000 men at Ravenscraig? Did they condemn the attempts to close down the steel industry? Did they say that Scargill's policies would put all those men out of work? No. Why not? Because they did not have the guts so say that. At that time the right hon. Gentleman and his party were in hock to Mr. Scargill. They did not have time for the steel workers then. It cost my constituency £1 million a week to move that coke and ore into Scunthorpe—3 million lorry movements. Yet still it made a profit.

The consequences of the Government's policies and the management of Black Bob, one of the finest steel men in the world, and Bob Haslam, is that we have not only one of the most efficient steel industries in Europe — the right hon. Gentleman did not mention that—but in the world. What other European country produces cheaper steel?

As for the Americans, they have a few lessons to learn about restructuring an inefficient and out-dated steel industry. I suggest that they get in touch with my hon. Friend the Minister of State. Perhaps the President will have him over and he can tell him how to do it.

I welcome the European Commission's decision to promote imports of certain semi-finished steel products. *[Interruption.]* I can tell my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor) that the Americans have stopped our steel going in because they cannot compete. They have one of the lousiest steel industries in the world today and they are in breach of their GATT obligations. That is why the European Commission has taken the steps that it has. I am pleased that my hon. Friend and the European Commission are taking reciprocal action.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: I shall be glad if I have the opportunity to say something about the American situation, but meantime will my hon. Friend explain something that I do not understand and he, with his knowledge of steel, obviously does? If we are so much more efficient and better than the continentals, why are we importing more and more steel from the continent?

Mr. Hickmet: When we get rid of the quota system, perhaps that will not be necessary. One reason why we are in this position is the quota system. My hon. Friend the Minister was not congratulated on bringing home a quote of 385,000 tonnes for the British steel industry. Who got that? *[Laughter.]* The hon. Member for Sheffield, Central (Mr. Caborn) may laugh, but my hon. Friend went to the Steel Council and obtained a quota of 385,000 tonnes. Perhaps, in passing, my hon. Friend will tell me where that quota will be allocated.

Mr. Teddy Taylor *rose*——

Mr. Hickmet: I must move on.

The first battle, that for survival, has been won, but the corporation must still achieve full viability. That performance is all the more important as the first phase of the manifest crisis comes to an end. The documents make it clear that state aids are being phased out and that the Commission will watch all state aids, whether direct or indirect. Only those corporations which are viable will survive, and the viable corporation in Europe today is the BSC.

I join hon. Members in commending my hon. Friend for the close attention that he is paying to hidden subsidies and I urge him to keep that matter under particular observation. I also remind hon. Members that it is only as the quota regime is phased out that those efficient steel producers will survive. Five years ago, the vultures of Europe were picking over the bones of the BSC which the Labour Government left to us when they were removed from office, and were hungrily eyeing its decaying carcase. Today, they are threatened by the corporation's success.

Efficiency requires investment. The right hon. Gentleman did not mention the fact that, last year, £194 million was invested in BSC. In 1986, £50 million will be spent in my constituency on a new sinter plant — the largest single scheme approved for 12 years — which will result in higher productivity, lower energy and maintenance costs and improved blast furnace operations. The quality of sinter produced by the new strands will equal the best in the world.

The improvement in the corporation's performance has resulted in substantial redundancies, for the reasons which I have outlined, and I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to ensure that state aid continues to steel closure areas to alleviate the social problems caused. My hon. Friend will know that, since 1983, my constituency has reduced unemployment by more than almost any other. The aid is a vital element in doing that. Will my hon. Friend ensure that non-quota European regional development fund moneys go to steel closure areas such as Scunthorpe, not to Hull, Grimsby or Bridlington, for which other Community funds are available? It is our money. Please let us have it. The social policy is essential to steel closure areas, which have lost many jobs.

I hope that we can knock on its head the myth that Britain has closed more steel capacity than any other

country. I should be interested to hear the right hon. Gentleman's answer to the point that I put to him in an intervention. His suggestion is simply not true.

11.6 pm

Mr. Ian Wrigglesworth (Stockton, South): I am pleased to join the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Hickmet) in paying tribute to the British Steel Corporation's achievements in recent years. But the hon. Gentleman did not pay enough attention to the damage caused to many people's lives by the shedding of labour in steel areas, which he knows well from his constituency experience. His constituency has had the good fortune, due in part to the state aids to which he referred, to find other employment for former steel workers. In Teesside and other parts of the north, it has been impossible to find alternative employment. The hon. Gentleman should have mentioned the impact of the enormous shedding of labour on people's lives while he paid tribute to the corporation.

Mr. James Tinn (Redcar): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is a pity that the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Hickmet), who lavishly handed out bouquets to past and present chairmen of the BSC, the Minister and everyone in sight for contributing to the improved position of the BSC, did not say something about the workers, who seem to be blamed for all the previous ills of the industry?

Mr. Wrigglesworth: I am pleased to concur with the hon. Gentleman. The staff of the BSC at all levels—management, middle management and the shop floor—paid an enormous price and made an enormous contribution to the success of the corporation. Since 1980, productivity has doubled from 14·5 man hours to produce a tonne of steel to 6·7 man hours today. That is a remarkable achievement in a short period. Losses of £660 million in 1980-81 have been turned into profit in a short period. Production is 14·6 per cent. higher than it was in 1982.

However, those achievements must be put into perspective. Output is still 30 per cent. below the 1976 level, compared with an average decline in European Community countries of only 10 per cent. British steel output and consumption has suffered from the contraction of our manufacturing base. During the past decade, United Kingdom manufacturing output has decreased by 4·1 per cent., whereas in the EC manufacturing output has increased by 8·3 per cent.

It is not surprising that the demand for the products of British Steel has declined in the way that it has.

I agree with the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe that the outlook for the corporation in its competitive posture is favourable. It has benefited from the recent fall of the pound against the deutschmark and from the rise of the pound against the dollar. Some 35 per cent. of its raw material costs are dollar-related, so that change will be a double advantage.

However, there are a number of reasons why any proposals to withdraw state aid should be treated with much greater caution than the Government appear to be treating them. First, the exchange rates cannot be relied upon to remain favourable if the dollar's slide ends and the Budget next week results in a return to the discredited sterling M3 strategy, which has been forecast in the papers in the past few days. When measured against purchasing power parities, sterling is still overvalued against the deutschmark, and my view and that of my right hon. and hon. Friends is that entry into the European monetary system would bring benefit, particularly to BSC, by giving rise to a more competitive position and more stability for the corporation.

Secondly, the fall of about one fifth in the manufacturing capacity has wiped out BSC's customers in many spheres. Falling oil prices, which will halve the contribution of the oil surplus to the balance of payments in the next two years, mean that strategy for industrial competitiveness throughout the whole of the economy is absolutely vital. We all knew that oil would first decline and then run out in the contribution that it was making to the balance of payments. That decline has been brought forward by the recent 40 per cent. decrease in oil prices, and the balance of payments problem is coming down the track at us much more rapidly as a result of the loss of value in oil. That will mean a much greater imbalance in our industry, which has been devastated in recent years. If steel demand and output is to retain its recovery, much higher levels of manufacturing investment in this and future years will be required, and measures must be taken to secure this.

Thirdly, more state aid may be required to ensure that BSC can continue to renew and modernise its equipment and plant, and particularly to concentrate on smaller scale, higher value added and more profitable products. Otherwise, the further threat posed to capacity by the Commission, which wants capacity reduced by a further 24 million tonnes in the next five years, will continue to put pressure on BSC. This may be accentuated by the much higher subsidies given to coal and electricity producers, railways and suppliers in West Germany and France in particular. As the right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) pointed out, the EEC report shows that subsidies amount to £8 per tonne in West Germany and France, and to £6 per tonne in Italy, but to only £1 per tonne in the United Kingdom. I am not arguing for our subsidies to the industry to be brought up to that level. We need tough action to ensure that all such subsidies are removed, and that we have not only free but fair trade between European countries.

Fourthly, the Community has not spelt out the form of extra social measures for areas affected by steel and coal closures. It has been suggested that the United Kingdom might cease to be a substantial net beneficiary from social measures on steel closures. This would be disastrous in some areas. We hope that it might be because we have borne a considerable brunt of the closures within the Community, and that there are no more to be carried out. It could also imply that the redrawing of the regional assistance map might have affected the eligibility of some areas. Unfortunately, with their usual negative attitude, the Government have objected to multi-annual programmes.

The work of bodies such as British Steel Industries and NCB (Enterprise) needs to be underpinned, consolidated and supported, along with the job creation agencies in those stricken regions that need to be replaced by proper regional development agencies with the necessary powers and resources to do the job. When the right hon. and learned Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Brittan) was the Secretary of State, that appeared to receive a higher

[Mr. Wrigglesworth]

priority in the Department of Trade and Industry. One wonders whether with his departure it is being returned to the end of the queue again.

The ending of state aids and the phasing out of quotas means that the British Steel Corporation will have to take advantage of marketing opportunities in Europe. As the Minister has said, the corporation is equipped to do that and I would agree with that statement. However, there will have to be new investment in such areas as continuous casting, replacement of old rolling mills, the development of flexible steel making and greater automation. It will mean breaking into the European stock holding operations which on the continent are usually owned by the steel makers themselves. It could mean greater collaboration with European steel makers and it would mean a much greater awareness of the consumer dimension with greater attention given to selling techniques in marketing and product design and innovation.

That is an enormous task for the corporation and it should receive the backing of the Government. I hope that the Minister, in any further remarks that he might make, will give us more reassurance than he has done so far that it will have the full backing of the Government in carrying through what will be a back-breaking task on top of the already back-breaking task that the corporation has carried out.

11.17 pm

Mr. Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): We have been given so many complicated papers to discuss in the debate that all we can really do is ask some questions about them. However, as the Minister has rightly said, these proposals have already been approved so there is really not much point in us saying anything at all.

I hope that the Minister will not mind me asking a few questions about what has already happened and on which our views are now being sought.

Bearing in mind that the Government very honestly accepted today that they were alarmed at the decline in our manufacturing industry, does the Minister think that there may be a clue to this decline in the measures that we are discussing on the future of the steel industry? He must know that that is not only a problem in Britain but that it exists on the continent in the EC. Unemployment and job losses are now so horrific that I do not know of any other nation or group of nations in the world where there is such a desert in job creation, with the possible exception of El Salvador and Tibet, which do not publish figures.

Does the reason for that fact lie in the steel regime? It is not a question of moving towards free trade or even fair trade but rather of having a protectionist wall provided by guidance prices, strict quotas on oil imports with a specified price for import and a high internal price. The whole principle of high basic internal prices in the EC is a job-destroyer as we find, for example, from the extra £7 a week for food that the average British consumer has to pay as a result of the CAP, which is far more than the Chancellor could possibly offer in his Budget by way of tax relief. We must realise that a basic high-cost economy is not good for Britain.

Mr. Hickmet: Does my hon. Friend not appreciate that the major problem of European steel producers is obtaining a price that is profitable? There is not a high artificial price for steel in Europe.

Mr. Taylor: That is the argument used by the farmers. They say that they find it very difficult to make a living by producing food and selling it at five times the market price. Trying to survive in an economy by taking in each other's washing is not a good basis for job growth. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Hickmet) will speak up for his steel workers, as other hon. Members spoke up for their farmers on Monday. Is there not a danger that we are working ourselves into the type of economy that will be a sure recipe for destroying jobs, exports and growth?

Will the Minister accept that there is a danger, once again, of the unfulfilled promise? I remember in recent EC debates that the House was told that our problems would be solved by strict budgetary controls. Now, sadly, after eight weeks of the first year of budgetary control, we find that these controls are being abandoned. Does the Minister recall that in previous steel debates we were told that 1985 was the last year for steel aid? The aid would cease at the beginning of 1985, and then it was the end of 1985. Now we find, as the Minister is well aware, that one of the documents describes what is—

"the Commission's first ideas on the shape of a new Community steel aids code after 31 December 1985."

My hon. Friend the Minister is well aware that some of these measures will involve the pumping of substantial additional funds into aids for the steel industry.

What does my hon. Friend the Minister mean by a free market? My understanding was that a free market was a market in which there was no dumping and that dumping meant that goods were exported at a lower price than the price at which they were sold at home. My hon. Friend must be well aware that the tradition, and the whole point of our steel policy, is that we dump steel outside the EEC at well below cost.

What is the real objection of the Minister to the attitude of the United States? Does he object to quotas? If so, what the blazes are we doing applying to every other country strict quotas linked to a guidance price by which we tell those countries the price at which they can sell the product? Does my hon. Friend accept that the Americans, with a surplus capacity, had what they regarded as a voluntary restraint agreement with the Common Market and that the Common Market not only disregarded but broke the agreement, and exported much more steel than it had promised?

Does my hon. Friend not think that there is a danger of Britain being a mug, even within the EEC? If we are so much more efficient than the continent, why is so much steel coming in from the continent? Is it purely because of quota? My friends in the steel industry say that it is nothing of the sort.

May I ask the Minister for his thoughts, or the thoughts of the Steel Corporation or, indeed, of anyone on how to achieve the reduction of 24 million tonnes, to which my hon. Friend referred, or of 25 million tonnes, to which the Commission referred? I am not sure which is the correct figure. It seems that 25 million more tonnes of steel capacity must go. Will my hon. Friend give his, or the Commission's, or the BSC's or anyone else's thoughts or expectations, on what part of the 25 million tonne reduction should come from the United Kingdom?

As someone who spent most of his life representing a Scottish constituency, I am afraid that our share of the reduction will mean the closure of the Ravenscraig steelworks, which will have a devastating effect on the

Scottish economy, for which every English and Welsh Member has responsibility. I am sad that tonight, when we are discussing the steel industry, I do not see one Scottish Labour, Liberal or SDP Member. I can forgive the absence of Conservative Members because they do not represent steel industries. Surely the Minister has a duty to tell us where he feels the cut will fall.

I am afraid that, when we look at EEC policies, we see a movement not towards free markets or efficiency but towards more and more protectionism and a guarantee of artificial prices for manufacturing industry. If hon. Members would question this, they would ask themselves why the Common Market, almost uniquely in the world, is not only a jobs desert but a place in which the number of people working is continuing to decline year after year. We want a breath of the low costs, the free competition and the movement towards free trade which helped this country, with 50 million people, to prosper in the past. I am afraid that, so long as we follow this route of bureaucracy, controls, quotas, restrictions and subsidies, which are inherent parts of every aspect of the EEC—whether it is steel, regional or agricultural policy—this nation will continue to decline.

11.23 pm

Mr. Richard Caborn (Sheffield, Central): I should like to deal with a matter of great concern to the private steel sector. It involves the operation of the iron and steel employees readaptation benefits scheme in the European Coal and Steel Community. For a considerable time, we have been making representations to the Department of Trade and Industry on the application of readaptation benefits for private steel sector workers. We have had little or no joy from the Department. While BSC has had the agency agreement—I am led to believe that it has been working satisfactorily — many hundreds, if not thousands, of people in the private sector have been unable to take advantage of the readaptation benefit because of the manner in which the Department has interpreted the treaty.

An industrial tribunal document was presented in one case in which a redundant steel worker did not obtain satisfaction from the Department of Trade and Industry. I shall quote some of the correspondence between the Department and the person involved. The tribunal accepted that it did not have the competence to deal with the problem, but some of its findings are interesting.

When Mr. Lewis, my constituent, applied for readaptation money through the company, it contacted the Department of Trade and Industry. The Department sent the company a letter in which it said:

"Eligibility for readaptation aid under the Scheme is determined by criteria laid down in the European Coal and Steel Community Treaty. In essence this means that a person is eligible for scheme benefits provided he has lost his job in the steel industry as a result of a permanent closure or reduction in activity in the iron and steel industry . . . the reduction is one for which the European Commission has agreed to contribute funds. The Scheme is administered by the Department of Trade and Industry and jointly funded by the United Kingdom Government and the European Coal and Steel Community. Since Mr. Lewis was declared redundant as a result of rationalisation within your Company and not linked to any permanent reduction in activity, which is crucial if an application is to be successful, I regret that on the basis of the circumstances outlined in your letter there can be no possibility whatsoever of Mr. Lewis being eligible for benefit under the Scheme."

The tribunal concluded:

"It is not, however, for this tribunal to comment further as to the rights of an individual stemming from a European Community Directive as applied by the United Kingdom legislation, and it may be evident to the advisers to the parties to this case that other remedies may exist. It is, however, within the knowledge of the tribunal that companies are failing to draw fully upon the relevant resources made available to the United Kingdom under European Community legislation."

Unfortunately, that was one case in which the person did not receive readaptation money.

I wish to quote two other cases, one of which was successful after a long period of discussion with the Department of Trade and Industry. The first case concerned a holding company whose maintenance workers were paid through the holding company but who were servicing the subsidiary companies. All fell clearly within the treaty of Paris. Because these people were being paid by the holding company which technically did not produce steel, they were not allowed to get readaption money. However, after a long correspondence over 18 months between the company, the Department, myself and the EEC, those people were paid.

Five hundred workers are being declared redundant at Phoenix 3 and the argument is that there has been a reduction in capacity. A letter from the Department speaks of that, but its definition in terms of readaptation must be plant taken out of production. That is not the criterion that has been applied in other member states and the private sector employees have lost out.

Of the 500 workers at the Forge masters complex, 150 fall clearly within the scope of the readaptation, but their claims have been rejected because of the Department's advice.

Because the private sector will not fund readaptation courses, those who work in the industry have to wait three or four months before clearance is given by Brussels and then the DTI. That creates serious anxiety, especially for the education service in my area, which has put on special courses for redundant steel workers and is not being paid until three or four months after it takes students on. I hope that the Minister will take that serious problem on board, as it still applies. There are still difficulties at several further education colleges in Sheffield because of the Departmemt's attitude.

I shall go further. Impediments are now being put in the way of redundant steel workers who want to follow courses. It seems that the Department does not want to develop readaptation moneys that are available from the EEC. I accept that the Government have to do some of the funding, but it seems that whenever possible it will turn people down.

The Minister referred to welders in my constituency. We produced and presented to the Department several advertisements for a specific welding skill, but people who had applied for courses in that type of welding were denied a place on grounds of insufficient evidence of reasonable prospects of employment after the course had been completed. There is no right of appeal in that regard. It seems that the Department's decision is final and binding, so there is no recourse for those who think that they should have received readaptation money.

I should like to draw attention to the lack of publicity for readaptation courses. There is little or no co-ordination. It is only when local authorities, especially education authorities, take the matter on board, as they have in Sheffield, which has involved expenditure in getting advice out to companies and counselling, that

[Mr. Richard Caborn]

advantage can be taken of the scheme. Even an industrial tribunal is expressing some concern about how the United Kingdom is operating the scheme.

It is very convenient to take the reference period that the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Hickmet) took. About two fifths of employees in the steel industry have lost their jobs. If we argue on grounds of productivity, however, we should compare like with like. Many of the continentals buy in their services such as a maintenance, whereas the BSC did not. When talking of production per man, we should compare like with like. On that basis, the hon. Gentleman would find that, as before, we compare very favourably. It is clear that more capacity has been cut in the United Kingdom than in any other EEC country.

Mr. Hickmet: Give figures.

Mr. Caborn: Very well. We have had a 68·2 per cent. reduction in the work force. That is 20 per cent. higher than in any other member state's steel industry. Those are not my figures but those of the *Financial Times* for Wednesday 16 October 1985. The article shows the cuts in capacity as well.

Mr. Tinn: As for the contractors who do essential work but are excluded from our competitors' productivity figures, has my hon. Friend found that there is a growing tendency for the black economy to affect the terms and conditions of those employed by contractors? Does he agree that the matter would bear investigation?

Mr. Caborn: I agree with my hon. Friend. That is very true and it is a serious situation, particularly as regards the conditions. Unit labour costs can be reduced by using the black economy effectively as well.

It is astonishing that the Minister should come to the House and say that there is no evidence, or that he has no evidence, on hidden subsidies by our major competitors within the EC. Either he has not read the files or he has been badly advised by his advisers. Major submissions have been made jointly by the British Steel Corporation and the British Independent Steel Producers Association on energy costs, comparing the United Kingdom with our major competitors within the EC. This has been done not once but several times. Representations have been made on research and development costs and on training costs, especially as far as Germany is concerned. A mass of evidence has been submitted in documentation from all sections of the steel industry in the United Kingdom. Yet the Minister says he wants more evidence. I suggest that he looks at his files. He will find that there is ample evidence, besides the reports and the references that have been made this evening.

I believe that over the latest period the British Steel Corporation has done a first-class job, particularly the employees, and the manner in which Ministers are now approaching the restructuring of our steel industries through the Phoenix development concept is an absolute, utter disaster. Sheffield Forgemasters, which is in my constituency, has unfortunately just gone through a 14-week strike because of sheer incompetent management —and that is not just my opinion but the opinion of a lot of industrialists in Sheffield. That situation has been manipulated by the present Government to take the running of the industry out of the hands of the BSC, which is a 50 per cent. shareholder and Johnson and Firth Brown, which is the private sector part of the Phoenix development. The Government intervened and forced a management upon that sector and have now created one of the longest strikes in Sheffield on the question of trade union representation. If the Minister allows that to continue, it will lead to disaster for a very important sector of our steel industry—the special steels and the open die forging.

It is hoped that the Phoenix 2 venture which will be launched in April this year will be more successful than Sheffield Forgemasters, but I give this warning: if the Minister treats that Phoenix development with the same contempt as he has shown to Phoenix 3, it is bound to fail. If he does not pay some attention to the financial structure of that development there will be serious trouble. We are talking about the engineering steel sector, which is extremely important.

What is being done is contrary to everything that is going on in Europe and the rest of the world in the development of steel industries to get economies of scale. We are doing the reverse and breaking these down into small sectors. I believe that this is industrially unsound and could well lead to a number of job losses and the loss of major sectors of our steel industry which will be needed if the British manufacturing base is to be revitalised, as we hope, in the not-too-distant future.

11.40 pm

Mr. Peter Morrison: I can assure the hon. Member for Sheffield, Central (Mr. Caborn) that if there are any iron and steel employees readaptation benefits scheme cases that he wishes me to re-examine, I shall happily do so. I am as concerned as he is to ensure that everything is right.

The hon. Gentleman and I will agree, I think, with all hon. Members who have participated in the debate, apparently with the exception of the right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams), who spoke from the Opposition Front Bench, that the work force and the management of the British Steel Corporation have made enormous strides during the past six or seven years to get themselves in a viable and competitive state that will allow them to have a far better future than might otherwise be the case. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will want to pay that compliment to them too.

Mr. Williams *indicated assent*

Mr. Morrison: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman. Although we may disagree on many other matters, I think that it must be recognised that there has been a significant achievement by the work force and the management. I hope that the all-party message that will issue from the House will be a compliment to the corporation as a whole.

Mr. Williams: I have indicated from a sedentary position that I support that sentiment. The Opposition congratulate the industry on the progress that it has made. I said earlier that it has made itself competitive with the rest of Europe. My purpose was to show that what has been achieved might be thrown away by what I regard as inept handling of negotiations and not to denigrate what has been achieved.

Mr. Morrison: I understand that the right hon. Gentleman would wish to make political points, but I am glad that we can agree on what has been achieved by the corporation.

The hon. Member for Sheffield, Central referred to the phoenix projects. I would not expect him always to agree with the course on which we have been proceeding, but I listened carefully to his remarks and I assure him that I wish to see them succeed every bit as much as he does.

My hon. Friend the Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Hickmet) made many positive points in his contribution. He described the industry as competitive and viable and said that that would ensure the jobs of the future. If the markets so turn out, there may be an expansion of the number of jobs in the industry in future. That is precisely the aim and ambition of the Government and the corporation. We wish to ensure that we have as successful a steel industry as it is possible to have.

My hon. Friend the Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe referred to ERDF funds, which may be made available to his constituency. I listened carefully to what he had to say and I hope that I shall have more definite news in the near future.

The hon. Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Wrigglesworth) paid tribute, like the hon. Member for Sheffield, Central, to the workers and management of the corporation. I agreed when he said that the task ahead of them, despite the solid foundations that have been built, was a demanding one and a major challenge to the corporation. He asked whether we had considered the effect of the reduction in oil prices, as did the right hon. Member for Swansea, West. The answer is that we have. We think that it will be good news, but I should not like to over-estimate that. Our current estimate is that the result will be rather more on the margin than a surge. We shall have to see what happens in the oil price market. I think that the outcome will be on the plus side rather than the minus side.

The hon. Member for Stockton, South referred also to regional policy. I can assure him that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State puts as much emphasis on regional policy as his predecessor, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Brittan). I know that the Secretary of State is planning to visit the north-east shortly. Of course, my right hon. and learned Friend had the advantage of having a constituency in the north-east, which, of course, he continues to represent.

The point which the right hon. Member for Swansea, West made about subsidies——

It being one and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings on the motion, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question, pursuant to Standing Order No. 3 (Exempted business).*

It was agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House takes note of European Community Documents Nos. 8293/85, a communication by the Commission to the Council concerning the organisation of the steel market after 1985; 9300/85, a communication by the Commission to the Council on the introduction of a system of production quotas under Article 58 of the Treaty establishing the European Coal and Steel community after December 1985; 9301/85, a communication by the Commission to the Council concerning rules on aid and financial transfers to the Community Steel Industry after 1985; 8779/85, proposals for Council Decisions concerning contributions to the European Communities to finance measures connected with the restructuring of the coal and steel industries; 5194/84, a communication by the Commission to the Council on the General Objectives for Steel 1985; and 4493/86, a proposal by the Commission for a Council Regulation establishing quantitative restrictions on imports of certain products originating in the United States of America; and welcomes the agreement by the Government in the Council of Ministers to a further limited period of European Coal and Steel Community market organisation measures beneficial to the United Kingdom and to the ending of most forms of state aid to the Community steel industry.

PETITIONS

Sunday Trading

11.45 pm

Mr. Ivor Stanbrook (Orpington): With your permission, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I beg leave of the House to present a petition from residents of my constituency in which they refer to the shops Bill, now before Parliament, and seek to request the House that that Bill be not passed in its present form in so far as it proposes the total deregulation of the law regarding shop hours.

The petition concludes with the words:

Wherefore your petitioners pray that your honourable House do maintain legal limitations on Sunday trading to ensure that the special character of Sunday is protected. And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray, et cetera.

The petition is signed by more than 2,200 of my constituents. I totally agree with them.

To lie upon the Table.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): With your permission, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I beg leave to present a petition. I have the honour to present the petition on behalf of my constituents who are residents of Stafford. The concluding words of the petition are:

Wherefore your petitioners pray that your honourable House do maintain legal limitations on Sunday trading to ensure that the special character of Sunday is protected. And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray, et cetera.

To lie upon the Table.

Mr. David Sumberg (Bury, South): With your permission, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I beg leave to present a petition opposing unlimited Sunday trading as proposed by the Shops Bill. The petition is signed by 700 of my constituents. It concludes with the words:

Wherefore your petitioners pray that your honourable House do maintain legal limitations on Sunday trading to ensure that the special character of Sunday is protected. And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray, et cetera.

Although I see little practical alternative to the Government's proposals to make our Sunday trading laws consistent with both logic and common sense, I pay tribute to the sincerity, conscience and industry of those who organised and signed the petition, and who have enabled me to present it.

To lie upon the Table.

Elderly Persons (Rest Homes)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Sainsbury.]*

11.47 pm

Mr. Christopher Chope (Southampton, Itchen): I am grateful for the opportunity to have a debate about the financial arrangements for people in registered rest homes for the elderly. I know that I am not alone among hon. Members in being concerned about the matter. My hon. Friend the Member for New Forest (Mr. McNair-Wilson) wishes me to associate his name with some of the concerns which I want to express.

I appreciate the keen interest which my hon. Friend the Minister has taken in the subject since taking over responsibility for it. May I thank him in particular for the way in which he has listened to the representations of my constituents? In January he visited Southampton and, after meeting several residents at the Brookvale care home, he had a discussion with other rest home owners, a consultant geriatrician, general practitioners and nurses about the problems of residential care for the elderly. Later the same day he opened a new rest home which I am pleased to tell him is prospering, although it is charging fees greater than those who are on supplementary benefit can afford. More recently, my hon. Friend had a follow-up meeting lasting about an hour with two registered rest home owners in Southampton. If he paid the same attention to every constituency, I do not think he would have time to do anything else. I am most grateful for his concern.

The Conservative Government have an excellent record in extending care in the community, and the expanding national network of residential and nursing homes in the private sector is testament to this. The passing of legislation to improve the standards of care in these homes has ensured that those who look forward to spending the later years of their life in residential care can do so with confidence. The national picture is fully reflected in Southampton and Hampshire. In Southampton, the success of the programme of extending care in the community is such that, despite increasing numbers of elderly, and particularly frail elderly, there are now fewer on the waiting list for long-stay hospital care. My hon. Friend will know, however, that one does not seek a debate on the Adjournment merely to praise the Government but to draw attention to particular problems.

The first problem to which I draw attention is the position of those who were in receipt of supplementary benefit in respect of their rest homes charges at 28 April 1985. When my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State first proposed a new structure of national limits for the residential care and nursing home sector on 29 November 1984, he said,

"These new limits will be designed to reflect the varying cost of providing different types of care. There is no question, however, of elderly, handicapped or disabled people being moved out of their existing accommodation, and their position will be protected." — [*Official Report*, 29 November 1984; Vol. 68, c. 1098-99.]

In circular LASSL 86(1), issued on 14 January 1986, there is confirmation that the level of charges being met in a person's supplementary benefit before 29 April 1985 will be maintained indefinitely where the person is over pensionable age. I welcome that, but it does not meet the problem of rising costs and charges. Most residential rest

homes have had to increase their charges since April 1985 or, if they have not already done so, will soon have to. Who is to pay the inceased charges?

The DHSS will not if the charges are already above £120. By definition, the residents do not have the means to pay the extra and even if they did this would be offset against their supplementary entitlement. I know of several proprietors of rest homes in Southampton who will have to take a crunch decision soon — next month is the crunch time—about whether to waive increased charges for the residents in the category I have described or ask those residents to leave. Surely if my right hon. Friend is to be consistent with his pledge to "protect the position" of such residents, he should be willing to allow increased supplementary benefit in line with the retail prices index. He should not rely upon the charity of the home owners, and should remember that because the residents do not enjoy security of tenure both they and their relatives are extremely worried about what may happen.

The second problem to which I draw attention is the position of those who were resident in rest homes at 28 April 1985 but who were paying privately and whose means subsequently fall to such a level as to cause them to qualify for supplementary benefit. Many of those who enter residential care use the capital released from the sale of their homes to meet the costs, but even £30,000 from the sale of a house pays for only three or four years in a rest home at £150 per week. These people expected that, once their capital was depleted, they would be in the same position as anyone else who qualified for supplementary benefit. Surely the pledge given by my right hon. Friend to which I have referred should extend unequivocally to these residents as well.

In this context I welcome the contents of paragraph 5 of the circular of 14 January, which states:

"For those claiming supplementary benefit after 29 April 1985 the new system of national limits applied straight away. But Ministers have decided to introduce a new provision to help some long standing residents in residential care homes who did not claim supplementary benefit until after 29 April 1985 . . . Where application of the new limits could produce exceptional hardship the Secretary of State has the discretionary power to extend to an individual the benefit of transitional protection so that he could receive the same rate of benefit as he would have received had he claimed before 29 April".

I hope that much greater publicity will be given to this very welcome concession by the Government, because I know that the problem has been a cause of concern to many. I have met many residents and their relatives who are still concerned, however, about what will happen when the money runs out. I doubt that the discretionary power will allay all their worries and concerns. I find it hard to contemplate a situation in which my right hon. Friend would choose not to exercise his discretion to extend transitional protection. If I am right in that, why cannot he go the whole way and guarantee that, in the situation that I have described, the transitional protection will be extended?

The third problem on which I seek my hon. Friend's comments is the rigidity of the limit of £120 a week on supplementary benefit payments for residents in residential rest homes for the elderly. In most homes in Southampton this limit is well below the fees charged to those who pay privately. I imagine that £120 a week is probably too much for a pensioner who is up and about and fully in command of his faculties and who does not qualify for attendance allowance. Such a person should not, perhaps, even be in a residential rest home — at any rate, not at the expense of the taxpayer.

However, at the other end of the scale there may be a nonagenarian who qualifies for the full attendance allowance, who is very frail and who is incontinent. For such a person, living in a centrally heated, single room with full board, 24-hour care and free laundry, £17 a day is a bargain. It is clearly far below the reasonable cost. One needs only to consider the cost of care in a long-stay hospital. It is £48 a day. Therefore, £17 a day is very much on the low side where a very considerable degree of care is required.

I do not underestimate the problems involved in having separate levels of supplementary benefit entitlement, depending on the extent of the infirmity and the degree of care being provided. But the present system, particularly now that the attendance allowance payments are taken into account and set off against supplementary benefit, discriminates against the very people that we should be most eager to help. My hon. Friend saw some such people on the occasion of his visit to the Brookvale care home in Southampton.

The fourth problem is the one of topping-up payments. If a person is below pensionable age and a home's charges exceed the supplementary benefit limit a local authority is able to top up the balance above supplementary benefit. The same principle does not apply, however, to a person who is a pensioner. I am sure that many local authorities would much prefer to top up a payment rather than have to provide home help services and meals on wheels. A district health authority might also be willing to make a topping up payment because it thereby saves on district nursing services. In Southampton, in the light of a recent decision to remove payments for incontinent aids, it would mean a saving of between £40 and £50 per resident per month if a person moved into a residential rest home.

There is also a problem about topping-up payments by relatives. I hope that in his reply this evening my hon. Friend will spell out clearly what those rules are. I have spoken to the officials in the supplementary benefit office in Southampton. They are in a state of confusion. The result is that some of the decisions that have been handed down seem to be wrong. I understand that under the regulations it is possible for relatives to top up payments, but I do not believe that that is the general understanding. I look forward to hearing what my hon. Friend has to say about that problem.

The fifth problem concerns the inflexible arrangements which apply to the categorisation of residents. A nursing home resident can receive between £170 and £230 per week from supplementary benefit, yet I have had constituency cases of individuals who would clearly qualify for nursing home provision but who would prefer to stay in a residential rest home where they have already spent many years, where the environment is familiar and the standard of care is as high as they would wish or need. My hon. Friend wrote to me about one such case on 28 February. The 89-year-old lady has charges of £180 per week. When I wrote to my hon. Friend he suggested that, in view of her disabilities and the high degree of care she needs,

"it may be that she should now be accommodated in a nursing rather than a residential care home. The limit for a non specialist nursing home is £170 per week. This higher limit could not be paid for"—

[Mr. Christopher Chope]

this particular lady's—

"present accommodation unless the home were jointly registered also as a nursing home."

But joint registration of this home is not a practicable possibility. There are planning problems and the additional facilities which the owner would have to provide would only be worthwhile if all her residents were in need of the level of care provided in a nursing home. The owner does not wish to register as a nursing home and the resident does not wish to move to a nursing home.

If a pensioner resident suffers from disablement but had become disabled before reaching pensionable age, the maximum supplementary benefit payable is £180 rather than £120, provided of course that the home is duly registered for the elderly and physically disabled. Yet if a pensioner resident becomes frail and disabled in old age, the limit is fixed at £120.

Circular LASSL 86(1) explains:

"This distinction is intended to avoid ambiguity between those suffering from substantial and permanent disablement and those simply becoming frail in old age."

That is Civil Service newspeak of the worst sort. If an 85-year-old bedridden amputee is frail and incontinent, he is disabled. Why should the cost of looking after him be deemed to be £60 a week less, if he was disabled at the age of 65 rather than 64? That is one of the worst anomalies.

There is a similar inflexibility in the assessment of those with mental disorders. Senile dementia is not apparently classified as a mental disorder, although its symptoms are often similar. The amount of care needed to look after someone with it is a great deal more than that for an ordinary old person. Yet supplementary benefit allowances are no different.

I know that my hon. Friend does not have responsibility for incontinent aids, but does he agree that it is desirable for health authorities to provide incontinent aids at no cost to residents in local authority, private and voluntary residential rest homes? I can understand why such facilities should not be provided to nursing homes because by their definition they are meant to provide full care and treatment, including all nursing services. But at a time when resident rest home owners are being pressurised from all sides, it is most unfortunate that in the Southampton health district the provision of such incontinent aids to residents in residential rest homes has been withdrawn by the health authority.

In a masterly understatement in a letter to me, my hon. Friend said:

"We do not regard the present arrangements as immune to change if the need can be shown."

I hope that he will show that he has thought further about the possible ways in which the system can be improved and changed, and that he will not delay in putting right some of the present shortcomings which threaten to discredit an area of Government policy for which there should be only properly great praise.

12.1 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security (Mr. John Major): I have listened with care and interest to the wide-ranging speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Chope). In the time available I shall respond to as many of his points as possible. I welcome the opportunity to debate this important issue, and understand and sympathise with many of the concerns that he has expressed. It is characteristic of his assiduity on behalf of his constituents that he has pursued this matter extremely vigorously over recent months. I have no objection to that, although I have frequently been on the sharp end of his activities, because few topics are more pressing to those concerned with social welfare than the provision of care for our growing numbers of elderly, especially very elderly, people. There will be an increasing number of them in society year upon year for as far ahead as we can see.

First, I wish to look at the background to the present circumstances since it is important that it is properly understood. There have been radical changes in the past few years, which have transformed the whole character and scale of the provision of help for the elderly. Historically, many people who could no longer cope on their own have gone into local authority homes, or local authorities have sponsored them in private or voluntary homes. Many others have been cared for in the long-stay geriatric wards of our National Health Service hospitals.

The new and welcome feature of the 1980s has been the substantial opening up of the private and voluntary sectors to many more people, who have been able to exercise choices previously open only to those with substantial private resources. That has occurred because of the substantial availability of high rates of supplementary benefit, which has become a major source of funding, enabling many people to be cared for in the private sector. The figures show beyond dispute the rapidity of this change. In 1978 supplementary benefit helped 7,000 people to pay their fees in residential care and nursing homes. By 1984 the estimated figure was not 7,000 but 42,000, a sixfold increase in as many years. Expenditure too has risen sharply. The figures have been often quoted but they bear repeating. In 1978 expenditure in this area was £6 million. By 1983 it had soared to just over £100 million and the estimated figure for 1984 was £190 million. It will undoubtedly be higher in 1985.

In most ways, that growth has been beneficial. But the system was open to exploitation and abuse; and it had other features which have caused widespread concern. In the longer term, we would very much like to find a way of restoring a greater measure of responsiveness to individual need. My hon. Friend dealt particularly with that point.

More immediately, I must reiterate what I have said. We simply could not have allowed the growth that was continuing prior to April 1985 to continue uncontrolled, in the interests both of the taxpayer and of the elderly residents themselves. My hon. Friend will know that the numbers of elderly in the population are increasing, and they must be cared for. We entirely accept that and are anxious to seek the best ways of caring for them in their interests and those of the taxpayer. Therefore, it is right that we should make a comprehensive attempt to address this issue, not simply fudge it by paying ever-increasing amounts of benefits, as some people have urged on us. We need to take a comprehensive look at residential care and that is what we are seeking to do in a number of surveys that we have undertaken.

As a first step, in April last year we introduced a new structure for the payment of supplementary benefit to people in homes. Our aim was to regain control of expenditure and to relate benefit levels to the type of care

and the cost of care provided. The system of limits that we introduced was intended to allow reasonable charges to be met on the basis of the registration categories set out in the 1984 Act. The limits were set by reference to the best information that was available to us and for residential care homes they initially ranged from £110 to £170. I should mention that the limit for Southampton before April 1985 was £110, the same amount as the limit we set for the elderly under the new structure that we introduced in April.

My hon. Friend asked about the position of people who were already in residential care homes when the changes were made. We have provided, as he acknowledged, extensive protection arrangements for people in homes who were in receipt of benefit when the changes were made and who would otherwise have been adversely affected. Those over pension age will continue to get their existing benefit for life or until payment under the new rules becomes more favourable for them. The new limits will normally apply to those who were in homes but not claiming benefit before April 1985. However, as my hon. Friend acknowledged, in cases of exceptional hardship the Secretary of State has discretionary power to treat certain long-standing residents in a similar way to transitionally protected claimants.

My hon. Friend asked particularly about the vexed question of topping up payments, which he believes is being misunderstood, and I believe that he is correct. He asked me to spell out the position. I assume that he was referring to payments made by relatives or charities to meet the difference between the supplementary benefit payable and the homes' charges. Such payments are not — I repeat not — taken into account when benefit is assessed. The guidance in the S manual advises local offices to

"disregard payments from charities, friends or relatives specifically intended to meet the balance of the charge to the extent that they are used for that purpose".

That is entirely clear, and I hope that none of our local offices will misunderstand it.

But we recognised that this was the first step. When the measures were introduced, we promised a full programme of monitoring and research. We did so partly because we had an early sense of some of the difficulties to which my hon. Friend drew our attention this evening. One result of the initial feedback was an increase in the limits in November 1985. The residential care home limits were increased by £10, giving a range from £120 to £180. The limits for nursing homes, which are higher because of the more intensive care provided, were also increased by just more than £30 a week. Those substantial increases show our willingness to listen and to take action when we believe it to be necessary.

As my hon. Friend may know, we are in the process of reviewing all the residential care and nursing home limits. I listened with special care to what he said about the difficulties and problems faced by residential care home owners and residents in his constituency. We shall consider carefully the comments that he and other hon. Members have made during the review.

As an integral part of the review, we have commissioned a firm of independent management consultants, Ernst and Whinney, to undertake a wide-ranging inquiry into the costs incurred by homes of all sorts. The review will also draw on our monitoring of the arrangements since they were introduced last year, information from our local offices and representations from interested organisations and individuals. Any changes shown to be necessary following that review will be introduced in July this year at the time of the general benefit uprating. Although there is a tendency to think of £120 as the limit for the elderly, assuming that a home is registered to care for them, a range of higher limits is available to residents in residential care homes that stretches between £120 a week and £180 a week.

As to the longer-term future, most people would agree that there are inherent difficulties in the present system of public funding in this area. The present duality, with local authorities and supplementary benefit as major purchasers and providers of care, has caused problems administratively and, in some cases, for the people whom the system is supposed to help. Our aim is to draw together the two disparate strands so that when someone needs care, it can be provided simply and at a reasonable cost to public funds.

The first step towards that was made with the joint central and local government working party, which was set up in late 1984 by my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Social Services, for Scotland and for Wales. The working party examined the scope for improving collaboration between the Department and local authorities over financial support for residents of private and voluntary residential care homes.

In its report, issued last year, the working party made two major recommendations. The first deals with an issue which I know worries my hon. Friend—the assessment of supplementary benefit claimants' need for care. I recall clearly the remarks of Mrs. Armstrong and the consultant geriatrician when we met in Southampton about a month ago. The working party recommended that we should explore the feasibility of extending local authorities' existing multi-disciplinary assessments to anyone in residential care claiming benefit and of local authorities advising DHSS offices on appropriate payments. We have agreed with the local authority associations that we should carry out pilot studies to test the proposals. They will take the form of a dry run and will not affect anyone's benefit. The pilot studies will be conducted by the social policy research unit at York university. The aim will be to explore how the arrangements would work in practice and to identify any new problems and, I trust, their solutions.

The second recommendation was that we should seek long-term solutions to the problems created by the existing parallel systems of support. We have also accepted this recommendation. We and the local authority associations have agreed to set up a further joint working party to consider ways of harmonising financial support for people in residential care homes. The first meeting of this working party will be held at the end of this month and it is expected to complete its work within a year.

As I hope my hon. Friend will agree, we therefore have a substantial programme in hand for reviewing the financial arrangements for people in residential care homes and the problems that he mentioned. In the short term, we are reviewing the current supplementary benefit limits, and in the longer term we have the pilot studies on the assessment of supplementary benefit claimants' care needs and the joint central/local government working party.

A related issue is the dual registration of homes. A home registered with the local authority as a residential care home may also be registered as a nursing home with

[Mr. John Major]

the district health authority. We call this dual registration. Indeed, the home has to be so registered if it is providing nursing care of the kind proper to a nursing home. Residential care homes themselves are classified for registration purposes according to the main categories of dependent people, such as physically disabled or mentally disordered people, or elderly people, without attendant, exceptional disability. As I mentioned earlier, different rates of supplementary benefit apply to people in those categories, providing that they are registered in homes that are properly registered to care for them.

I hope that from all this my hon. Friend will see that we are very carefully considering the financial arrangements for residents in registered rest homes for the elderly. I emphasise that a home can be registered for more than one category, and this is being made clear to local authorities, as the registration authorities, in a circular that is about to be issued, a copy of which I shall put in the Library. A home may therefore be classified to take physically disabled as well as elderly people. I hope that what I have been able to say in the few minutes at my disposal this evening will be of some assurance to my hon. Friend, to the many people who are running residential care homes and, above all, to the many residents of such homes, who may have had some uncertainty about the present arrangements.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at seventeen minutes past Twelve o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 13 March 1986

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

NEW WRIT

For Fulham, in the room of Martin Stevens Esq., deceased.—*[Mr. Wakeham.]*

PRIVATE BUSINESS

TEIGNMOUTH QUAY COMPANY BILL *(By Order)*

COUNTY OF SOUTH GLAMORGAN (TAFF CROSSING) BILL *(By Order)*

SOUTH YORKSHIRE LIGHT RAIL TRANSIT BILL *(By Order)*

BEXLEY LONDON BOROUGH COUNCIL BILL *(By Order)*

SHOREHAM PORT AUTHORITY BILL *(By Order)*
Orders for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time upon Thursday 20 March.

ABERYSTWYTH HARBOUR BILL *(By Order)*
Bill read a Second time, and committed.

HARWICH PARKESTON QUAY BILL *(By Order)*
Order for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time upon Thursday 20 March.

MILFORD HAVEN PORT AUTHORITY BILL *(BY ORDER)*
Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [18 February], That the Bill be now read a Second time.
Debate to be resumed upon Thursday 20 March.

BRITISH RAILWAYS (STANSTED) BILL *(By Order)*
Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [24 February], That the Bill be now read a Second time.
Debate to be resumed upon Thursday 20 March.

LOTHIAN REGION (EDINBURGH WESTERN RELIEF ROAD) ORDER CONFIRMATION BILL *(By Order)*
Order for Third reading read.
To be read the Third time upon Tuesday 18 March at Seven o'clock.

Oral Answers to Questions

NATIONAL FINANCE

Job Creation

1. **Mr. Clay** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what consideration he is giving to including measures in his Budget to reduce unemployment.

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. John MacGregor): I cannot anticipate my right hon. Friend's Budget statement.

Mr. Clay: Is the Chief Secretary aware that last year the Chancellor concluded his Budget statement by describing the measures that he was taking as tackling the problem of unemployment where it was most acute and that it was a Budget for jobs? Since that time, unemployment has increased by over 114,000 in this country, over 9,000 in the northern region, over 1,300 in my constituency and by 259 in Fulham. When the Chancellor sits down on Tuesday—I know he will not tell us what measures he will take—but, in language that the unemployed will understand—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Briefly please.

Mr. Clay: Will the right hon. Gentleman tell us whether unemployment is likely to go up or down, where and when?

Mr. MacGregor: After that rather long speech, I should say that the main element affecting the point to which the hon. Gentleman referred in the Chancellor's Budget statement last year was a significant increase in expenditure on employment and training measures in 1986 and 1987, involving extra expenditure of £600 million, particularly concentrated on the youth training scheme. I believe that throughout 1986-87 that will have a significant effect.

The same applies to the enterprise allowance scheme, which was extended last year, and which is having a substantial effect in encouraging people into self-employment.

I would also say to the hon. Gentleman that, in terms of getting unemployment down, the most significant element is by encouraging industry and commerce to provide jobs. The hon. Gentleman will have noticed that the Confederation of Bitish Industry's February monthly trends inquiry showed that it was the best combined response in industry on prices and output since the inquiry started in 1975.

Mr. Speaker: Order. May I ask for brief questions, because they lead to brief answers.

Mr. Fallon: Will my right hon. Friend explain to the people of Sunderland and to their elected representatives that the one thing certain to destroy jobs in Sunderland is a public spending spree of £24 billion?

Mr. MacGregor: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Such spending would mean either big increases in taxation or much higher borrowing, which would clobber industry. I know the point to which my hon. Friend is referring. I have just sent a letter to the right hon. Member for

Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) telling him that I still believe that the extra public expenditure involved in the Labour party's programme would be about £24 billion.

Mr. James Hamilton: As the right hon. Gentleman was educated in my constituency, knows Scotland well, and knows about the unemployment figures in Scotland, which are the highest in its history, is he aware that the British Steel Corporation has announced a further 414 redundancies in my constituency at the Clydesdale works? Unless there is a change in policy, there will be an upward trend in unemployment. I do not want the right hon. Gentleman to tell us that inflation worsens the position. When will the Government change their policy and show that in their Budget?

Mr. MacGregor: Because I come from the hon. Gentleman's constituency, I know of the need there, perhaps more than in most parts of the United Kingdom, to restructure from the old traditional industries, including the steel and coal mining industries, to modern industries. I have seen many examples in Scotland of vast new employment being created by modern industries. That is a considerable success story.

Interest Rates

2. **Mr. Latham** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will make a statement on the level of interest rates.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Nigel Lawson): Base rates have remained unchanged since 8 January.

Mr. Latham: As all the economic jigsaw pieces seem to be in place for an immediate and significant cut in interest rates, what is preventing such a cut? A cut in interest rates would be of great value to British business and to my right hon. Friend's counter-inflation policy.

Mr. Lawson: I am sure that there would be a benefit from lower interest rates, although one should not exaggerate the difficulties of the present level of interest rates. As my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary said, the latest CBI monthly trends inquiry has shown the best combined response to output and prices since these figures were first collected. Of course, there is a difference between the United Kingdom and other countries, which have recently been able to reduce their interest rates. Those countries have benefited unambiguously from the fall in oil prices, whereas for Britain the effects have been inevitably more mixed. I think that the world trend can be nothing but helpful to this country.

Mr. Robert Sheldon: Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that the House knows of his partiality for announcing interest rate cuts at the time of his Budget statement? Is he further aware that hon. Members will be extremely disappointed if the interest rate cut is not considerably more than 1 per cent?

Mr. Lawson: The right hon. Gentleman has an extraordinary insight into my partiality, given that in none of my previous Budget statements did I announce a reduction in interest rates.

Sir William Clark: Does my right hon. Friend agree that a 1 per cent. cut in the base rate would not only be welcome, but would give industry a boost? Does he also agree that a 1 per cent. reduction in the amount of wage claims would reduce unit labour costs much more than would a 1 per cent. reduction in interest rates?

Mr. Lawson: My hon. Friend is right. It would reduce industry's costs by many times more. There is a further connection. As I told the National Economic Development Council in December, excessive wage increases put upward pressures on costs. It is essential to stop that cost pressure from leading to an upsurge in inflation. That inevitably means higher interest rates than would otherwise be required. There is a double benefit to industry from keeping firmer control on its pay costs.

Mr. Skinner: Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that the sky-high interest rates which this country has had to tolerate under this Government have resulted in City bankers being able to make massive profits, whereas the manufacturing side of industry and local government have suffered as a result? The people in Fulham will vote out the Tory candidate, not merely because of unemployment, but because of the double standards operated by the Government to look after their friends in the City and to hell with everyone else.

Mr. Lawson: I must tell the hon. Gentleman, whose knowledge of Fulham I suspect is not very extensive, that if there were ever to be a Labour Government—which there will not—and they put into effect their £24 billion increase in public expenditure, the effect on borrowing would be to raise interest rates far higher than they are at present.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the Labour party's policy of directed reflation—which is the latest entertaining euphemism to come from the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) in an attempt to buy votes with a public expenditure addition of no less than £24 billion—would entail not only stratospheric interest rates but taxation rates even higher than under the Labour Government, a collapsing pound, souring inflation and truly catastrophic unemployment?

Mr. Lawson: My hon. Friend is very knowledgeable in these affairs, and his assessment corresponds precisely with my own.

Mr. Hattersley: On the subject of interest rates, will the Chancellor break the habit of a lifetime, be frank with the House, and admit the squalid fact that the inevitable reduction in interest rates is being held back in order to give a little shine to a Budget which would otherwise be very lack lustre?

Mr. Lawson: I am glad to note that the right hon. Gentleman is expecting a reduction in interest rates. Not so long ago he told the House that there was bound to be an increase, but that did not happen.

Mr. Hattersley: There was one.

Mr. Lawson: The right hon. Gentleman is wrong again. As I have said, interest rates have remained unchanged since 8 January, but since 8 January the right hon. Gentleman has confidently predicted that there would be an increase. He was wrong then, and he is always wrong.

Income Tax

3. **Mr. Freud** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has recently received concerning cuts in income tax.

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. John Moore): We have received a wide range of representations on this subject.

Mr. Freud: I thank the Minister for his reply. Does he accept that, in the light of the information today that only 3 per cent. of the work force have benefited from budgetary changes, most of the working people of this country cannot afford many more Tory tax cuts?

Mr. Moore: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer and I have tried to remind the House on many occasions that working people are benefiting at all levels, right down to half average earnings, from the enormous increase in the dynamics of the economy and the reduction in inflation. I wonder whether I might draw the attention of the constituents of the hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East to the fact that clearly the budgetary submission of their Member of Parliament should be that, if the Chancellor has the opportunity to reduce taxes in next week's Budget, those reductions should not go to his constituents.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: Will my right hon. Friend observe that many people are deeply appreciative of the lower rates of tax under this Government at the higher levels, but that, if there is any more taxpayers' money to be put around, it is better that the decaying inner cities should receive the benefit?

Mr. Moore: I know that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor will be listening carefully to my hon. Friend's budgetary lobbying.

Mr. Winnick: Why does the Minister not have the honesty to admit, be it in Fulham or anywhere else, that most people are now paying more tax, direct and indirect, than in 1979 when the Government took office? Have the Government any estimates of the amount of money which has been lost to the Treasury as a result of mass unemployment? If those millions of people had been allowed to earn their living, if there had been a different policy, how much more revenue would there have been from the people who are now unemployed being able to pay proper taxation?

Mr. Moore: It might be wise if I stay with the first of the hon. Gentleman's points, which was totally inaccurate. The people of this country are paying lower levels of income tax at all levels than they were when the Government came to power. Beyond the facts in connection with income tax, all people in work, whether on half, three quarters or average earnings, are better off than they were at any time under the previous Labour Government.

Young Persons (Financial Support)

4. **Mr. Marlow** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the cost to the Treasury of direct financial support to those aged over 16 and under 18 years.

Mr. MacGregor: Information on total social security expenditure for this age group is not available.

Mr. Marlow: I am sure that my right hon. Friend, like myself, is seeking common ground as much as possible on this issue. As any young person between the ages of 16 and 18 has the opportunity of education, the youth training scheme or a job, is it not time that the money that is spent in this area, through supplementary benefit or unemployment pay, was spent in other directions? Do not the sensitive souls on the Opposition Benches also agree that that money could be better spent on the elderly and other people?

Mr. MacGregor: Young people who refuse an appropriate training place—I am thinking of the youth training scheme on which a considerable amount of the expenditure on those aged between 16 and 18 goes—already face a substantial financial penalty. If they refuse a place, it will result in the loss of unemployment benefit for a period, for those who are entitled to it, and payment of a substantially reduced rate of supplementary benefit. Therefore, it makes sense to concentrate expenditure on YTS. I hope that, in view of the penalties for those who do not take up places, there will be a substantial take-up.

Income Tax

5. **Mr. Chope** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what he estimates would be the additional revenue in the year 1986-87 if the marginal rate of tax on personal incomes in excess of £30,000 was increased to 100 per cent.

Mr. Lawson: Individual taxable incomes in excess of £30,000 total some £3½ billion, of which almost £2 billion is already paid in income tax. The theoretical additional yield of a 100 per cent. tax on this slice of income would thus be around £1½ billion, but the actual yield would be closer to zero as relatively few people are prepared to work for nothing.

Mr. Chope: I thank my right hon. Friend for his full reply. Does he agree that it is a grave deception for any politician to suggest that a public expenditure programme of an additional £24 billion could be financed merely by taxing the better off, because it would mean that even those on well below average earnings would have to pay substantially higher income tax?

Mr. Lawson: That is right. My hon. Friend is on the ball, if I may use an expression of a sporting nature. There is an alternative. As the Labour party has said that it would not raise the basic rate of income tax, it is possible that it might have recourse to VAT, in which case, arithmetically, it would require a 41 per cent. rate of VAT.

Mr. Wrigglesworth: Will the Chancellor of the Exchequer confirm that the burden of taxation on individuals has increased under the Government, and that, as a reply from one of his colleagues showed, the Government would have to reduce the basic rate by 5·7p to compensate for increases in taxation which people are paying in other spheres? Until he reduces the basic rate of tax by a further 5·7p, will he refrain from claiming that there have been decreases in taxation?

Mr. Lawson: First, my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary was right in saying that the levels of income tax now are considerably lower than they were under the Labour Government, which the hon. Gentleman supported. Secondly, total revenue from taxation has

increased, because incomes and prosperity have increased considerably. I welcome the fact that in future the hon. Gentleman would like to see a cut in tax. So would I.

Mr. Yeo: Has my right hon. Friend noticed that the sum which would result from increasing taxes to 100 per cent. on incomes above £30,000 would not only be insufficient to pay for a programme of £24 billion extra expenditure, but would be wholly inadequate to pay for the more modest programmes espoused by alliance Members?

Mr. Lawson: My hon. Friend is right. We have not yet been able to cost the proposals put forward by the Liberal party and the SDP. One difficulty is that the proposals frequently conflict, but we shall get down to that in due course. Meanwhile, we have been able to cost properly, correctly and objectively the Labour party's proposals, and it is interesting that Labour Members have not been able to deny the accuracy of that costing.

Public Sector Borrowing Requirement

6. **Mr. Bruce** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has recently received concerning increasing the public sector borrowing requirement.

Mr. MacGregor: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has received a number of representations concerning the public sector borrowing requirement and related matters.

Mr. Bruce: Will the Minister acknowledge that last year the Chancellor of the Exchequer described his Budget as a Budget for jobs, but that unemployment has increased? Will he now acknowledge that a modest increase in the public sector borrowing requirement will be necessary to secure the finance to tackle the problem of unemployment? Will he now undertake to change his strategy, which would be destroyed by a modest increase in the PSBR?

Mr. MacGregor: I have already said that a number of measures which were announced last year have come into effect this year, although we have not yet seen their impact on jobs. I must make it clear that, as a result of the strategy that my right hon. Friend has been pursuing, the manufacturing industry and the economy are growing at a faster rate than before and inflation is at a lower level than for a long time. We are becoming more competitive, and that is the best guarantee for jobs in the future.

Mr. Watts: Can my right hon. Friend estimate what would be the effect on inflation and interest rates of a £24 billion increase in public expenditure implicit in the Labour party's programme and not to be funded through taxation?

Mr. MacGregor: Clearly it would be very severe. I stick to the figure in the region of £24 billion. Yesterday I wrote to the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) and admitted that one of the figures that I gave earlier should be down, but said that another should be up. I note that the right hon. Gentleman has not given an alternative figure. If the sum of £24 billion is to be lower—I certainly hope it would be—I should be interested to know which of his colleagues' spending commitments he would intend to knock out. The right hon. Gentleman would have to do that, because my hon. Friend is absolutely right.

Mr. Terry Davis: In view of the Government's track record from the so-called Budget for jobs last year back to the so-called Budget for enterprise in 1979 and the fact that the numbers of people working in Britain—the employed and the self-employed—have gone down by more than a million, what assurance can the Minister give the British people that this year's Budget will be any more successful than his right hon. Friend's previous Budgets?

Mr. MacGregor: The work force has grown considerably in recent years. Since 1983 there has been an increase in the numbers of people employed. One of the key factors is that we have had a consistently higher rate of manufacturing growth over a number of years.

Mr. Davis: One million fewer jobs.

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Gentleman knows that the same is happening in other countries with technology, tax, and so on. Nevertheless, it is absolutely clear that we are on a better course with regard to inflation and growth than for a long time.

Income Tax

7. **Mr. Kirkwood** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects to publish the Green Paper on personal taxation.

Mr. Lawson: On Budget day.

Mr. Kirkwood: Will the Chancellor take the opportunity of the publication of the Green Paper to make it clear that he will extend the consultation period to include the possibility of integration of taxation and the benefit system? Will he also give an assurance that he will take note of the findings of the House of Lords Select Committee on European Legislation and of the European Community, to the effect that the arguments against transferable allowances are substantially stronger than those in favour of it because they discriminate against women's prospects for employment?

Mr. Lawson: The hon. Gentleman will not expect me to anticipate the Green Paper which is to be published on Budget day. I hope he will find it of interest when it is published. The matters to which he has referred will be fully aired in the Green Paper, and there will be every opportunity for consultation.

Mr. Portillo: Does my right hon. Friend accept that the proposals will enable men and women to be treated equally in taxation matters? Does he agree that they are likely to be immensely popular and will represent an enormous step forward?

Mr. Lawson: My hon. Friend is correct. An increasing number of married women are fed up with the way in which the present tax system discriminates against and treats them almost as second-class citizens. I think that they are right to have this sense of grievance. The proposals that are to be aired in the Green Paper would remove all of those grievances.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Is the Chancellor aware that the programmes of a Labour Government will be funded not only through higher levels of taxation for the higher paid, but through the adoption of a completely different industrial strategy based on growth, as against the one of recession adopted by the Government? Another area that we could tap for higher taxes is the many billions of

pounds that are given away by the Government in the form of concessions on capital transfer and capital gains tax. The accumulation of the sources of finance would be quite sufficient to fund the major programme of a Labour Government.

Mr. Lawson: There is no way in which the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues can find £24 billion from capital taxes. Even the Labour Government, who introduced new and more punitive capital taxes, were unable to raise anything like that sum. Ten years ago, when they followed the hon. Gentleman's advice, they had to go cap in hand to the IMF.

Inflation

8. **Mr. Andrew MacKay** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a further statement on the current level of inflation.

Mr. Lawson: Over the 12 months to January 1986, the RPI rose by 5½ per cent.

Mr. MacKay: How massively would inflation rise if the Labour party were given the opportunity to go on its £24 billion expenditure spree?

Mr. Lawson: It is difficult to make an exact estimate, but we all remember what happened when the Labour party was last in office—the rate of inflation rose to nearly 30 per cent.

Mr. Norman Atkinson: Will the Chancellor say which section of the Treasury established the figure of £24 billion, and whether that is wholly the work of the Treasury? Secondly, will he answer the question on the Order Paper and give details of the assessments that have already been provided to him by Treasury officials?

Mr. Lawson: I shall readily explain to the hon. Gentleman as briefly as I can that Treasury Ministers collected a list of various published pledges to which the Labour party is committed and then asked Treasury officials to give an objective costing of these proposals. They did that, and the figure that was arrived at was £24 billion.

Sir Peter Emery: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, for the first time since 1979, this year British exports have increased as a percentage of world trade? Does this not reflect by his ability to take care of the problems of inflation?

Mr. Lawson: My hon. Friend is right, and it is a remarkable fact that in recent years British manufacturing industry and British industry generally have been more successful in holding their share of world trade than they have been for a long time.

Mr. Penhaligon: Will the Chancellor also confirm the more remarkable fact that the only roughly equivalent industrial nation that has a higher level of inflation than us is Italy? Was that the Chancellor's aim two years ago when he took office?

Mr. Lawson: I notice that the official spokesman for the alliance, the hon. Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Wrigglesworth) said that the party's programme would produce inflation of 7½ per cent. I shall be dealing with the prospects for inflation in my Budget statement, but I do not regard the present level of inflation as satisfactory, even though it is far lower than that achieved by the Labour party when in government.

Mr. Stokes: Is not the conquest of inflation and the return to honest money the foundation of the Government's economic policy and the essential prerequisite for industrial, and consequently commercial, success?

Mr. Lawson: It is indeed the foundation of the Government's economic policy, and I assure my hon. Friend, who has been one of the Government's most stalwart supporters through their seven years of office, that it will remain the foundation of our economic policy.

Mr. Hattersley: Why is it that our inflation rate is now running faster and higher than the inflation rate in the countries of our major OECD competitors?

Mr. Lawson: The plain fact is that I do not regard the present rate of inflation as satisfactory, even though it is far lower than was ever achieved during the period of that Government of which he was a Minister, but I am confident that it will come down.

Tobacco Industry

9. **Mr. Parry** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received from the tobacco industry concerning his forthcoming Budget.

The Minister of State, Treasury (Mr. Peter Brooke): Representations have been received from the Tobacco Advisory Council, individual companies, employees in the industry and trade union representatives.

Mr. Parry: When the Chancellor considers his Budget proposals, will he bear in mind that most tobacco factories are situated in areas of high unemployment and that more than 60,000 jobs have been lost in the tobacco industry since 1979? Will he tell the health lobby that in the last financial year more than £5 billion was raised through duty and VAT on tobacco products? Is he further aware that 200 Members have sent petitions to the right hon. Gentleman asking that there be no increase on cigarettes higher than the rise in inflation and no increase at all on pipe tobacco?

Mr. Brooke: I cannot anticipate my right hon. Friend's Budget, but industrial implications will obviously be one of the considerations that he will bear in mind.

Sir Kenneth Lewis: Has my hon. Friend asked his right hon. Friend not to increase tobacco duty in the coming Budget by more than the rate of inflation in case he succeeds in killing off the tobacco goose that lays many golden eggs for him?

Mr. Brooke: Again I cannot anticipate my right hon. Friend's Budget, but I am sure that he will take all considerations into account.

Mr. Pavitt: In all those considerations, naturally the Chancellor will be taking into account the health factors. Has he made the calculation that 6p on a packet of cigarettes would produce half the amount of the National Health Service bill for chronic emphysema, carcinoma and chronic bronchitis treated in NHS hospitals?

Mr. Brooke: The representations to which I referred in my answer have also included health interests, and I have been delighted to receive all of them, as has my right hon. Friend.

Business Expansion Scheme

10. **Mr. Freeman** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give the latest figures available for the annual rate of investment under the business expansion Scheme.

Mr. Moore: The figures are £105 million in 1983-84, something in excess of £126 million in 1984-85 and we expect the amount to be higher still in 1985-86.

Mr. Freeman: I congratulate the Government on the success of the business expansion scheme, which shows that the spirit of free enterprise flourishes in the country. Can my hon. Friend tell the House when he expects to publish the Peat, Marwick and Mitchell report?

Mr. Moore: I thank my right hon. Friend for his congratulations. He is correct to say that the scheme has helped hundreds of companies and thousands of jobs. I can confirm that the Peat, Marwick and Mitchell report will be published in full on Budget day.

Mr. Meadowcroft: How far would lower interest rates reduce the demands on the business expansion scheme? Why on earth, for instance, should manufacturers consider manufacture when they can get more money by lending money?

Mr. Moore: The hon. Gentleman completely misunderstands the nature of the business expansion scheme. He misunderstands the nature of the way in which high risk relates to high rewards and the way in which it has inspired a complete change in the entrepreneurial nature of society. I am unhappy that he obviously is not supporting from the Opposition Benches the nature of the business expansion scheme.

Income Tax

11. **Mr. Amess** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many taxpayers he estimates are assessed at the standard rate of income tax during the current financial year.

Mr. Moore: Approximately 24 million, of whom 23 million pay tax exclusively at the basic rate.

Mr. Amess: Will my hon. Friend confirm that it remains the Government's policy to reduce the standard rate of taxation, and does he agree that, if the black economy was not as buoyant as it appears to be, we would all be paying less in tax?

Mr. Moore: My hon. Friend will know that the Government have reduced considerably the burden of income tax. The thresholds have been increased in real terms by 20 per cent., and the basic rate has been reduced from 33 to 30 per cent. I think it peculiarly inappropriate for me at this juncture to do more than draw the attention of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor to the remarks of my hon. Friend.

Mr. Blair: Does the Financial Secretary agree that those who do not pay tax exclusively at the standard rate certainly number among them some of those earning very high salaries in the City? In those circumstances, how does he justify allowing them not to have assessed for income tax the vast sums of money that they are paid when they join their new firms?

Mr. Moore: I remind the hon. Gentleman of the figures that the Chancellor gave earlier. Those paying above the basic rate pay a substantial amount of tax, well in excess of £2 billion. I should have thought that that was a clear indication of their commitment, through their very high rates of tax, to the success of the economy.

Value Added Tax

12. **Sir John Farr** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will take steps to relax the level of penalties on late payment of value added tax by small firms when special circumstances exist.

Mr. Brooke: I can assure my hon. Friend that the surcharge, which comes into force in October, will not apply where the taxpayer can show a reasonable excuse to Customs and Excise or, on appeal, to an independent VAT tribunal.

Sir John Farr: I thank my hon. Friend for his reply. Is he aware that there have been a number of cases of hardship, particularly in relation to small companies? When the new regulations are brought into effect in the autumn, will he try to iron out some of the present inflexibility?

Mr. Brooke: Customs and Excise is prepared to be as helpful as possible to traders who are experiencing temporary difficulties. However, in fairness to the bulk of traders who pay tax on time, it cannot allow others to regard regularly delayed payments of VAT as a convenient no-cost source of working capital.

Mr. Stern: I accept my hon. Friend's answer. Nevertheless, does he agree that since the Customs and Excise proposals became law there have been sufficient worries among small firms to indicate to his right hon. Friend the Chancellor that there might be an argument for delay in introducing the similar proposals of the Keith committee relating to income tax?

Mr. Brooke: I shall pass on my hon. Friend's comments to my right hon. Friend.

Economic Demand

13. **Mr. Knox** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the level of total demand in the economy.

Mr. MacGregor: The 3½ per cent. growth of gross domestic product in 1985 is likely to be the highest in the European Community and probably higher than in the United States.

Mr. Knox: Does my right hon. Friend agree with the statement in the 1944 White Paper on employment that the country will avoid mass unemployment if the total demand for its goods and services is maintained at a high level?

Mr. MacGregor: I did not quite catch what my hon. Friend said, but I think that what is absolutely clear— *[Interruption.]* I am afraid that I missed a crucial word in my hon. Friend's question. However, it is absolutely clear that we have seen a higher growth in real demand and therefore in the level of proper demand in the economy, which I am sure he will agree is not money demand, as money demand has been brought down. It is the fall in inflation and the success of other policies that have enabled us to achieve that higher growth in demand.

Dr. McDonald: But is the Chief Secretary aware that the level of total demand is lower than it might otherwise

be because the oil companies have failed to pass on to domestic and industrial consumers the 50 per cent. drop in crude oil prices? That failure means high and rising unemployment. What does the Chief Secretary intend to do to ensure that the oil companies pass on these benefits to the economy?

Mr. MacGregor: I recall that the hon. Lady wanted to have discussions with OPEC to ensure that oil prices did not come down. On balance, the drop in oil prices has been of benefit to the economy and has produced much greater prospects for industry, including exports, because of lower costs. I certainly hope that more of the lower prices will be passed on to assist industry to do even more.

Value Added Tax

14. **Mrs. Currie** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much extra revenue would be yielded by each additional percentage point in the rate of value added tax.

Mr. Brooke: One percentage point on the standard rate of VAT would bring in about £945 million extra in a full year, at 1986-87 prices.

Mrs. Currie: I thank my hon. Friend for his answer. May I ask him to clarify something that I believe I heard his right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer say a moment ago about the yield from VAT? I wondered whether he was quite serious about it. Did he say that if this country suffered the twin misfortunes of a future Labour Government and the incredible spending programme that the Labour party has presented to this nation, VAT would not be 15 per cent., as it is now, or 20 per cent., or 25 per cent., or even 30 per cent., but would be 41 per cent.?

Mr. Brooke: When my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury unveiled the Opposition's spending plans he said that it would require a VAT rate of 41 per cent. to achieve that £24 billion of expenditure. My right hon. Friend was characteristically generous in his estimate. Since larger increases would yield progressively less revenue, the figure would therefore be considerably in excess of 41 per cent.

Mr. James Lamond: Is it sensible for the Minister to use the resources of his Department to construct an entirely fictitious figure, which he says is the cost of the Labour party's programme, and then to encourage all of his hon. Friends to try to make the figure stick by constantly repeating it, as though a lie constantly repeated becomes the truth?

Mr. Brooke: I was asked about the extra yield of an additional 1 per cent. Even a Treasury Minister can divide £18·5 billion by 15.

Public Expenditure

15. **Mr. Sackville** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has received about the level of public expenditure.

Mr. MacGregor: Public expenditure has been mentioned in some Budget representations. It is customary for the Government to receive representations on these matters throughout the year.

Mr. Sackville: Does my hon. Friend agree that the refusal of the Labour party to cost its extraordinarily irresponsible spending programme is a fraud on the British public?

Mr. MacGregor: What is interesting about our public expenditure plans is that they will remain constant in real terms over the next three years and fall as a proportion of gross domestic product. What is interesting about today's Question Time is that the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) clearly does not wish to deny the figure of £24 billion.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Cartwright** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 13 March.

The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher): This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Cartwright: Does the Prime Minister acknowledge that today's reports of unlimited extra money for teachers' pay in Scotland simply encourage militant teachers in England, who want to use the current ACAS negotiations as a pause before further disruption in our schools? Therefore, will she ensure that Ministers give the same positive support and financial commitment to the ACAS negotiations as they are giving to the independent inquiry in Scotland, so that teachers, parents and, most important, pupils can look forward to lasting peace in the schools?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising the question, because I think that the reports have not been wholly accurate. As he knows, there is a formula for distributing extra money. The formula is on a well-known basis, so that when changes are made in public expenditure programmes for England and Wales, changes are made in the comparable Scottish programmes on the basis of the fixed formula. That formula will still obtain for taxpayers' money.

Sir John Farr: Notwithstanding the statement in the House yesterday by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, will my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister see whether something can be done so that British Airways can be privatised in the immediate future? That would meet the needs and desires of many people.

The Prime Minister: Yes, we are anxious to get British Airways privatised. As my hon. Friend will be aware, there are certain legal and negotiating requirements under the Bermuda agreement with the United States and we must safeguard our vital interests before British Airways can be privatised.

Mr. Foulkes: Has the Prime Minister seen the reports that the Budget commissioner, Mr. Christopherssen, has said that the United Kingdom rebate is now in doubt? Will she confess that the rebate was not automatic, as she promised, and will she tell the House what she intends to do about it?

The Prime Minister: The rebate is made upon a formula. I am not certain what the hon. Gentleman is

referring to. There are times when there has to be a small supplementary budget to enable us to receive our rebate. Our refunds have risen from £440 million for 1983 to £570 million for 1984, and to at least £830 million for 1985. So the amount we are getting back has almost doubled in two years.

Sir Edward Gardner: Does my right hon. Friend agree that there appears to be a growing and strong link between violent crime, including rape, and the widespread misuse of heroin and cocaine? Will she confirm that the Government are giving, and will continue to give, the highest priority and all the resources that may be necessary to meet the terrible dangers of drug abuse?

The Prime Minister: Yes, Sir. I agree with my hon. and learned Friend that the use of drugs makes all crime, and particularly crimes of violence, worse than they would otherwise have been. We shall give every priority to tackling this terrible canker in our lives. As my hon. and learned Friend knows, largely at his instigation we are changing the law to make it easier to get at the proceeds of this dastardly crime.

Mr. Kinnock: In view of the continuing and alarming rise in crime—a massive increase of 41 per cent. since 1978—will the Prime Minister ensure that new money is allocated to local authorities to assist them in their efforts to make streets and homes safer in their areas for ordinary citizens, especially the elderly?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman is aware that local authorities were given extra money through the police grant. Some money is expended under the community programme to further crime prevention programmes.

Mr. Kinnock: Is not that answer somewhat misleading? At the crime prevention seminar which the right hon. Lady held back in January the only new money that was ever referred to was the £50 million to be taken from the housing improvement programme. Does she not think that that would be an inadequate sum from absolutely the wrong source? Will she acknowledge that the sums involved in improving door locks, the standards and safety of doors, lighting, telephone entry systems and many other additions to security should be paid for, and that they can appropriately be assisted by the Government?

The Prime Minister: Most people will and should be able to make their own provision for crime prevention.

Mr. Skinner: Someone can if he lives in Dulwich.

The Prime Minister: As with almost every question, the right hon. Gentleman shows that he wants to put his hands deeper into the taxpayers' pocket. It is important to say——

Mr. Campbell-Savours: The right hon. Lady does not care.

The Prime Minister: Opposition Members do not care how much they take away from the taxpayer. It is far better for most people, who are able to do so, to take crime prevention measures themselves. As for the elderly, who cannot afford to take such measures, it is very proper use of money and labour from, for example, the community programme, to assist with a crime prevention scheme. I will stand comparison with any Opposition Member on personal care and provision—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is very difficult, even for me, to hear against this background noise.

Mr. Kinnock: Much of what the right hon. Lady says might be true in Dulwich, but it is not necessarily true on housing estates throughout the country. If we do not find resources to help old people and poor people to protect their homes and their streets, we shall have to find the money in any case to help the police detect the crime, too late—after the damage has been done.

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman's record on the police should be compared with ours. We have provided extra police and extra equipment, and he goes and shakes hands with Bernie Grant and Scargill.

Mr. Lawrence: Is my right hon. Friend encouraged to pursue her economic policies by the annual report of the British Overseas Trade Board, which says that British manufacturing industry is improving its performance and that last year it expanded its volume exports by 8 per cent., thus proving that the rubbish spoken by Opposition Members about the British manufacturing base contracting is utterly false, as it is expanding?

The Prime Minister: My hon. and learned Friend is right. British manufacturing industry increased its exports last year by a further 8·5 per cent. That contributes greatly to our balance of payments and to the provision of jobs. Management and work force should be warmly congratulated.

Mr. Beith asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 13 March.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Beith: In connection with the crime figures, is the Prime Minister giving urgent attention to the large increase in reported crimes of rape and sexual assault on women? Does she believe that, among other things, what appears in the media plays some part in creating the climate of opinion in which so much of this violence takes place? Will she dissociate herself from the offensive way in which the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short) was ridiculed when she tried to bring this matter before the House yesterday, and will she perhaps use her influence to bring together some of the newspaper proprietors and editors to talk about how they might improve the climate and not add to the grief of the victims of rape?

The Prime Minister: Rape is a uniquely barbaric offence and I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is very pleased with the recent judgment of the Lord Chief Justice, which set out guideline sentences of a much more severe kind than seem to have been applied in previous cases. The whole of the media bear a great responsibility for the way in which they report crimes of violence. As far as this particular crime is concerned, the hon. Gentleman will be aware that the name of the victim must not be given, by law, after a charge has been made, and that there are certain customs and conventions which obtain between the commission of this terrible offence and the court which one would hope would be observed by the press.

Mr. Hill: Does my right hon. Friend remember that in July last year we held a very informative meeting on the deregulation of the six freeports in the United Kingdom? She kindly gave me a letter after the meeting, but unfortunately I have to say today that the six freeports are

ailing and dying because Customs and Excise is still applying all the regulations within its power. VAT, import duties and all the other taxes are still being charged within the freeports by Customs and Excise. The six freeports are very worried about this.

The Prime Minister: Perhaps my hon. Friend will let us have details. I think he is saying that fees are being charged which should not be charged because they are freeports. I doubt very much whether the Inland Revenue or Customs and Excise is charging what should not be charged, but if they are, perhaps my hon. Friend will let us know.

Q3. **Mr. Ray Powell:** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 13 March.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Powell: If the Prime Minister is not concerned about the old-age pensioners, I wonder whether she could show some concern for shop workers. Is she aware that 99 of her right hon. and hon. Friends have signed early-day motion No. 90 requesting a free vote on the Sunday trading legislation? Is she also aware that early-day motion No. 538 asking for the preservation of the traditional Sunday is supported by 70 right hon. and hon. Members? Is she further aware that Home Office Ministers have expressed great concern at the fact that they have received 400 letters in support of the Shops Bill and 40,000 against it? Is it not time that she reconsidered the situation and either withdrew the Bill or took it to the country?

The Prime Minister: First, with regard to pensions, I would point out that when the pension went up in November it went up to the highest ever level in real terms, and this is the first time that we have had an interim increase in the pension.

Secondly, if the law on Sunday trading were to be enforced, garden centres, do-it-yourself shops, furniture shops and video shops would be closed, newsagents and chemists would be able to sell only a fraction of their normal stock, and food shops would be trading illegally if they sold anything except fresh fruit, vegetables and milk. It is legal to sell on a Sunday boiled fish and baked potatoes at a fish and chip shop, but not fish and chips. Fish and chips may be sold at any takeaway food shop except a fish and chip shop. I hope the hon. Gentleman understands that it would be utterly impossible to carry on with the existing law on Sunday trading.

Q4. **Mr. Amess** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 13 March.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Amess: Has my right hon. Friend read press reports today which show that, despite the negative attitude of the Socialist parties towards Britain's manufacturing prospects and performance, it is predicted that exports of manufactured goods will increase to offset any loss of oil revenues?

The Prime Minister: Exports of manufactured goods are doing very well and have increased by 8·5 per cent. in volume terms—*[Interruption.]* Opposition Members are not interested in good news. This is good news for manufacturing industry and will provide jobs. Opposition Members would much prefer not to listen to success stories. Moreover, there is wider investment in manufacturing. In 1985, overall investment reached an all-time record of about £60 billion.

Q5. **Mr. O'Neill** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 13 March.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. O'Neill: Given the Prime Minister's well known interest in law and order, may I ask her to consider what happened at Wapping last night, when one of Rupert Murdoch's lorries ran into a crowd of people who were peacefully listening to speeches from Privy Councillors and members of the shadow Cabinet? Will she institute a full inquiry into the rogue lorry that attacked those people last night?

The Prime Minister: I regret that in this incident two demonstrators at Wapping suffered injuries, and I am glad to report that neither was seriously hurt. Two police officers also suffered minor injuries. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will express sympathy—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Only one question has been asked.

The Prime Minister: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will express sympathy for the 79 policemen who have been injured at the picket line at Wapping.

Later——

Mr. Ryman: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I should like to raise a short but not bogus point of order arising from questions. When the Chief Secretary to the Treasury answered question 13, he distinctly said that he had not heard the queston. Before the question could be repeated, he answered it, without having heard the original question.

With respect, Mr. Speaker, I believe it is legitimate to raise this point of order. If a Minister does not hear a question, he should ask for it to be repeated so that he can purport to answer it. To purport to answer a question when that question is inaudible is, even for this Minister, extraordinary conduct.

Mr. Speaker: I also noticed that, but I am not responsible for Minister's answers.

Business of the House

3.32 pm

Mr. Neil Kinnock (Islwyn): May I ask the Leader of the House to state the business for next week?

The Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Biffen): Yes, Sir. The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 17 MARCH—Progress on remaining stages of the Gas Bill (1st Allotted day).

TUESDAY 18 MARCH — My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer will open his Budget Statement.

European Community documents relevant to the Budget debate will be shown in the *Official Report*.

Motion on the Housing Support Grant (Scotland) Variation (No. 2) Order.

Debate on a motion on the second report of the Privileges Committee in Session 1984-85 (House of Commons Paper No. 555).

The Chairman of Ways and Means has named opposed private business for consideration at 7 o'clock.

WEDNESDAY 19 MARCH AND THURSDAY 20 MARCH —Continuation of the Budget Debate.

FRIDAY 21 MARCH—Private Members' motions.

MONDAY 24 MARCH—Conclusion of the debate on the Budget statement.

[Tuesday 18 March (Debate on Budget Statement)
Relevant European Documents
(a) 9792/85 Annual Economic Report 1985-86.
(b) Unnumbered Annual Economic Report 1985-86 (final version as adopted)
Relevant Reports of European Legislation Committee
(a) HC 21-ii (1985-86) para 2.
(b) HC 21-xii (1985-86) para 3.]

Mr. Kinnock: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman. Since the Budget debates will take up much of the time before the Easter recess, for which day has the right hon. Gentleman arranged the debate on the sale of Land Rover, Freight Rover, Leyland Trucks and related businesses, which he promised would be held before Easter?

Will the right hon. Gentleman arrange for a statement from the Secretary of State for the Environment about the peculiar circumstances surrounding the proposal by the Conservative and Liberal coalition on Hammersmith and Fulham borough council to sell Stewart lodge old people's home? The sale will have to be approved in the normal way by the Secretary of State, and it has been reported that, oddly, the borough council has recommended the acceptance of an offer which is lower than seven other offers that were received.

There is a great deal of public and parliamentary interest today in the report of the Select Committee on the Environment on radioactive waste. Will the right hon. Gentleman ensure that time is allocated for a debate on that report as soon as possible after the Easter recess?

I asked the right hon. Gentleman last week whether he would ask the Foreign Secretary to make a statement about the Government's attitude towards President Reagan's readiness to contemplate the use of military force against the Republic of Nicaragua. No statement has been forthcoming. Can the right hon. Gentleman now tell us whether the Government will endorse the opposition of many Members to the provision of funds to the terrorist Contras operating in and around Nicaragua?

Mr. Biffen: I will draw the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary to what the right hon. Gentleman says about Nicaragua. The Environment Committee has produced a most significant report on nuclear waste, which will require an initial Government response. I will be happy to be in touch with the right hon. Gentleman through the usual channels about its subsequent parliamentary handling.

I note the point that the right hon. Gentleman makes about the local authority in Hammersmith and Fulham and will refer it to my right hon. Friend.

As for a debate on Land Rover, doubtless we can look at that matter through the usual channels, bearing in mind the commitment that I gave on 20 February.

Mr. Michael Latham (Rutland and Melton): If we are to have a statement on local government such as the Leader of the Opposition has requested, could we have one on the trend of rates where the Labour and Liberal parties have control of county councils? In Leicester they have gone up by a shocking amount.

Mr. Biffen: Shropshire, in a sense, could match that experience. I can only tell my hon. Friend that I have no immediate plans for parliamentary consideration of the point that he makes, although I recognise it as pertinent.

Mr. David Alton (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): Will the Government's proposed changes to Sunday trading be debated before or after Easter? Has the Patronage Secretary decided whether there will be a free vote on this issue? What progress has been made on the Anglo-Irish parliamentary tier?

Mr. Biffen: On the last point, I have nothing to add to what I said last week. As to the point in respect of my right hon. Friend the Patronage Secretary, I have nothing to add to what I have already said on that topic. All I can say about the Second Reading of the Bill is that it has not been provided for in the statement that I have just made.

Sir Kenneth Lewis (Stamford and Spalding): Before we reach the debate on the Shops Bill, can my right hon. Friend arrange a suitable leak from a Government source on what kind of compromise is being proposed, so that when we come to the Second Reading we will all know where we stand?

Mr. Biffen: So many in this Chamber are much more skilled at that task than I am that I would prefer not to undertake such a requirement.

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): The right hon. Gentleman will have heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) during Prime Minister's Questions of the deplorable and dangerous incident that occurred last night outside the premises of News International in Wapping in my constituency, when a heavy lorry leaving the plant ploughed its way through a dense crowd of peaceful demonstrators, inflicting injury on a number of those who could not escape its passage. This event was witnessed by me and by three of my hon. Friends. Will the Home Secretary make an early statement not only on this particular event but on the arrangements made between the police and News International for the

movement of these lorries, with a view to avoiding any repetition of what could easily have been a disastrous and tragic event?

Mr. Biffen: Yes, of course, I will refer that request to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary.

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): My right hon. Friend will no doubt have read with great interest the debate in the American Congress on the conduct of domestic affairs in this country and the wish of the Americans to give us money with strings attached. When will we have the opportunity of debating whether or not we want the money and of telling the Americans to give it to someone else?

Mr. Biffen: I shall draw the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to those sentiments, so robustly expressed.

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): The right hon. Gentleman was not entirely unsympathetic earlier in the Session when I asked that the House should have an opportunity to debate the important matter of the dispersal of objects and paintings from semi-public institutions, which are not, unfortunately, open to restraints on export because of their average values. When can the House have an opportunity to discuss that really very important and critical matter which may be peripheral to a lot of people but is central to the cultural life of Britain?

Mr. Biffen: I note the hon. Gentleman's points and I shall refer his remarks to my hon. Friend the Minister for the Arts.

Mr. Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): Has my right hon. Friend read this morning the alarming speech of the Budget Commissioner to the European Assembly saying that there is no chance of Britain getting its £380 million rebate for 1984 unless we agree to breach the spending guidelines for 1986? Will my right hon. Friend give a firm and clear commitment that, before the Government even consider breaking through the agreed guidelines, which were the basis for selling the argument for increased EEC resources to this House, they will seek the approval of the House of Commons, not do it in Brussels and then come back here and ask for approval?

Mr. Biffen: No, I have not read the speech, but I shall look into the matter and be in touch with my hon. Friend.

Mr. D. E. Thomas (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): Will the Leader of the House seek an opportunity to speak to his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence to ensure that there is a debate in the House before he introduces byelaws which will severely restrict civil liberties surrounding certain MOD establishments in Wales and elsewhere?

Mr. Biffen: I shall most certainly comply with that request.

Mr. David Crouch (Canterbury): Will my right hon. Friend bear it in mind that to introduce during Lent any measure which would limit Sunday as a day of rest would be particularly insensitive and most unpopular in the House and the country.

Mr. Biffen: I note what my hon. Friend says. I am just wondering whether it implies that he may have a change of heart after Easter.

Mr. Bruce Millan (Glasgow, Govan): Is the Leader of the House aware that, to put it mildly, there is now considerable confusion and anxiety about the level of the Government's contribution, if any, to the settlement of the Scottish teachers' salaries which has just been reached and that that confusion will have been added to by the answer given by the Prime Minister this afternoon, which suggested that there would be no contribution? Can we have a statement from the Secretary of State for Scotland on this next week?

Mr. Biffen: I certainly cannot accept that comment about the Prime Minister and the extent to which her remarks clarified the situation, but I shall draw the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland to that request.

Mr. Jonathan Aitken (Thanet, South): Will my right hon. Friend try to arrange an early debate on the reckless overspending that is now gathering momentum in the EEC and which has culminated in today's announcement that Britain is not likely to receive its £380 million promised rebate? Rather than give in to that kind of blackmail from Europe, will my right hon. Friend seriously consider whether we should withhold our payment of the next EEC money?

Mr. Biffen: I note what my hon. Friend says, but I cannot really go any further than the answer that I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor).

Mr. Norman Buchan (Paisley, South): Will the right hon. Gentleman reconsider his answer to my right hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Millan)? A position was reached in Scotland which today has been blown out of the water by the Prime Minister. We now require the Secretary of State for Scotland to make a statement to the House. The Prime Minister said that the independent pay review is no longer an independent pay review; it will be determined by the discussions and the formula reached in England and Wales—in other words, the Goschen formula. That is completely opposed to the agreement that was made and we must ask the Leader of the House to ask the Secretary of State for Scotland to come to the House to make a statement to clarify the matter as soon as possible.

Mr. Biffen: I told the right hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Millan) that I would refer that matter to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): Is my right hon. Friend aware of the consternation and fury of Londoners at the pressure of the GLC on tax and ratepayers to spend some £25 million of their money before abolition on 31 March, given the legal opportunity to do so, including £2·5 million for the Trade Union Resource Trust which employs nobody? Will he ask my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment to come to the House so that he can answer questions on the possibility of legislation to stop that Socialist body damaging London and London's ratepayers in this disgraceful and unacceptable way?

Mr. Biffen: My hon. Friend raised that important point with me this time last week. I will say again now what I said then—that I shall draw the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment to the issue.

Mr. Eddie Loyden (Liverpool, Garston): Will the Leader of the House give an assurance, in view of the

[Mr. Eddie Loyden]

statement by the Chairman of Ways and Means during the passage of the Felixtowe Dock and Railway Bill, that the procedures on private Bills will be debated in the House as soon as possible?

Mr. Biffen: I note what the hon. Gentleman says. I do not think that I can give any hope of an early debate on that.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Berkshire, East): In order for us successfully to combat violent crime, will my right hon. Friend find time for the House to debate sentencing policy, so that many of us can express our desire for legislation which would enable the prosecution to appeal against over-lenient sentences?

Mr. Biffen: There is no prospect of a debate shortly in Government time. I regret that my hon. Friend was doubtless unlucky in seeking to have this matter ballotted for a debate on the Consolidated Fund Bill. However, I shall mention the matter to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary.

Mr. Robert Litherland (Manchester, Central): Is the Leader of the House aware of the public outrage and anger at the way in which unscrupulous foreigners such as Mr. Rupert Murdoch treat the workers at Wapping? That treatment is to the disadvantage of workers who have spent most, or the whole, of their working lives with that company and nearly led to the tragic accident which has been referred to. Does the right hon. Gentleman not think that it is time that the House debated the whole sordid mess surrounding News International?

Mr. Biffen: No, but I suggest that if the hon. Gentleman feels so strongly about it he might use the opportunity of an Adjournment debate.

Mr. Ivor Stanbrook (Orpington): Has my right hon. Friend seen early-day motion 538 which calls for an amendment of substance to the Shops Bill?

[That this House calls upon the Government to seek to amend the Shops Bill [Lords] so as to preserve the special character of Sunday and to have regard for the principles and conscience of those who would be affected by the total de-regulation of Sunday trading.]

Has my right hon. Friend noted that it has been signed by over 60 of his right hon. and hon. Friends? Does he consider that that is perhaps a significant number, in view of the size of the overall majority of the Government in the House? In view of the results of the recent Harris poll, does he not think that the best judge of public opinion on this subject in this country would be a free vote by all hon. Members?

Mr. Biffen: As my hon. Friend knows, voting is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Patronage Secretary. I am sure that my hon. Friend will have the opportunity to deploy his arguments on the wider issues on the Second Reading of the Shops Bill.

Mr. James Lamond (Oldham, Central and Royton): The Leader of the House will know that, since the debate on the multi-fibre arrangement, events have moved on considerably and a unanimous mandate has now been agreed among the EEC members who are interested in the MFA? Will the right hon. Gentleman ask the Minister for Trade to come to the House next week to make a statement which could keep us up to date with what is happening? It is of supreme importance to many of the people involved in textiles in the north-west of England, and that amounts to many hundreds of thousands of people.

Mr. Biffen: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will be aware that that was the subject of a written answer. However, I shall mention to my right hon. Friend the point that the hon. Gentleman now makes.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels (Leicester, East): Does my right hon. Friend share my concern at the shocking percentage increase in crimes of rape—50 per cent. in London and 33 per cent. in Leicestershire? Will my right hon. Friend look at early-day motion 451?

[That this House would welcome the abolition of the anonymity of rape defendents prior to the institution of proceedings both to assist the police and to protect the public and rape victims by announcing the names of those charged with such detestable crimes; and calls for legislation to this effect as a matter of urgency.]

It calls for an opportunity to amend the law so that the names of those charged with rape can be published.

Will my right hon. Friend also consider the difficult problem of the rape victim in Ealing, who was virtually identified by some of the media? Can the law be changed so that rape victims are given the sympathy and the rape attackers are given the force of the law, with long terms of imprisonment?

Mr. Biffen: I shall most certainly draw the attention of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary to the issue that my hon. Friend has raised.

Mrs. Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): Has the right hon. Gentleman looked at early-day motion 592 about cancer screening for women working at the Palace of Westminster?

[That this House regrets that proposals made by the Transport and General Workers Union and the Association of Professional, Executive, Clerical and Computer Staffs representatives, that necessary facilities for cancer screening for women working at the Palace of Westminster be made available to enable a mobile caravan unit operated by the Women's National Cancer Control Campaign, were turned down by the Select Committee on House of Commons (Services); and requests them to reconsider their decision.]

Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that regular, systematic cancer screening can avoid many unnecessary deaths? Will he ask the Select Committee on House of Commons (Services) to reconsider its most unfortunate decision?

Mr. Biffen: As the hon. Lady fairly admits, the matter has recently been considered by the Services Committee. The Committee's view differed from the hon. Lady's, but I shall certainly draw the Committee's attention to her point.

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): Has my right hon. Friend read early-day motion 372, which stands in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale)? Signed by 168 right hon. and hon. Members, it asks for the introduction of a law to permit longer and more flexible licensing hours.

[That this House calls upon the Government to introduce legislation to amend the Licensing Acts for England and Wales to permit longer and flexible opening hours.]

Is my right hon. Friend aware that many thousands of people who, like me, own, manage or work in hotels, restaurants or public houses, which make such a contribution to the Treasury and tourism, will be dismayed by reports that the Government have decided not to bring forward modest reforms in 1986-87? Will my right hon. Friend draw the attention of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary to that fact? Will he ask him to consider reforming the law, so as to bring England and Wales into line with Scotland where, as a recent report by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys has suggested, the licensing hours are very popular?

Mr. Biffen: I shall comply with that request.

Mr. Robert Parry (Liverpool, Riverside): Has the right hon. Gentleman seen early-day motion 547, tabled by me?

[That this House regards with grave concern the decision of Mr. Justice Glidewell, Mr. Justice Caulfield and Mr. Justice Russell to disqualify democratically elected councillors from Liverpool and Lambeth; notes that judges are themselves appointed and not elected; and calls for the immediate dismissal of these judges.]

Has he also seen early-day motions 556 and 557, which have been tabled by my colleagues?

[That this House condemns the decision of the High Court in imposing a surcharge and potential disqualification on 80 democratically elected Labour councillors in Lambeth and Liverpool; recognises that the action of the district auditors in bringing the case to courts against these councillors is part of a concerted attack on local democracy, jobs and services; notes that this draconian penalty is not applicable to any other class of elected public representative; demands that no further action be taken against all those other councillors and councils who similarly have sought to defend their communities; and calls for the immediate removal from the statute book of these powers of surcharge and disqualification.]

[That this House, following the decision of the High Court to surcharge 80 Labour councillors from Liverpool and Lambeth and to impose fines on them of between £2,000 and £4,000 each, draws attention to the fact that the District Auditor, who initiated the court action, is unelected and unaccountable to this House whereas the Labour councillors were democratically elected; believes that only the voters should have the right to remove them; recognises that the court decision could result in the surcharge of several other Labour councils who set a late rate; salutes the courageous stand of the Liverpool and Lambeth councillors to protect jobs, homes and services; supports the taking of industrial action by local authority trade unions to prevent the Labour councillors being removed from office; and looks forward to the election of a future Labour Government who will restore to these brave socialists their democratic right to stand for public office and re-imburse any fines imposed by the courts.]

Those early-day motions deal with High Court action last week against Liverpool and Lambeth councillors. That High Court judgment could lead to the disqualification and bankruptcy of democratically elected councillors. Will the right hon. Gentleman ask the Lord Chancellor to consider dismissing those politically biased judges?

Mr. Biffen: I receive many requests, but I think that this is the first time I have been asked to be an intermediary in the dismissal of judges. I shall, of course, refer the hon. Gentleman's point to my right hon. and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor.

Mr. Derek Spencer (Leicester, South): Is my right hon. Friend aware of concern at the publicising on television and in newspapers of specific methods of committing criminal offences? When may we expect a statement on this subject and the introduction of a statutory code banning such publicity?

Mr. Biffen: I shall look into that point and get in touch with my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Was the Leader of the House paying his normal rapt attention to the proceedings in the House during Trade and Industry questions yesterday, when I asked a legitimate question of Trade Ministers? It was answered by reference to answers given by the Secretary of State for Defence which in no way covered the question asked. Mr. Speaker understandably said that the way in which Ministers answered questions was not a matter for him. However, it is a matter for the Patronage Secretary and the Leader of the House.

Next week, will the Patronage Secretary and the Leader of the House rebuke any of their ministerial colleagues who slide out of answering legitimate questions by reference to answers to questions that were not asked?

Mr. Biffen: If I chastised every Minister who provided a reply which the hon. Gentlman thought was unsatisfactory, I would have no other occupation.

Mr. David Sumberg (Bury, South): When will the House have an opportunity to express its satisfaction at the vote by the people of Spain that their country should remain a member of NATO? As Monsignor Bruce Kent has tramped over to that country to tell the Spanish Government not to be part of NATO, would it not be nice for the House to have a chance to express its satisfaction that at least one European Socialist leader can resist the blandishments of CND and Monsignor Kent?

Mr. Biffen: That is an entertaining proposition. It opens up flourishing prospects for Monsignor Bruce Kent in activities nearer home. My hon. Friend has requested a debate. I think that that might be considered in the context of a general foreign affairs debate at some future date.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): May I also add my weight to the arguments for a debate or statement on Wapping, in view of the accident — the deliberate assault—last night on the picket line? In view of the Prime Minister's performance today on security and dangers on the streets and in the homes, may we start having debates about broken promises? Did the Prime Minister not go to the country in 1979 claiming to set the people free? After today's performance, she is calling upon the people to lock themselves in.

Mr. Biffen: The hon. Gentleman calls for a number of debates. If I had endless time, I should be delighted to oblige the hon. Gentleman because in every instance the Government would emerge triumphant and so sustain our political fortunes more generally.

Mr. Kinnock: The right hon. Gentleman is an idealist.

Mr. Biffen: It needs an idealist to match an idealist. I shall be very interested to find out what the Labour Party does about the present dispute concerning News International.

Mr. Patrick Thompson (Norwich, North): May I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to early-day motion 582 concerning free speech on the campus?

[That this House notes the improved statement of intent from the vice-chancellors and principals of universities to uphold the right of free speech and acknowledges the efforts of some university authorities to protect that right; regrets that this determination is not uniform among all institutions of higher education; deplores the continuation of a 'no platform' policy among students in many universities; believes that the majority of students have no wish for such a policy designed to gag political opponents; and urges Her Majesty's Government to support legislation to safeguard this fundamental feature of the purpose of universities.]

Bearing in mind the increasing examples of intolerance in universities, will the right hon. Gentleman accept that those of us who are concerned about the future of higher education feel that the matter should be debated in the House and that we hope that legislation will be introduced? I hope that my right hon. Friend can reassure me on that point.

Mr. Biffen: I cannot offer the prospect of an early debate on that topic, but that does not in any sense lead me to deny the importance of that subject. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making his point.

Mr. John Ryman (Blyth Valley): Will the Leader of the House give a sensible and not a flippant answer to the following question? What is the Government's position about the situation that has arisen in the coal mining industry as a result of the failure of the National Coal Board and the Secretary of State for Energy to intervene in the decision to close Bates' colliery despite the recommendation of the independent colliery review tribunal? Does the Leader of the House realise that NACODS is proposing to hold a ballot on an overtime ban and that if that is carried it would bring the coalfields to a standstill? Does he also realise that there is no confidence whatsoever in the future of the colliery review procedure and that many of the coal mining unions are contemplating boycotting it? Is he concerned about the position that has arisen? It is no use the Leader of the House saying, by way of answer, that he will speak to the Secretary of State for Energy, because the Secretary of State for Energy is invisible and flatly refuses to come to the House to answer questions on that subject.

Mr. Biffen: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman should have spoilt his question with his sneering final sentences. That is precisely the course of action that it is prudent and sensible for me to take—to refer the matter to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy.

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): I was not going to ask the Leader of the House any questions this afternoon, but as the Prime Minister was in one of her moods and was not prepared to give a reasonable reply to my question, I must ask him about it and also ask him to correct the suggestion by the hon. Member for Orpington (Mr. Stanbrook) that early-day motion 538 was signed by 60 hon. Members. It was actually signed by 70 right hon. and hon. Members opposite.

Since the Government have not received a mandate from any source for the introduction of the Shops Bill, will the Leader of the House consider the tremendous opposition expressed in letters sent to hon. Members and to Ministers at the Home Office? Only 400 letters were in favour and 40,000 were against the Bill. With such tremendous opposition, will the Government now consider withdrawing the Bill or at least go to the country to decide whether it should be introduced?

Mr. Biffen: I thank the hon. Gentleman for making his preferences clear on that matter. Next week's business contains no provision for the Second Reading of the Bill but the hon. Gentleman will know that it has passed through another place; I expect to be announcing the date of Second Reading before too long.

Orders of the Day

Consolidated Fund (No. 2) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

Question, That the Bill be now read a Second time, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 113 (Consolidated Fund Bills), and agreed to.*

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

Question, That the Bill be now read the Third time, *put and agreed to.*

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

Motion made, and Question proposed, pursuant to Standing Order No. 113(2) (Consolidated Fund Bills), That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Sainsbury.]*

Nuclear Waste

4 pm

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Grantham): The disposal of nuclear waste material has now become an issue of general and intense concern to the British people. Therefore, I am grateful for this opportunity to discuss at such an early time those matters that lie at the heart of the report published yesterday by the Environment Select Committee.

One consequence of that general interest is that so many of my right hon. and hon. Friends are present now to show their interest. I am particularly glad to see my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Mid-Bedfordshire (Mr. Lyell), my hon. Friends the Members for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) and for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown), my right hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Sir B. Braine), and Opposition Members.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): What about the Chief Whip?

Mr. Hogg: I am coming to the Chief Whip. I have no doubt that all of them will seek to catch your eye, Mr. Speaker, during the debate.

We who can speak in this place on this matter are a great deal more fortunate than those who by reason of their office are precluded from speaking. I am referring to my right hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, South and Maldon (Mr. Wakeham), the Patronage Secretary. His opposition to the suggestion that this material should go to Bradwell in his constituency is matched only by my opposition to the suggestion that it should go to Fulbeck——

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle (Lincoln): And mine.

Mr. Hogg: It is also matched by that of my hon. Friend the Member for Lincoln (Mr. Carlisle). We welcome the presence of the Chief Whip on the Front Bench because he will lend powerful support to my arguments.

On 25 February 1986 my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment made a statement to the House to the effect that NIREX had identified four possible sites for the disposal of low-level and short-lived intermediate level nuclear waste. Those places are Elstow, Bradwell, South Killingholme and Fulbeck airfield, which is in my constituency. I wish to make it plain that my constituents wholly and utterly reject the suggestion that nuclear waste should be brought to Fulbeck airfield. We shall fight this proposal on three grounds. First, we shall contend that a near surface disposable system is not a proper, safe or necessary way of disposing of intermediate level waste. Secondly, we shall say that the hydrological and geological properties that are to be found at Fulbeck airfield are inappropriate for the construction of a near surface disposal site. Thirdly, we shall say that we believe that the road communications to the site are such that no safe system of transporting nuclear waste to the airfield is possible. Those will be our main but not our only arguments.

Today, I should like to concentrate on one argument, the proposition that surface or near surface disposal systems are not a safe, necessary or appropriate way of disposing of intermediate level waste.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: On several occasions, I have given what I believe to be the solution to the problem. Will the hon. Gentlman make it clear during his speech how he thinks we shall ultimately resolve this difficulty? I trust that he will not suggest putting the site in another constituency. Will he put a real and sensible proposition to the House?

Mr. Hogg: I agree entirely with the hon. Gentleman, and I hope that I shall satisfy him on that point.

The proposition that lies at the core of all the arguments is that near surface disposal facilities are not a proper, safe or necessary way of disposing of intermediate level waste. I am supported in that argument by my right hon. Friend the Chief Whip and my hon. Friends who represent affected constituencies and who are present, especially my hon. Friend the Member for Lincoln.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: If there is to be any storage of nuclear waste, the method must be absolutely safe. All of us would support my hon. Friend in that.

Mr. Hogg: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. The core of our argument is our grave doubt whether near surface disposal facilities are safe for the purposes of keeping intermediate level nuclear waste. We are at one on that point because we do not believe that it is a safe system.

I recognise that some people will say that we are making narrow constituency points. *[Interruption.]* I am glad that Opposition Members deprecate that idea, and I hope to persuade them that that is not so. The argument of my constituents and of myself is backed by the great weight of informed opinion. Moreover, it is backed by past practice, and justified by policies that are being or are about to be implemented in most OECD nuclear nations.

Let us take first the report of the Select Committee. Hon. Members will bear in mind that without exception none of the Members of the Select Committee had a direct constituency angle to express. Their report is categoric in its terms. Paragraph 99 states:

> "The poor research in the United Kingdom means that it is impossible at this stage for us to recommend any disposal options with total confidence . . . We recommend that near surface disposal facilities are only acceptable for short-lived low-level wastes and must be fully engineered on a complete containment basis."

NIREX is suggesting that a near surface disposal facility should be used, not only for low level waste, but for intermediate level waste having a half life of 30 years. Therefore, NIREX's proposal flies directly in the fact of one of the major conclusions of the Select Committee's report. That brings me to my second point.

[Mr. Hogg]

NIREX's proposals are contrary to what is becoming general practice in the nuclear nations. With the exception of the United States and France, all nuclear nations are proposing to store all nuclear waste material in deep geological sites. France has a near surface site at Centre de la Manche near Cherbourg. That site is disposing of intermediate level waste in an engineered container but the site is close to the sea. Therefore, should there be an accidental outflow of tainted material it will flow into the sea and be dispersed. For reasons appreciated by Lincolnshire Members, that is not true of Fulbeck.

In every other nuclear country—Germany, Sweden, Switzerland, Belgium, Canada and Finland—all nuclear waste material, low level or intermdiate level, will be disposed of in deep geological sites. These sites are usually thousands of feet below the surface and are protected from mankind by strata of rock. NIREX's proposals are directly contrary to what has become an accepted policy within all OECD nuclear countries.

Mr. David Alton (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): Is it not true that the United States is also looking at deep disposal sites? There is a proposed site at Hanford near Seattle, in the state of Washington. Therefore, the United States is moving towards deep geological sites for disposal rather than using the option that NIREX has put forward.

Mr. Hogg: The hon. Gentleman is quite right. However I wish to be strictly accurate. In the case of the United States and France intermediate waste has been, and continues to be, disposed of at near surface disposal sites.

It is frequently argued either expressly or by implication that there is no alternative to near surface disposal sites. That is manifestly untrue. West Germany has a deep geological site in Lower Saxony at Gorleben which is in the process of construction and will be ready to receive nuclear waste shortly. However, no sites in Britain are being examined for that purpose, despite the fact that the Select Committee on the Environment was informed by no less a person than Dr. Feates of the Department of the Environment that some 15 per cent. of this country may be suitable for the disposal of high level radioactive waste.

There are other methods by which this problem can be resolved. There is the seabed option which could use any of three methods. First, there is the method of using oil drilling techniques to drill deep boreholes into the continental shelf, where the waste could be stored. Secondly, waste could be disposed into the deep ocean seabed either by drilling or by emplacement. Thirdly, material could be disposed of in horizontal tunnels and caverns excavated under the seabed and from the coast.

These are no idle or academic dreams and they are already being brought into existence. In Sweden, for example, there is a planned operational site at Forsmark on the east Baltic coast. In three years' time that site will be ready to receive low level and intermediate level waste. The technology is already available for implementing the oil drilling option. The problem is not technology but the fact that the nuclear industry has been so slow to investigate the possibilities that technology offers. I was concerned to learn from paragraph 93 of the Select Committee on the Environment's report that it was not until March 1985 that NIREX placed a contract for examining the oil drilling option.

There are alternative methods for disposing of low level and intermediate waste. The fact that NIREX does not come forward with alternatives to the near surface system does not reflect any lack of available alternatives but reflects the failure on its part to follow any sustained and consistent research into the alternatives. We have the right to expect that research. As long ago as 1976 the Flowers report said:

"the United Kingdom now appears conspicuously backward among nations with significant nuclear programmes in its consideration and funding of studies related to geological disposal of the radioactive waste".

I note with concern that the Select Committee echoes that view when it states:

"All that we have seen confirms that impression, save that we are now nearly ten years further behind."

It is wrong to suppose that there is an immediate and pressing need to find another site for the disposal of intermediate nuclear waste which in any way overrides the paramount need for appropriate research. There is no such pressing and urgent need. It is clear that we have enough capacity for a long time. The life of the facility at Drigg can be greatly extended if the operators on that site would show more discrimination as to the volume and type of material that they store there. If the operators could be induced to use the modern techniques of incineration and compaction, Drigg could carry on longer still. Those materials which are not suitable for Drigg can be stored at existing facilities, most notably at Sellafield, until proper alternatives can be devised.

I do not believe that a near surface disposal system for the disposal of intermediate level nuclear waste will ever be willingly accepted by my constituents at Fulbeck—or indeed by any other community. That is a fact that the House and, as a consequence, the country has to face. The scheme put forward by NIREX is contrary to the recommendations of the Select Committee. It is contrary to the weight of informed opinion and it is contrary to what we have learnt in the past. It ignores the existence and the establishment of alternative methods of disposal. It reflects a certain complacency, a lack of sensitivity, a lack of research and, dare I say, a certain incompetence on the part of the British nuclear industry.

Those of us who represent the people of Bradwell, South Killingholme, Elstow and Fulbeck—we are all present today — will not deliver the British nuclear industry from the consequences of its own omissions or the consequences of its past errors.

4.19 pm

Mr. David Alton (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): It is a pleasure to follow the speech of the hon. Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg). He said that there is no pressing or urgent need to take decisions on the NIREX sites. I agree that it is too soon to take these far-reaching decisions, and I have the feeling that we are being bounced into taking decisions that will have enormous consequences for the communities to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

I am glad that the hon. Gentleman talked about some of the other longer-term options. He mentioned Forsmark, and I had the privilege, as a member of the Environment Select Committee, of visiting Forsmark with the other members of the Committee. In the longer-term we shall have to examine such options, although I plead with the

industry not to try to reinvent the wheel. Much work is being done elsewhere in the world, and we should examine that carefully before we embark on our own projects.

In terms of geography we are a small country, and one that is congested, with many people living near areas where nuclear waste may be dumped. I suspect that wherever sites are suggested, whether they are shallow sites close to the surface or deep disposal sites, the same arguments of opposition will be advanced. Despite his support for deep geological sites if they had been suggested for his constituency, I suspect that the hon. Member for Grantham would have been advancing the same sort of arguments today. The acronym used in the United States, NIMBY—not in my back yard—would probably apply to any of us if the proposal were to put either a shallow or a deep disposal site near our constituencies.

One or two hon. Members would favour a different acronym, INMBYP—in my back yard please. They take the view, because of job implications in their constituency, that because many people are employed by the industry they have to support it. I can understand that, and will leave those Members to make their own arguments. Some hon. Members are concerned about environmental implications and others about job implications. These things cross party barriers.

This is a timely debate because yesterday the report of the Select Committee on the Environment was published. I regret that we did not go beyond our remit of looking simply at nuclear waste. We should challenge all the assumptions on which our industry has been based. We should be raising questions today about whether we need to maintain and expand the existing nuclear industry at all. That is why I entered many dissenting notes to the report. In my first amendment I said:

"the Government should set up an immediate independent inquiry into the continuation of the civil nuclear programme, and that this inquiry shall be instructed to take due note of our comments on the undesirability of nuclear waste."

We need to look at the question whether we should produce the waste in the first place. I do not wish to detract from an excellent report, to which I was happy to put my signature, but that limited brief meant that we were able to discuss only such matters as the management of radioactive waste, health and dose limitation, reprocessing, the public, institutions and the law, without looking at whether we should be producing nuclear waste at all. While I welcome the two sections of the report dealing with reprocessing, and institutions and the law, nevertheless I feel that elsewhere the report is both complacent and inadequate. I would particularly pinpoint the management of radioactive waste, the effects on the health of the public and the general concern of the public over the way information is given to them about the nuclear industry.

The Committee heard a number of conflicting statements from the industry about health effects on those living close to nuclear reactors and to people who might be affected by the seepage of nuclear waste. BNFL behaved despicably when it fed wrong information to the Black committee. That resulted in a number of conclusions being arrived at by the House and by the Departments of Energy and of the Environment. The Black report needs to be reassessed in the light of information now put forward by a number of outside sources.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Will the hon. Gentleman clarify his words? Is he saying that BNFL deliberately misled the Select Committee? If so, is he sure of his evidence?

Mr. Alton: I am saying that the evidence that has come out since the Select Committee considered this question implies that either BNFL did not know, and if it did not know it should have known, or that it deliberately misled the Committee, which would be of great concern.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: The hon. Gentleman used the words "acted despicably". That presumes that he knew what happened. Would he care to qualify what he said?

Mr. Alton: I cannot really qualify it. The chairman of BNFL, Mr. Allday, said:

"I am satisfied that the safety of the environment around Sellafield is very, very good indeed."

I do not share that view. Wrong information was given, and it may have been given deliberately, both to the Committee and to the House. If it was given intentionally, BNFL acted despicably. Figures reveal that in the Seascale ward, in the small village near Sellafield, the area has 24 times the regional average for leukaemia. That is according to James Cutler of Yorkshire Television. Considerable concern has been raised not just by James Cutler but by many other people about the incidence of cancer among people living near nuclear installations and in areas where there could be seepage of radioactivity into the environment.

That is why I was disappointed that Labour and Conservative Members of the Committee were unable to support my recommendation

"that the Government establish an inquiry to investigate the incidence of cancer around all nuclear establishments, examining the medical records of those working in, or living near to, nuclear establishments, and that such an inquiry should not repeat the logical and statistical errors of the Black report."

There are clear links between the nuclear industry and the cranking up of the nuclear ratchet in the development of our nuclear missile programme. Otherwise, there would not be such a keen desire to proceed with the construction of the thermal oxide reprocessing plant at Sellafield. That is being built at a cost of some £1·3 billion of public money, and was started in 1978. I am glad that the Select Committee has said that THORP should be put in mothballs, because it would be environmentally damaging, uneconomic and unnecessary.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Will the hon. Gentleman qualify what he has said? Is that precisely what the Select Committee has said?

Mr. Alton: The Select Committee has made it clear that, unless arguments can be brought to the contrary, THORP should be put into mothballs. I am satisfied

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Mr. Campbell-Savours: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This is very important to me, as I have connections with the nuclear industry by way of my constituency. It is important that we destroy the myths surrounding the industry. It is important that we have facts, not misrepresentations.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. I realise that the hon. Gentleman feels strongly about this issue, but this is a matter of argument, not a matter for the Chair.

Mr. Alton: I understand the concern of the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours). Many

[Mr. Alton]

people in his constituency are employed in the nuclear industry and he is concerned about their future. It would be strange if he were not. However, he must also accept that other hon. Members have reservations about the operation of a reprocessing plant at Sellafield and believe that it should not proceed. When the original vote on it was taken in 1978, the hon. Member for Wirral, West (Mr. Hunt), who is now a Minister at the Department of Energy, the Leader of the House and the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow), who is a former Minister, together with many Labour Members, voted against the construction which was opposed by my right hon. Friend the leader of the Liberal party.

Sir Hugh Rossi (Hornsey and Wood Green): I am sure that the hon. Member would not wish to mislead the House about the findings of the Committee, of which we are both members, particularly as he always displayed himself, if I may say so as Chairman of the Committee, as a concerned member of it. However, his overriding concern was to see the complete abandonment of the nuclear industry in this country. The Committee could not look at this, not because it wished to restrict its remit, but because it had no power to do so because it was concerned not with energy policy but with environmental policy. The environmental policy was concerned with the disposal of radioactive waste, not with whether there should be nuclear power stations in the country.

On the question of medical evidence, the hon. Gentleman will know that it is an axiom of the Committee that we reach opinions or conclusions only upon evidence that has been adduced before us, and we do not seek to make assumptions outside that. Every recommendation that we have made is founded firmly and solidly upon evidence that we have received.

With regard to THORP, our recommendation is simply that inasmuch as the economic considerations that led to a particular policy in 1978 have changed, perhaps one should reappraise whether it is necessary to continue with reprocessing, but against those economic factors one has to take into account the employment effects that abandoning THORP would have. It is a difficult decision to take. Now is the time to undertake a reappraisal, but no more than a reappraisal at this stage.

Mr. Alton: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. As usual, he has been adept in the way that he has put qualifying remarks fairly to the House. They do not represent my views. As he rightly says, both sides gave a considerable amount in order to be able to arrive at a unanimous report. I have put my view to the House.

I take exception to one point that the hon. Gentleman has just made in connection with implications to health. He will recall that I moved an entire new chapter to the report on the dangers of radioactive discharges as they affect people. He will also recall that we were given evidence in the course of the inquiry about the benefits of the new SIXEP plant at Sellafield, and about how it would improve the environment and the prospects for local people's health. We were given evidence that the expenditure of £0·25 billion would save two lives—that was a statement by BNFL. I made the point to the Committee, and I make it to the House now, that I find it strange that the health benefits of SIXEP could be argued with such precision. I think that it demonstrates that the industry once again has put its information and its case across to the public in an appalling way.

It is clear that many Members wish to argue about the effects of nuclear waste and the dumping and disposal of nuclear waste in their areas and to put their cases to the House. I do not intend to detain the House for much longer.

I wish to touch on one other question only, the disposal of nuclear waste into the Irish sea. I hope that there can be unanimity in the House that that is a totally unacceptable practice. At Sellafield we must move to zero discharges as soon as possible—I would hope within two years. Every pressure possible should be put on the industry. It should at least consider the effects on Anglo-Irish relations, if nothing else. Already representations have been made to the Government by the Taoiseach, Dr. Garret FitzGerald, when he was here only 10 days ago, about the real worries and concerns on the other side of the Irish sea. The same is true for those of us who represent constituencies on this side of St. George's channel. There is considerable anxiety throughout the north-west of England about this.

It is clear that the industry is open to considerable criticism. Hon. Gentlemen are right to have raised this important issue, but they must now accept the logic of their position. If nuclear waste is undesirable in their back yard, they ought to ask why it is suitable for someone else's.

4.33 pm

Sir Bernard Braine (Castle Point): I am particularly grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg) for providing the opportunity for us to debate this matter today. If I may say so, in a speech of rare distinction — clear, compelling, eloquent — he would have completely convinced me, if I was not already convinced.

I am glad too not merely for my own reasons, which I hope to deploy before the House, but for my right hon. Friend the Chief Whip, the Member for Colchester, South and Maldon (Mr. Wakeham), who is here in his place. As my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham said, we all know that, while, by long convention, a Chief Whip is unable to express his views and those of his constituents in the House, his silence today must not be construed as an expression of indifference or inactivity.

Fortunately, outside the House, a Chief Whip is not bound by a vow of silence on planning matters, and my right hon. Friend has already expressed his total opposition to the prospct, remote though it may be—and remoter still by the end of the debate, I hope—that Bradwell in his constituency be a site for the disposal of intermediate and low-level radioactive waste. Moreover, in this, he has the full support of his parliamentary colleagues in Essex and that of Essex county council. My right hon. Friend has told me of meetings that he has had in his constituency, including one in Bradwell itself, where some 250 very angry constituents expressed their total opposition to the proposal. I can understand their anger, as does my right hon. Friend. He is in complete sympathy with their views. I understand that he has further meetings planned.

One reason is that my right hon. Friend's constituents, like him, are aware that Bradwell does not begin to meet the criteria set down by NIREX itself for a site with the greatest potential for a deep-trench repository based on clay. In its information to local authorities, NIREX says that the four factors likely to exert a significant influence

upon site choice are population density, accessibility, conservation and geology. On those criteria alone, the Bradwell site ought never to have been included.

But the case does not rest there, as I shall presently show. Let me briefly outline my right hon. Friend's deeply held objections to Bradwell being chosen as a site. First, it is close to areas of rapid population growth — Colchester, Maldon, Rochford, Castle Point and Southend. Over the past 10 years, our county has experienced faster than average population growth, and the trend will continue well into the next century.

Secondly, rail and road access links with the proposed site are totally inadequate.

Thirdly, if by conservation NIREX is referring to the preservation of the environment, then the site is totally unsuitable for reasons which have not been taken into account, notably that the area is subject to flooding and has other inherent drawbacks which make it totally unsuitable for the disposal by burial of any kind of toxic waste, let alone nuclear waste.

Fourthly, the geological evidence in the possession of my right hon. Friend, which I have seen too, because it has been available in the geological survey for Essex since 1980, makes it crystal clear that the site is unsuitable. The water table is very high. The London clay which underlies Bradwell varies in depth below the surface from 3 to 55 m, but only 34 m of this is true clay. Beneath the clay lie significant deposits of chalk which are a valuable aquifer for the supply of water to the west. The possibility, however remote, that contaminated water could pass from the clay to the chalk is clearly an unacceptable risk.

There are, however, two considerations of paramount importance which NIREX could have discovered for itself if it had wished, or had there been proper consultation with the Essex county council. These concern not merely Bradwell but the whole of the Essex coast down to my constituency in the Thames estuary.

First, there is the risk of flooding. I had already been in Parliament some time when, just over 33 years ago, the North sea struck with fury down the whole of the east coast. In the disaster that followed, 119 people lost their lives in Essex alone, half of them at Canvey Island in my constituency. I have a vivid recollection of what happened. I was on Canvey on 31 January 1953 a few hours before the water struck just before midnight. The sea burst through our defences, flooding 12,356 Essex homes. In the next few hours, 21,000 people were made homeless. Over 31,000 were to qualify as flood victims and received help from the Lord Mayor's distress fund. Incidentally, at that time the Lord Mayor was a distinguished Member of this House. Almost the whole of the Essex coastline, from Harwich in the north to the Thames estuary, was inundated. It included the Dengie peninsula, the area where the Bradwell nuclear power station and the proposed waste disposal site are located.

I find it incredible that a site for the storage of nuclear waste should be established in this vulnerable area. In the opening words of her gripping account of "The Great Tide", our county historian, Hilda Grieve, wrote:

"Essex and the sea have been antagonists for centuries."

It is ironic in the extreme that we are still worried about the weakness of our sea defences in this part of Essex. I hope that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment will take due note of this. We are deeply concerned about the inadequacy of our sea defences, particularly in the area from Harwich to the constituency of my right hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, South and Maldon. I suggest to the Government that it should be a high priority to mend those defences before embarking on a crackpot scheme of this kind.

What happened in 1953 along the Dengie peninsula? Close to the proposed site the sea walls gave way and the angry waters poured through. In Hilda Grieve's eloquent words:

"The jaws of the North sea had opened wide and engulfed the walls as effortlessly and indifferently as the great fish swallowed Jonah."

Can anyone be sure that the great tide will not return? Will there never be a repetition of what happened in 1953? How safe is the Essex coastline, particularly the area to which I have referred? London is now protected by the Thames barrier, one of the technical marvels of the age. Canvey Island is now safe from flooding. Its sea walls have been raised twice since 1953 and it is safer now than it has ever been in its history. But what about the Bradwell area? I do not know whether my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State has thought about the Bradwell area, but I hope that when she replies to the debate she will be able to assure me that resources will be found to ensure proper coastal protection before any order is introduced.

However, a second serious danger must be dragged out into the open. Bradwell lies on a geological fault line which stretches right down from that part of Essex to my constituency. This has given rise, down the centuries, to a number of minor earthquakes. The most serious of these was what the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority's safety and reliability directorate has described as "the great British earthquake" of 1884. It was centred on Peldon, which is about four miles from Bradwell. There is an account of it in the Alderson report which was published as recently as December 1982 by the safety and reliability directorate of the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority. It said:

"At about 9.20 am on the morning of Tuesday, 22 April 1884 an earthquake occurred, centred in the south-eastern corner of Essex. The area most strongly affected included the villages of Abberton and Peldon lying south of Colchester. The city of Colchester itself was extensively damaged during this event which was felt as far away as Exeter . . . over 1,200 houses had sufficient damage to require assistance in terms of grants for essential repair work, of these some 400 were in Colchester alone. Thirty-one churches suffered extensive damage necessitating repair and minor reconstruction. Reports varied on the number of deaths due to this event, but it would appear that at least three people died".

That happened during the lifetime of my grandparents.

There are also records of earlier earthquakes in the area. There was one in 1692 near Colchester when buildings were damaged. There was another in 1750 which was felt in the Bradwell area, and another in 1755 was recorded in Rochford, a district which I represented in this House for 19 years.

Had NIREX bothered to consult the Essex county council and its archivists, or even me, or any other Essex Member of Parliament who had represented an Essex constituency for any length of time, it could have been told about this. But there was no proper consultation. The first intimation to the county council that NIREX was looking for a site did not even mention Essex. That led one official to say, "This is suspicious. I bet that NIREX has us in mind." Incidentally, NIREX seems to have been completely unaware of the Alderson report. It seems that in this great scientific set-up the left hand does not know what the right hand has been doing.

[Sir Bernard Braine]

The significance of all this is considerable. A qualified geologist employed by the Essex county council has confirmed that the proposed site lies on the fault line. She is of the opinion that the layer of soft sediment near the surface would in fact amplify any shock waves. Thus, there is a risk that any seismic disturbance would be enhanced in its effect by that alone.

I am also advised that basic information about the foundations of the Bradwell nuclear power station has been denied to the Essex county council. I do not wish to be alarmist, but the power station adjoins the proposed disposal site. It is inconceivable that such information could be withheld from any public inquiry, but it should not be necessary where public safety is concerned to withhold it now.

On behalf of my Essex colleagues and my right hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, South and Maldon, I must ask that this information is made avaiable to the Essex county council now. It must be made available not at a public inquiry but now. I ask for it to be made available, even if NIREX decides that discretion over the proposed disposal site is the better part of its misplaced valour and withdraws the proposal.

Let me put this in perspective. The nuclear power station is already there. It is feeding electricity into the national grid. I happen to believe that nuclear power generated at carefully chosen and safe sites is good for the nation. But a nuclear power station has a limited life and is not to be regarded as a permanency. What should concern us here is the burial close by of nuclear waste, which must inevitably continue to present a hazard for decades to come. If the site is disturbed in any way—by excessive flooding or by seismic disturbance — that should concern us all. It certainly concerns the constituents of my right hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, South and Maldon, and it concerns me. For the people of Essex this constitutes virtually a permanent hazard. As such, it is simply not acceptable.

I have one further observation to make. We are told that the site is for the disposal of intermediate and low-level nuclear waste. Let us not be mesmerised by words. What, pray, is the definition of "intermediate" nuclear waste? In what respect does it differ from high-risk nuclear waste? I am advised that the difference between high-level nuclear waste and intermediate nuclear waste is that the former generates a great deal of heat; but all such waste emits radioactivity over a very long time span. The impression that is given is that intermediate waste is not very hazardous, although it is prudent to bury it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Grantham went into the matter in great detail and described the conditions for the disposal of radioactive material of this kind. It should be disposed of in dry conditions, deep down in the bowels of the earth, if it cannot be disposed of in the Atlantic trench.

My hon. Friend dealt effectively with the point. To dispose of the waste at Bradwell, where there is a high water table, where there is an aquifer supplying water to the communities to the west, where there is flooding from time to time, and where the sea defences have been neglected, is madness. It must not be.

I should have thought it prudent not to go ahead with boring tests and not to go to a public inquiry but to stop the waste of public expenditure now, and to exclude the area from any order. I am not referring to any other locations; my hon. Friends will make their own cases in due course. I am talking about something that I know is a hazard, and one that confronts our people now.

So I have one last question. What is the point of embarking upon a costly investigation of a site so palpably unsuitable, which must be followed by a long public inquiry? Why waste public money on such a farcical exercise? Other factors should perhaps be taken into account. I do not wish to prolong my speech, but hitherto the debate about nuclear waste disposal techniques has been restricted to matters of physics, chemistry and geology. There is a wealth of knowledge within that framework, but environmental science is discovering new facts which must not be ignored.

A wet environment, such as the Bradwell site, will not be a dead environment; it will be inhabited. Current research in microbiology shows that there is a new factor here to reckon with. Has there been any consultation with the Natural Environment Research Council about the microbiological implications of storing radioactive material in wet, underground sites? I put the question deliberatly because I am aware of research that is taking place. Whether NIREX has caught up with it or has simply suppressed the facts, I do not know, but the question must be asked.

My advice to my hon. Friend on the proposed order is to tear it up and start again. When the Secretary of State is considering the matter he should also give thought to the urgent need to repair the sea defences in Essex.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. At least four hon. Members with strong constituency interests wish to speak. The debate must end at 5.30 pm. I hope that they and the Front Benches will bear that in mind.

4.53 pm

Mr. Michael Brown (Brigg and Cleethorpes): It is a great privilege to follow my right hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Sir B. Braine), the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton), and my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg), who must be congratulated on his initiative. I have considerable admiration for the forthright way in which my hon. friend the Member for Grantham has represented the interests of his constituents. Although my right hon. Friend the Patronage Secretary may not speak in the House, the whole House will support the efforts he has been making on behalf of his constituents in Colchester, South and Maldon. He has made his representations properly.

I speak with great feeling on the issue because, unlike my right hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, South and Maldon (Mr. Wakeham) and my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham, we had information about South Killingholme as far back as April or May. Of course, it was denied. Department of Environment Ministers were unco-operative about confirming the rumours that abounded. The Minister of State, when he must have known that my constituency was being seriously considered, led me to believe that it was just one of 2,000 or 3,000 different sites that were being remotely considered. So I totally support the case that has been made outside the House by my right hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point, my right hon. Friend the Patronage Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for

Grantham, and my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Mid-Bedfordshire (Mr. Lyell), who has had to live with the issue for some two years. I know what he has gone through during that time and what my other right hon. and hon. Friends have had to go through for the past two weeks, after the announcement was sprung upon them with no consultation.

In view of the Select Committee report which came out yesterday, there is every case for the proposal to be withdrawn. My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State is more to me than an hon. Friend; she is also a friend. I hope that she remains so during the difficult months when the matter is being discussed. I hope she will tell her colleagues in the Department of the Environment that if their comments yesterday about the constructive nature of the report are to be taken seriously, they must think carefully before they proceed with the order.

I understand that yesterday the Minister of State, who is responsible for the matter in the Department, welcomed the report and said that it was a useful contribution. If his words are to have any meaning, he should not bring forward the order at the end of April, as he said in a parliamentary answer to me a couple of days ago that he still intends to do. If he means to do that, he might just as well say publicly now that he has no regard for the important and detailed report of the Select Committee.

We are basing our arguments on the well-researched recommendations of an all-party Select Committee. In paragraph 99 of its report, as my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham indicated, the Select Committee said:

"The poor state of research in the United Kingdom means that it is impossible at this stage for us to recommend any disposal option with total confidence . . . Near surface disposal facilities are only acceptable for short-lived low-level wastes".

I do not agree even with that, but the implication is clear. On the terms of the report there is no case for the special development order for the four sites that are to be considered for the disposal of intermediate waste.

I do not want to go over old ground. My hon. Friend the Member for Grantham has eloquently indicated the alternatives which should be considered. The message from the Select Committee's report to my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary and her colleagues in the Department of the Environment is simple: no work has been done on alternative ways of dealing with nuclear waste.

We all accept that nuclear waste arises and has to be disposed of. According to paragraph 114 of the Select Committee report, it was indeed the chairman of the Central Electricity Generating Board, Lord Marshall himself, who pointed out that

"the sense of urgency which the Flowers Commission engendered in the industry to formulate disposal policy is no longer so pressing."

I have been privileged to have the support locally of my hon. Friend the Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Hickmet) and of my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) in the arguments adduced against South Killingholme. I want to draw the attention of my right hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point to one thing: I accept totally that there is no case for Bradwell; for similar reasons there is no case for South Killingholme, which also suffered from the floods in 1953. If my right hon. Friend represented Mid-Bedfordshire or Grantham, with the knowledge of this subject which he displayed this afternoon, he would be able to adduce the very arguments that he used in his excellent speech against all four sites. On my way home to my own constituency I drive through the constituency of my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Mid-Bedfordshire, and within one mile of Fulbeck, before arriving at my home three miles from South Killingholme, where I have lived for the past seven years.

We have a text before us that has been well researched and well argued. Based on facts, the Environment Select Committee has put forward several recommendations.

I acknowledge your injunction to confine my speech, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I want to draw the House's attention to paragraphs 277, 279 and 280 of the Select Committee's report, and especially to the Committee's view of NIREX—this unaccountable, unelected body that has been stumbling up and down the country, causing the most terrible distress to local people at public meetings. The NIREX representatives have absolutely no idea how to treat local people. I understand that the constituents of my right hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, South and Maldon have experienced the disgraceful way in which NIREX has presented its very bad case, as have I.

The Select Committee's recommendations regarding NIREX are very simple and straightforward and should be honoured by the Department of the Environment. They are:

"We therefore recommend that the Secretary of State for the Environment should hold the Government's single special share in NIREX . . . rather than the Secretary of State for Energy.

We therefore recommend that the Department of the Environment should clarify the lines of communication and accountability between themselves and NIREX. In due course NIREX should be made directly answerable to the Department of the Environment".

I am getting fed up with my hon. Friend the Minister of State answering questions which I put to him about this matter by saying that it is a matter for NIREX. It is not a matter for NIREX. It is a matter for the Department of the Environment and the Minister here at this Dispatch Box. I shall get very angry if I get answers like that to any more parliamentary questions.

My final point, which supports all that my right hon. and hon. Friends have said, is here in the report:

"We therefore recommend that site selection criteria should be established in advance and published for each type of waste disposal route likely to be developed. Thereafter, the Department of the Environment should ensure that any possible future disposal sites identified by NIREX should satisfy the site selection criteria for that disposal option. Thus responsibility for final short listing . . . should effectively rest with the Department of the Environment rather than NIREX."

That is the battle that I have had for the past six months and I am delighted to be joined in that battle by such formidable allies as the Patronage Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point, my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham, my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Mid-Bedfordshire, my hon. Friends the Members for Gainsborough and Horncastle and for Glanford and Scunthorpe. We shall defeat the proposals at all four sites. I warn my hon. Friend the Minister that we intend, all of us, to win.

5.3 pm

Mr. Nicholas Lyell (Mid-Bedfordshire): I shall be brief because I know that others of my hon. Friends wish to speak. The strong feelings expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown) will

[Mr. Nicholas Lyell]

be reflected by all right hon. and hon. Members who are concerned about these matters. He passes through my constituency. My constituency and Elstow were first singled out, and singled out is the right phrase, two and a half years ago by NIREX without any proper forethought.

I am glad to see present my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, North (Mr. Carlisle), who feels as strongly as I do on this. The deep anxiety which is felt by my constituents, and those in surrounding districts has been felt for two and a half years. It is not the view of cranks, but the view of sensible constituents of all persuasions who have thought the matter through. They ask themselves how NIREX can propose to put such a repository, as it calls this dump, two and a half miles from a major centre of population in a crowded county with a constantly growing population, when its first criterion for choosing sites, which it now announces, is population density. That is to turn logic on its head.

We recognise that a solution must be found, but I should like to draw attention to four points in the Select Committee report. The first is the wise advice to be found in paragraph 58. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg) on initiating this debate with a formidable and well thought out speech. Like me, he draws attention to these words:

> "It is essential that research and development is carried out well in advance."

It was not.

> "The kind of urgency suggested by NIREX's haphazard activities with regard to Billingham and Elstow is very unhelpful and can only fuel the public's anxiety and distrust. In addition, NIREX's rush risks the loss of what might be geologically prime sites."

Those of us who have lived with this for two and a half years probably realise that it has lost possibly the best geological site, at least for low level waste, in the country —the site under Billingham. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] I am not suggesting that it should go there, but NIREX rushed, and the site was rejected on wholly emotional grounds before any proper consideration had been given to it.

I have said for some years that NIREX should split low and intermediate level nuclear waste. I am glad to see that well argued and reflected in the report. If any consideration is to continue to be given to the dumping of waste in what is now called near surface trenches and used to be called shallow land burial—I am not quite sure what the difference is—it should be low level only. My hon. Friend the Minister should remember that there is only one such repository in Europe — Centre de la Manche. It does not rely on absolute containment. It has fail-safe drainage to the sea, which is a formidable difference. I am not saying that that is the right solution, but to rely on absolute containment when it is admitted that the site is waterlogged and has room for that water to escape only on to the surface or to leach down to the aquifers is plainly a wrong solution.

Mr. Alton: The hon. and learned Gentleman will have seen the publicity photograph of Drigg that has been published in the Select Committee's report. Surely that is an example of the worst possible way in which to dispose of low level nuclear waste.

Mr. Lyell: If that be true I know not. I went to Drigg, as did the hon. Gentleman, and it was sworn to me that it was perfectly safe, which shows how confident I am in NIREX, following the report.

There are other sensible solutions which should be considered. I believe that the Select Committee recognises that time is on our side, which it is not in this debate. We should consider dry storage, proper compaction and, above all, the formation of deep mine cavities, perhaps under the sea. When we have had proper and open research and debate, an idea should be proposed which can carry scientific and public confidence.

5.10 pm

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): I shall speak very briefly, because, as has been said by another Liverpool Member, the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton), in whose constituency I live, we in our area are deeply concerned about radioactive discharges into the Irish sea. The Irish sea is slowly but surely becoming a sort of nuclear cesspool. We know that every two years the Irish sea is flushed out, but we also know that a deposit is left. We are trying to get rid of the old problems in the Mersey, and so on, yet we are faced with this new problem, which is growing all the time to an extent that is worrying our people deeply.

It is not only we who are worried. There was a debate yesterday in the Irish Parliament on this issue. The Irish Government are not calling for Sellafield to be closed down, and nor am I, but we have to face what is happening to our areas, and the whole process needs to be looked at again. Do we really need to bring in nuclear waste for reprocessing? Is it sensible, is it safe, is it good for our people? Surely we have to look at this whole thing again.

At its last annual conference the Labour party passed a resolution on future nuclear policy. My party is concerned about this issue. We are not saying that the thousands of workers at Sellafield have to be thrown out of work. We know that a new plant is being built, which will be ready, we are told, in 1990. Be that as it may, this matter is of such concern to us in our area that we say that it has to stop, and that it has to stop now. We cannot allow this build-up, which is causing immense problems for all of us. We are worried about it, we are concerned about it, and we want to see something done quickly to deal with the matter.

5.12 pm

Dr. David Clark (South Shields): The last few words of my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer) sum up the mood of the people of this country. They are deeply concerned about the handling of nuclear waste and want something done about it very quickly. It is our duty to try to ensure that the Government and Government agencies do everything possible to see to it that this problem is tackled responsibly.

I very much welcome the initiative of the hon. Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg), and I equally welcome the report of the Select Committee. The only unsatisfactory point about this debate today is its brevity. I look to the Government for an assurance that we will have a full day's debate on the Select Committee report, because it is of considerable importance. I am aware that many Government Members who wish to participate in the debate have not been able to do so. I hope that very soon

we shall have a debate on the special development order by which means the Government will bypass the local planning authorities on the four specific sites.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Walton said, we are all deeply concerned. Whether it is a civil nuclear engineering problem, or a military one, we have to face the fact that even if we decommissioned every nuclear power station tomorrow—and I am not saying that we should—we shall still have to face the problem of nuclear waste. We expect this problem to be tackled in a much more sensible way than it has been tackled so far and we commend the report to the attention of hon. Members. I am sure that they are reading the report, but it is difficult to comprehend everything. The report is right when it says that we are literally 40 years behind in the way in which we are tackling the nuclear waste problem.

Many hon. Members have put points relating to their own constituencies. Let me emphasise the fact, because it needs emphasising and re-emphasising, that there are 5,000 sites in this country where we use radioactive material. Much of that activity is beneficial to us. I shall cite simply the radium treatment in our major hospitals and the battle against cancer. All the material involved in that procedure has to be dumped, and I do not think that we can store it all above ground. It may well be that very low-level material will have to be stored in trenches.

Whatever decisions are made, we must ensure that if mistakes are found the situation is retrievable. I think that that is what worries many Government Members. They feel that trenches and concrete bunkers will be placed in their constituencies and that, if it is found that a mistake has been made, there will be no way of retrieving the situation.

I take issue with the hon. and learned Member for Mid-Bedfordshire (Mr. Lyell) on one point, and I think that he would expect me to do so. In a sense I am agreeing with him, because I feel that NIREX has been insensitive in the way in which it has gone about this operation. I agree that NIREX should have a much wider membership and ought not to be the narrow grouping that it is. The anhydrite mine at Billingham may be an ideal site on purely technical grounds. However, we are dealing, not with a technical issue, but with an emotional one, and I see that the hon. and learned Gentleman agrees with me. It does not make sense to dispose of waste under a major conurbation, with a major chemical complex above it. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook) would have been most active if he had been here.

I think that there is agreement, and that the message from the House to the Minister is that we are not convinced. We have seen the Committee's report, we want to study it, we want a full day's debate on it and we want the Government to take a number of the issues seriously. I think that almost all hon. Members agree with the Select Committee's report that our approach to the dumping of nuclear waste has been "amateurish and haphazard" and that we have tried to do it on a shoestring. I impress upon the Minister the fact that the people of this country do not expect the problem of nuclear waste to be tackled in such a miserly fashion, although perhaps the Committee used the wrong expression when it talked about Rolls-Royce, because that implies cost. I believe that what the report is saying is that we should have the best possible means of tackling this problem of nuclear waste.

It is a matter of deep regret that one of the first things that the Government did on taking office was to stop the deep geological search for sites for radioactive waste. I am not saying that that was the way, but we should have continued with that research, and we have lost five years because of that mistaken decision. We are talking about 200 or 300 years, and we cannot see that far ahead. It may well be that we shall find that we have made mistakes, so whatever course of action we follow, it must be reversible.

5.17 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mrs. Angela Rumbold): I want to start by saying how grateful I am to my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg) for raising this issue today and making such a powerful and well-argued case. This is the first of probably a number of occasions on which we shall discuss what is clearly a very important matter.

I am sorry that not all the hon. Members whose constituencies are involved in this matter were called, particularly my hon. Friends the Members for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Hickmet) and for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh), who I know were anxious to have a say and whose constituencies will most certainly be affected in the same way as those of many other hon. Members who have expressed very real fears during the debate.

I should like to extend my gratitude to my colleagues from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food for their support throughout the whole of this debate.

I must make it absolutely clear that the Government take the public concern on this issue very seriously indeed. I am extremely grateful to the House for the high level of understanding that hon. Members who have spoken on this matter have brought to the debate today. I certainly appreciate why so many of the constituents of my hon. Friends and of other hon. Members have been alarmed by the recent announcement by NIREX of the four potential sites for the disposal of radioactive waste, and some things need to be said to put that announcement in context. I hope that I can allay some of the fears that have been so eloquently expressed.

It is important to emphasise four general points. First, the Government have a range of strict controls on radioactive waste disposal. In exercising those controls, our paramount concern will be public health and safety. Secondly, only one of the four sites announced is needed, and only if the Government's controls and requirements can be satisfied will one be developed. Thirdly, we shall try to ensure that the process of selecting and evaluating a site is as open as possible. Fourthly, we shall ensure that any radioactive doses from a disposal site are insignificant.

Mr. Richard Hickmet (Glanford and Scunthorpe): My hon. Friend has outlined four points which the Government will bear in mind, but may I add a fifth point? Whatever may be the truth or the facts of the dangers or lack of dangers surrounding the disposal of nuclear waste, until public fears can be allayed, it will be impossible to persuade those who live in the areas affected that this is a satisfactory or safe method of disposal. Unless the general public accepts that, the Government have no alternative but to accept the forthright opposition of Members of Parliament who are affected by the decisions of NIREX.

Mrs. Rumbold: I fully understand and accept my hon. Friend's point. It is essential that the Government, NIREX and all those involved with radioactive waste disposal have a better understanding of the matter.

My hon. Friend the Member for Grantham outlined three key areas to which he and his constituents object. He said that the geology at Fulbeck is inappropriate for waste disposal and that there is a lack of communications, as he sees it. They are two of the major criteria that NIREX will use. His main objection was that near-surface disposal systems are not a safe, necessary or proven way of disposing of radioactive waste. That is the point that I must answer. My hon. Friend asked whether alternatives to near-surface disposal had been considered. The study of the best practicable environmental option, which was published today, considered alternatives to the near-surface disposal of waste. It examined deep disposal on land or in tunnels under the sea. It considered disposal in bore holes drilled into the coastal seabed, disposal in the deep ocean and long-term monitored storage. It concluded that near-surface disposal is the best practical environmental option for low-level wastes and some short-lived, intermediate-level wastes.

My hon. Friend mentioned the way in which other countries practise or plan near-surface disposal of low-level waste. He mentioned the French site at Centre de la Manche. Canada also practises such disposal and the option is being considered in Japan. Much research has been undertaken nationally and internationally into the seabed option. This relates to the eventual disposal of high-level waste under the seabed. NIREX recently commissioned two feasibility studies into the disposal of waste under the seabed, and that option is also being considered as a possible way of disposing of longer-lived, intermediate-level wastes. However, some significant legal uncertainties and problems with international agreements must be overcome before any such action could be implemented. We shall consider that recommendation carefully.

Any disposal in or under the seabed would require a licence from my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food under the Food and Environment Protection Act. The legal position on sub-seabed disposal is extremely complex. There is as yet no agreement among the contracting parties to the London dumping convention on whether the matter falls within its remit.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Sir B. Braine) made a powerful speech. I couple his anxieties with those of my right hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, South and Maldon (Mr. Wakeham), which I share and understand fully. My right hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point made some telling points about the criteria upon which NIREX makes its suggestions for suitable sites. He mentioned population, accessibility, conservation and geology. Of course, all those matters will be revealed in the general geological investigations that have been proposed by NIREX, and all those considerations will be subject to full consultation through public inquiries. We have commissioned research by the Natural Environment Research Council on the potential role of microbiological processes in releasing radioactivity at a wet disposal site. I assure hon. Members that the results of the research will be taken fully into account in assessing the suitability of any site for radioactive waste disposal. I shall pass my right hon. Friend's request for information on the foundations of Bradwell power station to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy.

NIREX carried out exhaustive studies before selecting those sites. It could not have consulted county councils before announcing its choice. I understand that it considered several hundred sites; had it consulted the councils involved, unnecessary anxiety would have been caused in many places that were not chosen. Hon. Members will understand that point.

Sir Bernard Braine: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for trying to meet all the points that I raised, but was NIREX aware that Bradwell is on a fault line and that seismic disturbance has been a factor in the mind of the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority? Was NIREX aware of the history of flooding in the area?

Mrs. Rumbold: If it was not aware, I am sure that it will soon become aware of the fact when it carries out its geological investigations.

I assure hon. Members of the importance that the Government attach to openness in the investigations. We wish to be as open as possible at every stage, especially during consultation.

It is important to mention Government control. Hon. Members do not always appreciate that NIREX and the Department of the Environment are separate organisations. I stress the rigorous controls to which the NIREX proposals will be subject from the Government. The nuclear industry is probably the most highly regulated in the country, and NIREX will be no exception. We shall provide an independent assessment of the results of the site investigations and of NIREX's proposal for the facilities. NIREX will require planning permission and, assuming that that is given, it will require an authorisation from the Department to dispose of wastes.

My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Mid-Bedfordshire (Mr. Lyell) mentioned the nature of the waste to be disposed. At such a facility, NIREX will wish to dispose of low-level wastes and some shorter-lived, intermediate-level wastes. But I give the House a categoric assurance that neither high-level wastes nor longer-lived, intermediate-level wastes will be disposed of at such a facility. The Government would not allow a near-surface facility to be upgraded subsequently to higher-grade wastes, which involve a different and far greater risk.

Mr. Lyell: Would my hon. Friend consider carefully the wisdom of looking at the difference between very low-level waste, which might not frighten anyone—an alarm clock or a pair of gloves perhaps—low-level waste and intermediate-level waste? Separating those three might help the public a great deal.

Mrs. Rumbold: I am extremely grateful to my hon. and learned Friend. This is one of the points to which the Government will address themselves clearly.

I have little time left in which to deal with many of the points which have been made in this extremely interesting debate, but I want to assure the House that there will continue to be many opportunities for discussing this particular subject and for reaching a clearer understanding of it. It is of enormous concern to the whole country. I hope that this is the first of many such debates.

Local Housing Programmes

5.30 pm

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): I wish to begin my discussion of Government policy towards local housing programmes by highlighting the desperate need for good homes to rent for the people of my constituency and for many in other parts of the country. The impact of Government policy on the availability of good-quality homes to rent has been disastrous, as I hope to illustrate during the course of my speech. It is perhaps unnecessary to rehearse the bare statistics so often brought before the House, but some bear repeating because they draw attention to the scale of the problem that we face, in the country at large and in my constituency in particular.

We have the lowest number of home building starts since the 1920s. The housing investment programme allocations of most local authorities have been cut to a third of what they were in 1979. Bed-and-breakfast accommodation in squalid and inadequate hotels and boarding houses is being used for homeless families, particularly in London, but elsewhere as well. Many of our older council estates are in an appalling state of repair. Equally appalling is the rate of replacement of accommodation. At the current rate of replacement, it will take 625 years to replace the whole of Britain's housing stock.

This affects local statistics as well. In my constituency we have a waiting list in Islington of 7,000 families, and a transfer list, that is, those wishing to transfer to larger and better accommodation, of 9,000. The chances of these families getting the moves that many desperately need and want are very small indeed, and have been dramatically reduced over the past six or seven years because of the restrictions on the building, renovation and repair programmes that local authorities can carry out.

The human need behind those bare statistics, however, is greater and more tragic than any statistics can possibly indicate. This need is felt by families who have been forced to live in damp, overcrowded, mould-infested accommodation, up many flights of stairs, with lifts which do not work, even where they exist — the sort of conditions which, in a modern society, we ought not to impose on families, on children, on ordinary people whose only crime is that they cannot afford to buy property at the grossly inflated prices which would be necessary if they turned to the private market in my constituency.

We must also bear in mind the possibility of the employment that would be generated by a much more vigorous programme of building and repair work. A major programme of building and renovating houses would not only provide homes for people who need them, but would provide jobs for people who need them. For every one job directly created in the construction industry by investment in housebuilding and renovation, a further job is created in the ancillary trades supplying the builders. Virtually all those jobs would be created here in Britain rather than overseas. It makes economic sense from the Government's point of view. It makes employment sense, as well as making social sense in providing good homes for people who need them.

It is not just the need that exists, however, or just the jobs that could be created by good quality housing programmes. Nor is it just the way in which many Conservative Members, as we heard in the debate on the Housing and Planning Bill, seek at every opportunity to do down the provision of council housing. They speak of vast, impersonal estates such as were put up in the fifties, sixties and early seventies. They speak in denigrating terms of the mistakes of the past. To a large extent, they are quite right to do so, because many mistakes were made, encouraged and fostered by Governments of all political complexions.

That does not mean that we should ignore the extremely good work carried out in the past 10 years by local authorities, particularly in the latter part of the seventies, when the mistakes of the past had been taken to heart and the lessons learnt. Good quality homes with gardens, which were liked and respected by the people who came to live in them, were built, and, in many cases, were created out of the older housing stock by the councils concerned.

I draw the attention of the Minister to the homes in Blair Close, Islington, for example. They have been built in only the past four years by the present Labour council on land which was on the point of being sold for private development by the Social Democratic council in 1982. The SDP had hijacked Islington for a fortunately brief period of six months. The land was due to be sold the day after the election for a new council in May 1982. Because the SDP was swept ingloriously from office on that occasion, the incoming council was able to revoke the sale of the land and went ahead with speed to build a very fine development of small houses around a close, which is much appreciated by the tenants now living there.

That is the kind of good quality accommodation which can be provided by local authorities now. Those who simply assume that all local authority housing development is like the junk estates of the past are unhappily and ungenerously doing down the quality which can be achieved by local authorities in modern days.

I turn now to the malign influence which present Government policy has on local authority housing programmes through the operation of the project control system. Many prospective tenants are disadvantaged because of the conditions and restraints of the project control system, operated by the Department of the Environment under the aegis of this Government — indeed dreamt up by this Government. The operation of the system seriously affects the quality of accommodation which can be provided.

The project control system is a mechanism whereby a calculation of the cost of the homes to be provided, either by new build or by rehabilitation, is set against the original site value in the case of land, or property value in the case of a house. A ratio is calculated and figures are submitted to the Department of the Environment. In some cases the Department of the Environment declines to intervene, but in many cases it does intervene. If it does, it can reject the application, and if it rejects the application the building or renovation project cannot go ahead.

To make matters worse, the guidelines against which the system operates have never been published. No manual is available to local authorities to explain how the Department will set about its task of calculating the value for money of particular schemes. Some schemes which cost more than others are passed, whereas the cheaper ones are not. Some which have a better ratio than others are declined, while the worse ratio schemes go ahead. There appears to be little rhyme or reason to the decisions which

[Mr. Chris Smith]

are made by the Department in this matter, and no explanation has to be given, or is indeed ever given, to the local authority for the turning down of particular projects.

In such a matter, where we are talking about people's homes and something that will be of enormous benefit to people who desperately need it, for the Department and Ministers to operate the sort of secret system that we have in the present project control operation is outrageous. The Department should, at the very least, publish guidelines to set down the rules by which it will operate so that local authorities can at least do some advance planning and know how to advise their prospective tenants when they are consulting them about design, building or renovation. When they are going out to their electorate and talking about the sort of housing programmes that they can have, they should at least know what will and will not be possible. The roulette game which is imposed on local authorities at the moment by the way the system operates acts to the detriment of local authorities and their prospective tenants.

However, there are a number of even worse effects of the project control system. I want to go into those in some detail. The first is that the system seems to operate against those areas where land and property values are higher than others. In a constituency such as mine, where the southern part touches the City of London, where land and property prices are extremely high, whereas in the northern part they are much less high, the operation of the project control system means that schemes which are proposed in the southern part of my constituency tend to fare much worse than schemes which are proposed in the northern part.

I shall give one recent example of two housing schemes, both designed to provide 18 homes and both with more or less the same density of accommodation. I refer to the project at Everilda and Copenhagen streets, which was approved under the project control system by the Government, and the project at Farringdon road, which in the last few days has been rejected by the Department of the Environment under the project control system. At Everilda and Copenhagen streets there are 18 homes, with an average number of persons per dwelling of 4·2. At Farringdon road there are 18 homes with an average number of persons per dwelling of 4·3. The cost of construction of the 18 homes at Everilda and Copenhagen streets was £44,500 each. The average cost of construction at Farringdon road was £45,000 each. The ratio of cost to value at Everilda and Copenhagen streets was 101. At Farringdon road it was 92—a better ratio under the project control system.

Yet the Department of the Environment, with those two almost identical schemes, with almost identical construction costs and almost identical density, has rejected the scheme which has the better cost to value ratio and accepted the one which had the worst. We have no knowledge why the Department took that decision, because it does not have to tell us. But the only possible reason, and the only difference between the two schemes, is the original market value of the land. At Farringdon road, because it is towards the City in a prime site location, the cost of the land is some £10,000 per home higher than it is at Everilda and Copenhagen streets, despite the fact that the land is already in the local authority's ownership and has been for a number of years. The Department appears to have rejected the scheme because of that higher value of the land.

If the Department and Ministers are serious about creating good quality homes within the inner city, particularly in the heart of the inner city, they must not operate such apparently arbitrary rules about land values. The project control system operates in a malign way against the interests of those who wish to see accommodation, particularly family accommodation, built in areas in the inner city where land values and prices will inevitably be higher than elsewhere. That seems to be the only reason why the Government could, in that particular instance, have decided to turn down that scheme which means that people will be denied a number of flats and houses, of which four are designed for wheelchair use for the disabled, and of which 10 are designed to mobility standards so that those who are frail or find difficulty in walking can have access to them, and where good quality family accommodation can be provided in an area which is in high demand for tenants in my constituency who wish to move into that sort of quality of accommodation, because of the apparently arbitrary rules that the Department of the Environment is seeking to operate. That is a tragedy for the people who are faced with that decision. That is one way in which the project control system operates in a malign way.

There is another tragedy, and that is that the system tends to force local authorities to build or renovate, with smaller homes being created rather than larger ones. Because there are no ground rules, we can only go by experience, but the overwhelming experience of people from Islington submitting applications for renovation or new building projects to the Department of the Environment is that an application for a family dwelling will be rejected, while an application for a home for one or two people is much more likely to be accepted.

If the Minister intends to protest that that does not happen, I draw his attention to the way in which his Department operated in relation to the Sans Walk housing development, again in my constituency, again in the Clerkenwell area, like the Farringdon road development, and again a development which will be extremely useful for the people of my area. That scheme had to go through three submissions before the Department finally accepted it. At each submission it required a reduction in the number of family homes which were to be provided in the development. It was only when we got down to a development which included far fewer family homes than the number which we had started with, and which people in the Clerkenwell area really want and need because there is a desperate need there for three, four and five-bedroom houses, that the Department said that we could go ahead with it. That is the way in which the project control system operates. It operates to the detriment of those who need housing accommodation.

It has also had a malign impact on what is called the estate action programme. This is a programme of work on estates which were built between the two world wars in Islington, where the council moves tenants out of blocks on a rotation basis and does major renovations, including the installation of lifts and central heating, knocking down walls to make rooms bigger, putting in entry phones, complete redecoration, refitting and so on. The way in which new homes are created out of old shells is quite often miraculous.

The purpose of that is not just to be able to use good quality solid and stable basic accommodation to create modern homes, not only to bring new life to old estates which are decaying and unpleasant to live in, but to keep a community together. On an estate of that kind, where one is working on a rotation basis over a number of years, one can preserve much of the tenant community on the estate, and people can stay on the estate but move into much better quality accommodation than the flat which they previously occupied.

It is extremely popular with the tenants who live on those estates. It was highly praised by the former Minister for Housing and Construction when he came to visit Islington and visited one estate where such work had begun. He saw the shoddy, awful and desperate state of the previous blocks, and he saw the extremely good quality of the work which was being done for the renovation programme.

The project control system is now operating to the detriment of that programme. Two years ago it was relatively easy for a local authority to gain acceptances on the various stages of the programme on various estates, but now, on stage after stage, even though the costs are deliberately being drastically reduced to try to assist in getting through the project control system, rejections are coming through from the Department of the Environment.

I should like the Minister to explain to the tenants of Sickert Court estate or Canonbury Court estate why his Department feels that they are no longer entitled to the good quality accommodation which can be provided out of the homes in which they are presently living, even though great effort has been made to keep costs down to the minimum necessary to produce good quality work. One should never cut costs in order to cut the basic quality of work. I am afraid that the way in which the Government are operating at present means that tenants on those estates, looking at other estates which now have very good work completed under the estate action programme, will be sadly disappointed that they are not able to achieve the same standards of work on their own estates because the Government will not let them.

I should like the Minister to tell the tenants why the Government will not let them have the standard of work that is needed on those estates, and why there has been such a stream of rejections of project control applications by the local authority for work which is highly valued by the tenants concerned. I suspect that what we are seeing —and it runs through the whole operation of the project control system and the philosophy behind the Government's housing activities—is the "cut costs at any price" philosophy.

That is the approach which the Government wish to see adopted by local authorities. In fact, by depressing the costs of work in that way, supposedly in the name of value for money, but in fact in the name of cuts in cost at any price, the effect will be to drive us straight back into the junk work which the Government's Back-Bench Members so decry and deplore, quite rightly, in the work which was carried out in the 1950s and 1960s in many parts of the country.

I am happy to say that the Labour party is going in precisely the opposite direction. I am happy to say that the party's housing policy document, adopted overwhelmingly at our party conference last year, specifically said that there should be far fewer controls by central Government and bureaucrats in Marsham street over the way in which local authorities carry out their housing programmes. The need is for local councils to be accountable to their local electorate and to be accountable to the tenants who will live in the homes that are created. That is where the consultation will take place and where the controls will operate. The controls will operate by the imposition of arbitrary rules by the Department of the Environment, which will not publish those rules, will not tell local authorities how or why they are operating. The Department operates them in a way which discourages the creation of family homes in the heart of the inner city and damages major and valued programmes such as the estate action programme.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Sir George Young): Will the hon. Gentleman tell the House the percentage of cases in Islington in which my Department has intervened?

Mr. Smith: The Department has intervened in recent months in a considerably higher percentage of cases than in previous months. I do not know the overall percentage. The Minister may enlighten us as the debate progresses, but that is not the point. If the Minister seeks to make great play of it, he is ignoring the fact that the local authority deliberately tries to read the mind of the Department of the Environment before making submissions, thereby deliberately downplaying its expectations, and he is ignoring the impact of the refusals.

I should like the Minister to tell me whether rejections have taken place in the estate action programme, because they have, and I have a list of them. I should like the Minister to tell me whether rejections took place on the Sans Walk development, because they did, and whether a rejection has occurred on the Farringdon road development, because it has. Whatever overall percentage the Minister may try to use to sweeten his actions, and whatever he decides to do in that respect, it will not mitigate the fact that there are now many tenants in the estate action programme who were looking forward to much better quality work than they are now to get because of the way in which the project control system operates.

Earlier on I mentioned Blair close, which is a new and small development carried out by the borough of Islington. It is named after Eric Blair, who wrote under the name of George Orwell and was a resident for many years in my constituency. He had a profound belief in the equal dignity and value of all ordinary people. On behalf of my constituents—and I wish that the Government would listen and not hide behind false statistics, as I expect the Minister will—I am saying that they have as much right to the best quality of accommodation to rent, and to want to see created out of the estates they are living in at the moment, as the Prime Minister has to have a fine house built for herself in Dulwich. My constituents want that to happen for them. That is their aspiration. It is a valid and valued aspiration and one which the Government are thwarting.

5.29 pm

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): I should like to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) on having initiated this useful and necessary debate. I appreciate his remarks about the effects of the housing programme on his own constituency. The background to this and other recent

[Mr. David Winnick]

debates on housing is the 63 per cent. reduction in real terms in public expenditure on housing between 1979-80 and 1985-86. In addition, there have been reductions in central Government subsidies for local authority housing. There have been cuts of about £1 billion since the Government came to office.

Those figures explain why there has been such a dramatic decline in the number of new council houses built. The provisional figure for the number of public sector starts last year is just over 33,000 for the whole of the United Kingdom. That is almost unbelievable. What would people have said if, a few years ago, before the Conservative party came to office, we had warned that a Tory Government's policies would result in the number of council dwelling starts in any given year being so low? It would have been understandable even if some of our supporters had even privately accused Labour candidates and Members of Parliament of exaggeration.

Figures that I have obtained from the Library show that this year there will be just 28,000 new council house starts in Great Britain. As we have said—it is worth repeating —in peace time there has never been such a sharp reduction in council house building since local authorities started to build. Is the Under-Secretary of State, who has just been muttering, proud of that record? Will he merely read out his brief when the time comes, taking the line that this is not his responsibility but a matter for Cabinet? The hon. Gentleman should be thoroughly ashamed of himself for being responsible, as one of the Ministers in the Department of the Environment, for a policy which has meant that the number of starts in the public sector last year was 33,000 and this year will be 5,000 lower than that figure.

It is untrue to say that there is no demand for council dwellings. That has been part of the fiction that Conservative Ministers have peddled since coming to office in 1979. From the very start, they said that the position had changed dramatically and that much less council accommodation was required. I do not accept that for one moment. I believe that the demand and need—certainly in the inner cities—is as great and as acute as in previous years.

The explanation is simple: for those who cannot possibly afford to buy, the only hope of obtaining adequate accommodation is through either a local authority or a genuine housing association. In some areas, including Greater London, property prices are so high that many people, including those on average incomes, find it very difficult indeed, if they have no savings, even to start to buy. I say again, because it is easy for Ministers to distort our position, that we are not against owner-occupation —indeed, the opposite. We are for owner-occupation. We recognise, however, as the Government are so reluctant to do, that many families and single people are just not able to buy.

Some people who do not wish to buy are forced to do so because they have no alternative. In a number of cases which have been brought to the attention of local authorities, the breadwinner has become unemployed or has had a reduction in his income and therefore has not been able to pay the mortgage. In addition, there has been a sharp decline in the number of housing association dwellings.

In my borough of Walsall no contracts for new council dwellings have been entered into since 1979. Inevitably, a large number of people are on the waiting list. Many families who live in high-rise flats have come to my surgeries or written to me about their problems. If they have one child, their chances of being rehoused are remote. Even families with two children have a small chance of being offered alternative accommodation in a house. I am sure that my borough is not unique in this. If no new council dwellings are built and if, at the same time, the Government ensure by their policies that a large part of the rented accommodation is sold, it is hardly surprising that such problems exist.

I believe that housing will be a major issue in the next election. The constant talk by Ministers about the tenants' right to buy will not hide the fact that there is increasing hardship and misery. My colleagues and I are continually waiting for an answer to the question about private tenants which we always ask in these debates. My question still is: if it is right for council tenants to have the right in law to buy, why do private tenants not have that right? Many private tenants would certainly like that right. My colleagues and I understand why a Tory Government will not do anything to offend the large property companies, but private tenants, who often are not as political as we are, do not understand why they are not given that right.

It is an indictment of the Government that so many families are living in acute hardship and misery, and will continue to do so, because of these policies. They have meant that local authorities cannot carry out their housing responsibilities. There is the scandal of bed and breakfast accommodation. How much does that add up to financially and in terms of misery for the families involved? Where is the logic and justice in a Government washing their hands of their responsibilities in one of the most important aspects of social policy—adequate housing?

Sometimes, we get the impression that, in effect, the Government say that the private rented sector will be able to fulfil the needs which at present are not met by the public sector. During the last debate on this topic, the Minister for Housing, Urban Affairs and Construction told us that there would be no "major" change in the Rent Acts during this Parliament. As I said at the time, I am not sure what he meant by "major". We shall strenuously oppose all attempts to deregulate the private rented sector.

We do not want a repeat of the Rachmanite scandals. We warn that, if the Conservative party is re-elected to office and if it is determined, as it appears to be, to carry out the same policies carried out by the Tory Government in the Rent Act 1957, the result will be the same as in 1957. Ministers say that only new rented dwellings will be subject to deregulation. It is obvious that, as happened with the Rent Act 1957, some landlords will apply pressure to ensure that their tenants are thrown out so that their places can become new dwellings which are not subject to decontrol. That is how Rachmanism arose. Many of us warned at the time of what was likely to occur.

The way that the Government have acted on housing should cause the maximum concern and, as I have already said, we are determined that that should become a dominant issue in the next election campaign. The Government have done their best to undermine the existing stock of local authority housing. If the Government believe in selling off much of the rented housing stock, then replacements should have taken place. However, the opposite has happened.

The Government are more concerned with selling off as much as possible of the existing rented accommodation and at the same time to ensure by the housing policy that the majority of local authorities are not in a position to build. As a consequence, most local authorities have not been able properly to carry out their housing responsibilities for new building and modernisation. Many estates in my borough have not yet been modernised, because the local authority found that its HIP allocation has been inadequate.

For these reasons, I hope that the debate will continue elsewhere, in the Fulham by-election and in the country at large. The Opposition believe that it is wrong that people should be deprived of the ability to be properly housed. If they cannot buy accommodation—as I have said, I support owner-occupation—and so many people are not in that position, then those families have an absolute right to be properly housed. The only way they are likely to be properly, adequately and securely housed is through local authorities offering them accommodation. The Government have done everything possible to undermine the right and ability of local authorities to build and modernise. That is the Opposition's accusation against the Government and the Ministers who are carrying out their policy.

6.14 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I welcome the opportunity provided by the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) to debate the Government's policy towards local housing programmes. Now is the appropriate time of year to hold such a debate, as all hon. Members will know that around this time local authorities are deciding their priorities for what they have been granted as expenditure permission under the housing investment programmes. The authorities are now deciding their budgets for the coming year.

Like other hon. Members perhaps, I have in recent days attended at least one of the district housing committees in my borough, where local representatives of the tenants associations in the estates owned by the borough council in Southwark have been expressing their views about the priorities for expenditure. The tenants hope that these priorities will be endorsed by the housing committee and implemented over the next 12 months.

The background to this debate is common knowledge. We are at the end of a 10-year period in which Government financial contributions towards housing — which is traditionally also contributed to by local authorities — have been reduced year by year. We are now at the bottom point of that period of reduced Government investment in housing. Coincident with that is the reduction in the number of new housing starts and completions, and the reduction in the amount of work that is being done on renovation.

That is the background to the debate and we have often rehearsed in the House the difference in attitude between the Government and the Opposition in the way the Government have responded to what, by any analysis, is the housing need in England. The Government know that all the committees and reports issued last year concluded that we needed a massive amount of new housing. We also need a massive amount of money—£20 billion was the Department of the Environment's own figure — to renovate the housing stock in the public sector.

We continue to hope and look for signs that wisdom will prevail. We are looking for signs of a response to that mass of critical evidence which states that the Government are not doing their job properly in seeking to fulfil their election promise. That promise is now famous and no doubt with hindsight the Government may regret making it, but the Government promised that their objective was to make this nation the best housed nation in Europe. The Government have so far fallen appallingly short of that objective. Presumably the Government will want to forget all about that promise, as it will be decades if not centuries —if the Government's present policy continues—before they can reverse the trend and put us at the top of the league table in terms of adequate provision and meeting housing needs.

The title of the debate on the Order Paper names the three key issues on which I shall concentrate in my short contribution. That is unusual, as debate titles do not normally set out all the aspects of the matter under discussion. The hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury wanted the House to address the subject of Government policy on local housing programmes. That requires us to confirm each of the three elements in the title of the debate.

First, there is a need to have programmes for housing. We do not want a hit-or-miss, stop-start housing policy. We need, if we are to recover from the appallingly low position in housing provision, a planned policy whereby the housing provided actually meets the housing need. At present there is no set of programmes, under any Government-recognised methodology, which considers what is to be produced across the range of tenures and sectors. There is no way at present whereby the Government require a local authority to prove that the housing need — not demand — in the authority area requires so many single-bed, two-bed, three-bed or four-bed homes over the next few years. There is no way at present whereby the local authorities state their projection of population for new households and so require the Government to respond to their need. There is no way in which the Government can require an authority to supply details of local authority housing build, housing association or Housing Corporation build, as private development and so have the authority to provide a plan which the Government can recognise and ensure that the authority achieves.

The time has come for us to plan to meet housing needs at all levels. Some two years ago, the Government said that they would no longer have a national housing plan for England. We must plan if we are to realise the extent of the need and so meet that need. We must plan in each local authority area. Unless there is planning and a financial response to the sheer volume of need, we will not be able to fulfil that need and the increasing needs which will be caused by people presenting themselves for housing in future years.

If we do not meet this year's need, for example, for the people presenting themselves as homeless and the needs of those who may become homeless in the future, which may see an escalation in the number of new homeless cases received in boroughs such as Brent, Camden and Westminster, we will perpetually — certainly until the end of this decade — condemn people to bed and breakfast accommodation, to sleeping on the streets and to wandering around looking for what may be seedy, unsatisfactory, unsafe and multiple occupancy dwellings.

[Mr. Simon Hughes]

The first priority is planning. The second need is obviously for houses—renovated, fit and warm houses. Often of course flats and maisonettes are acceptable and people may prefer them. I am sure that the Minister will have seen that the survey recently produced by the GLC about housing standards in Greater London—no doubt one of its last pieces of research before its demise—confirms that with the removal of the traditional Parker Morris standards there has been a reduction in the standard of housing.

There has also been a reduction in the size of rooms, particularly in London, and no doubt elsewhere. Although there are arguments which may suggest that old-fashioned housing with high ceilings and large rooms was difficult to heat and unsatisfactory, I often now have complaints—as I am sure the Minister has in his borough of Ealing and elsewhere—that many people believe that there is not enough space. We must examine the standards of the housing we need and alter the requirements of the building regulations and of local authorities.

Although we should through advanced building construction and material science have better quality housing—much of our housing is of better quality—some poor quality new-build housing still exists in all sectors. That is often worse in the private sector than in the public sector. There is not a great deal of timber-framed housing or modern housing development in a constituency such as mine, except in the docklands area in Bermondsey, but when surveys are done there are often complaints that the new housing is not of a high standard, so would-be occupiers are put off. They will not buy those properties because they are advised that for structural reasons they should not make a major investment in them.

The third point was made specifically in relation to Islington—I do not know the figures or percentages, but perhaps the Minister will inform us of them—but it should not be the responsibility of Government to decide local authority priorities. Housing programmes supported by funding from taxpayers need to be local housing programmes. This is one of our great criticisms of Government economic policy as it affects housing policy.

In 1979, the Conservative party went to the country on a policy of the right to buy. The Government steered legislation through Parliament, and local authorities, whatever their views, political colour, will or circumstances, were forced to sell. They gained the assets from the sales which often left them in net deficit, and now they are told that they cannot spend the proceeds from those sales. They have been told that this year they may spend only 20 per cent. of capital receipts.

That restriction, for national expenditure reasons, which forbids local authorities to spend their own money, which has been acquired only by policies imposed by the Government, shows that the relationship between central and local government is wrong. Local authorities are at the centre of a complete pincer movement. On the one hand, they are forced to reduce their stock but are not given extra money to replace it, and on the other they are not allowed to spend the money coming to them from forced sales.

I hope that the Government will co-operate fully with the plans that the GLC has laid for the forward funding of housing programmes which it cannot pay for or manage after abolition at the end of this month. Southwark has the largest volume of public sector housing of any London borough. It has 65,000 properties, and some 65 per cent. of the population live in public sector housing. It also has the largest proportion of ex-GLC housing stock—27,000 homes. A substantial amount of work needs to be done.

When we debated the undertakings by the Minister's predecessor, we did not receive any commitments that money would be found for that work when the GLC properties were handed to the boroughs. Indeed, there was a breach of a clear undertaking given at the time. We now need a clear undertaking that the Government will co-operate with, support—not merely be neutral about—and oppose any attempt to prevent, the forward funding with GLC money of the work that needs to be done on the housing estates that were in the hands of the GLC. If the boroughs cannot have the moneys which the GLC at present has, much of the vital work on the estates in greatest need of expenditure, whether on roofing and window repairs or on the installation of central heating, will not be done. People who live on what are generally regarded as some of the least desirable estates in London will then have no prospect of decent housing in the foreseeable future.

My next point is a regional point, which is inevitable given that all hon. Members who are likely to participate in the debate are London Members, except for the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick). In London we have a particular responsibility to the public sector because a substantial proportion of our properties are local authority properties. Only one region in England has more local authority properties. In London, 29·8 per cent. of homes are owned by local authorities, we have the highest proportion of housing association properties—nearly 5 per cent.—and the highest proportion of private rented accommodation—we are the highest of the three regions where it is more than 10 per cent. Therefore, owner-occupation is a relatively small form of tenure in London compared with other regions. For that reason we have a particular responsibility to consider London policy separately from regional policy.

I should be grateful if the Minister, when he considers Government figures, planning and HIP allocations, will recognise that in London we are starting from a base of more public sector housing. I hope that he will recognise that, whatever happens in the future, we need commensurately more Government investment and approvals for expenditure on housing in our capital city than elsewhere.

As the Minister knows, one problem with the right to buy, and one of the problems which we in the alliance see increasingly with buildings in the public sector, is that if the right to buy is to continue, public sector new build, unless it is specialised housing, such as sheltered housing or housing for the elderly, is the housing most likely to be bought because it is the most desirable housing. Therefore, there will inevitably be a higher take-up of the right to buy of new-build housing stock, so the relative amount of decent new property in the public sector will be reduced. If it is believed that it is inappropriate to replace lost stock in the public sector, the voluntary sector must take up the deficit. I am thinking of the social housing sector, the Housing Corporation, housing associations and the like.

The Housing Corporation administers this part of the moneys funded by Government. I know from discussion with its officers that, although this year it is seeking to deal with the needs in London by moving funds which would otherwise be spent in counties such as Kent, Surrey and

Sussex to housing association build in London, it is finding it impossible to fund the projects for which it has bids from housing associations and which it would like to fund. If in the coming year the Minister does not fund and support public sector housing through Government expenditure, we need some commitment to increase the possibility of people having housing association and Housing Corporation funding.

Will the hon. Gentleman reconsider the grant given to the Housing Corporation, and encourage the view that, if there is a crisis in housing in the capital city, he will seek to make additional funds available to the Housing Corporation? He knows that I am particularly interested in arguing that the docklands could benefit greatly from additional special Housing Corporation funding. Is he willing to accept that the docklands should be considered for special Housing Corporation allocation, such as has been given to other areas in the past?

The other day we came to the end of a hard road, down which many of my constituents have travelled to achieve an acceptable result regarding the Cherry Garden site on the riverside in Bermondsey. The London Docklands Development Corporation was about to develop largely private sector housing there, which was wholly unacceptable because the cost of the housing was to be massively beyond the means of most local people. A flat on the river with a wonderful view would have cost hundreds of thousands of pounds in a community with a desperate need for housing. The local authority, the LDDC, the Government, the GLC and I have long been engaged with local people in seeking a satisfactory solution, and we have now more or less done so.

Most of the site will be taken up with a deferred funding project, which means that local authority housing will occupy most of it. That is a good achievement. Incidentally, the best laid plans of the LDDC were further thwarted when it was discovered that there was an ancient monument on another part of the site—a medieval royal mansion on the riverside. Therefore, its idea of putting up a futher luxury block of flats for sale has been thwarted because our heritage must, of course, come first.

I ask the Government for a commitment that schemes which allow deferred payment and forward funding, if necessary by borrowing from the private sector, can be encouraged rather than discouraged. Therefore, even if there is no immediate prospect in the forthcoming financial year of the development of such a site as the Cherry Garden site for public sector or deferred public sector housing, if none the less the need is there and the financial arrangements are available, I hope that the Government will not block any possible overtures by local authorities for extra funds to enable the housing to be built that the local people need. Such co-operation from the Government would prevent such a site as Cherry Garden being bought speculatively for private gain at the expense of local needs. I would be grateful for an assurance that that type of scheme will receive the endorsement of the Government. We need more such schemes for the local people of Bermondsey, as elsewhere.

I hope we will soon see change from a Government who have resisted Londoners' demands for housing long enough. The Government may think that a move in this direction will at least save them a few votes in the elections that are coming up.

6.31 pm

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) on raising this important matter, and I congratulate him also on his excellent speech, in which he set out the problems caused to so many families by the Government's savage cuts in local housing programmes.

On the day that the House adjourned for Christmas, I raised the problem of the housing crisis in my constituency of Leyton and Leytonstone. I drew attention to the growing problem of homelessness and the increasing inability of the local authority to cope properly with that problem. Such inability had an effect on the people on the waiting lists who were desperately trying to get a move. More and more were told that they had no chance of getting the move that they wanted. The new building programme had been effectively curtailed. Repairs were harder to obtain and estates which desperately needed environmental improvements were denied them and were pushed further back in the queue awaiting such improvements.

Subsequent to that debate I asked a parliamentary question about housing investment in Waltham Forest. I asked what the investment in real terms was in 1979, and what it was at present. The answer was that in 1979 housing investment was worth £17 million, but that it was worth £4·5 million in real terms in 1985. That was the result of the Government's savage cutback in the housing programme. The Minister who replied to my question said that I had not given enough emphasis to the private sector. However, the private sector cannot possibly fill the gap caused in Waltham Forest, or anywhere else in the country, by the Government's savage cuts.

I have referred to the housing problems in the private sector. Home improvement grants for owner-occupiers in my borough have been blocked since August 1984. The opportunity for low-income owner-occupiers to repair and improve their homes has been effectively extinguished by that blocking policy. Private tenants are afforded little protection. I contributed to the debate on this matter recently, and I feel that there should be an effective charter of rights for private tenants. The Labour party takes into account private as well as public sector housing.

I referred briefly at Christmas to the Sinnott road development site in my borough. It is a site of scarce housing land which will be needed to rehouse families displaced by the M11 link road proposals as they affect my constituency. The Waltham Forest council—it is jointly controlled by the Liberals and the Tories—is in the process of selling off that site. It is a scandal.

I received a letter from the leader of the Labour group on the council, Councillor Bill Pearmine, about that site. Bill Pearmine draws attention to the recommendations of the council's housing committee on 28 January which were accepted by the full council—Liberal and Tory-controlled—on 20 February. The housing committee recommended:

> "Members are asked to endorse the current proposals. This would include a formal submission to the DOE in order to dispose of the land at nil cost or at cost below market value."

Councillor Pearmine asked:

> "How anyone can talk of disposing at 'nil value' land on which 148 homes can be built is beyond me; as the developer will retain nearly 100 properties. This is putting in the hands of a private developer an asset that when built will be worth over £3·5 million assuming a unit price of £35,000 and that may indeed be

[Mr. Harry Cohen]

on the low side . . . You will notice that if the DOE requires repayment of the outstanding loan debt on the land, then the nomination rights would only apply to 16 properties."

That is all that the council would get out of the sale. However, the total cost would be £1,806,000. That is the amount of the give away by the council to private developers for scarce housing land in my borough. Privatisation is represented by that type of handout. The Conservatives and Liberals are forcing a massive handout to private developers, regardless of the need for public sector houses.

It is a deplorable situation. The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) should get on his feet and deplore that handout. Unless he does so, in any future elections the Liberals' part in that deplorable give away of housing land must be made clear.

Mr. Simon Hughes: I do not know the facts in the hon. Member's borough, but I shall look into them and I shall certainly raise the matter with him again. I understand his concern, and it is a matter with which I shall deal.

Mr. Cohen: I am pleased that the hon. Member has made that point. I hope that he will visit the Liberal councillors at Waltham Forest and get them to reverse this deplorable situation.

6.37 pm

Mr. John Fraser (Norwood): With the advent of the second world war, the construction industry went through a dramatic change, for quite understandable reasons. The building of homes came to a sudden and dramatic halt. I can remember as a child that it was clear that the industry was not building houses, but was concerned with defence and was often engaged in building barriers and obstructions.

For wholly incomprehensible reasons, a cycle of dramatic change has been followed by the Minister for Housing, Urban Affairs and Construction. Under the Conservative Government the large public housing building programme has been replaced by barriers and obstructions. They have blocked the desires of local authorities. I wish to deal with two such obstructions, which were touched upon by my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith).

The first obstruction is in terms of the housing investment programme. We tend to use jargon far too often in the House. I suspect that many people outside do not understand what the housing investment programme is, so let us remind ourselves. It is not money that is provided by central Government to local authorities. It is the amount of money which a local authority is allowed to raise from its own resources or by borrowing from banks or building societies. It is not money which is supplied by the Government. The housing investment programme has turned out to be the restricted levels which are imposed by central Government upon local government when it seeks to discharge its housing responsibilities. Over the past seven years we have had a history not of assistance to local authorities, but one of obstruction.

The figures given by my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) are fairly clear. Between 1979-80 and the current financial year, the amount of capital expenditure that local authorities have been allowed to engage upon has dropped by 63 per cent. That is, in broad terms, the money that was allowed to provide 10 new houses in 1979-80. Now enough money is allowed to provide only four new houses.

To put it another way, there has been a loss of 100,000 public sector homes for every year that the Government have been in office; or, to put it yet another way, every week that goes by under this Tory Government, 2,000 fewer homes are built than would have been built if a Labour Government had been in office. The plight of individual boroughs shows that it should be called, not the HIP, but the dip. I have some figures from my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury. At constant 1985-86 prices, in 1979-80 Islington was allowed to spend £90 million on all sorts of housing projects, ranging from new build to help for owner-occupiers with repair and improvement grants. As a result of the HIP allocation in 1985-86, it will be allowed to spend £29 million, which is slightly under one third of what it was allowed to spend six years ago. That is a Labour borough, so let us take a borough under Conservative and Liberal control—Brent. In 1979-80 it was permitted to spend £52 million on housing expenditure and in 1985-86 it has been allowed to spend rather less than half that figure, £23 million.

Only yesterday, some figures were published by the Greater London council on the cost of bed-and-breakfast accommodation. I am sorry that these figures are not directly comparable to the HIP figures. In 1981, Brent council had a net expenditure on bed-and-breakfast accommodation of £600,000. In 1984-85 it had a net expenditure on homeless families in bed-and-breakfast accommodation of £1·5 million. In two years, from June 1983 to June 1985, the bed-and-breakfast population accommodation by Brent council has doubled.

One sees reflected in London borough after London borough a steep and dramatic drop in the amount of housing investment permitted to the local authorities, and equally a steep and dramatic increase in the number of homeless families and the amount of money that has to be spent by the local authorities in looking after those who have no roof above them.

I do not apologise for using the figures for Lambeth. In 1979-80 it was allowed to spend £94 million on its housing programme. That figure has dropped by almost two thirds to £34 million in the current year, and, rather like Brent, expenditure on bed-and-breakfast accommodation has gone up, while investment has gone down. In 1981 it spent £229,000 on looking after such families, and for 1984-85, despite many efforts to use local housing for homeless families, the expenditure has escalated to £997,000. Over six years housing investment has been cut by two thirds, and in three years expenditure on bed-and-breakfast accommodation has increased by 300 per cent. Wherever one looks, the figures are much the same.

To give some idea of the scale of dereliction of public housing and the lack of urgency and care about what should be spent on those in greatest need, we can take another comparison. In the current year, the revenue subsidy through the mortgage interest relief scheme to those buying their own homes is running—I do not know the exact figure to the end of the financial year—at about £4·7 billion. That means that the revenue subsidy to owner-occupiers is running at double the amount of capital expenditure that local authorities are permitted to pay.

Side by side with homelessness, unfit homes, waiting lists, deprivation and despair are the continuous cuts in the

amounts available to local authorities to spend. One cannot escape the conclusion that the severity of control is applied with the greatest stringency to those areas of greatest housing need.

The second obstruction that is being persisted in by the Minister for Housing, Urban Affairs and Construction is what is called project approval. For some local authorities the words "project approval" have a hollow ring.

Sir George Young: Project control.

Mr. Fraser: Project control. That amounts to the substitution of the judgment of officials at Marsham street for that of the local authority. I have examples similar in part to those given by my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen). When my local authority read the Department's circular 28/82, it saw that it was about "good value for money". I have no objection to that, but the circular went on to say that the project control was about the local authorities

"being directly accountable to their electorate for decisions about housing provision . . . to give local authorities greater freedom to decide cost and quality of the dwellings they provide".

My local authority took that seriously. It wanted to provide large family houses and spacious flats in the heart of Brixton. We all recognise the need for spacious accommodation, to give people a sense of history and place, to enhance a conservation area, to respect the views of local people and to maintain mature trees. The accommodation had a large number of bed spaces, private gardens and parking, and was to be built at the relatively low cost of £13,245 per bed space. However, when the project was submitted to the Department of the Environment, it was turned down because the cost was above market value by 198 per cent.

In this case, the project was turned down because the value of the dwellings that would be created by the rehabilitation scheme were far above the low-market values in the centre of Brixton. In an area that has been dragged down by its boot straps, which has a number of social problems, a problem of crime — which affects property values — and where unemployment has been escalating, and values and purchasing power falling — affecting land prices—projects for good dwellings will be at prices well above the local value for property. Therefore, projects are turned down.

In Islington the problem is different, because land prices are high, but the projects are still turned down. This brings us to the complaint that local authority offices do not know where they are. They do not understand what the system is. If it is the system that operates in Brixton, it seems extraordinary. In the project that I mentioned, the cost per dwelling was £62,000. That might seem a lot of money, but it is not compared to the dwelling that the Prime Minister is intending to buy in Dulwich. It is not much money compared to the price of many three or four-bedroom homes in the south London area. When I look in the Wates property guide or the *South London Press*, I see that at Gun wharf a two or three-bedroom maisonette costs £329,000. With such property prices in the affluent part of my constituency and south London, £62,000 for a completely modernised, self-contained, centrally-heated flat with a garden at the front and the back and car parking space is incredibly good value for money, but it is not good enough for those who are poor and deprived.

Local government officials do not know where they stand. They believe that the project control operates against the maintenance of quality. The one thing about which I feel most strongly, and I am sure that my hon. Friends the Members for Islington, South and Finsbury and for Leyton feel the same, is that we must invest local authority housing with more dignity and status. Perhaps we can even have a few extravagances—extravagances which can be enjoyed, not just by the occupants, but by all the community, and which raise the standards and the quality of an area. We want to see that, but project approval operates against it.

Secondly, project approval appears to be wholly inconsistent. The levels of expenditure permitted in one area of a borough are disregarded in another area only a mile away. The system is uncertain. The yardstick at least had some kind of generally accepted measure of cost.

The application of project control is operated where the local authority officers and councillors are kept in ignorance and frustration. I am told that no reasons are given for decisions, and this applies in Lambeth, in Islington and elsewhere. I am told that no approach is possible to technical counterparts of local government officers in Marsham street. There is no dialogue possible between those in local authorities and those in central Government.

We have had the chance to air two obstructions which the Government have erected against the provision of local authority housing programmes. I do not know when we will have repentance. The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, I am sure, regrets the trends that have taken place, perhaps imposed upon the Government mostly by the Treasury. I hope that in the course of the coming local and parliamentary elections, repentance will be forced upon the Government.

6.50 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Sir George Young): I join in the congratulations to the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) on giving the House the opportunity to debate housing, a crucially important subject. In no way do I deny the existence of the problems that he set out in opening. Too many buildings in local authority control are in poor condition and too many people are living in bad conditions in both sectors with too many people in bed and breakfast accommodation. That is common ground between us.

The problems have not risen overnight. As a London Member of Parliament representing an inner city seat, I share the hon. Member's concern that too many people are living in unacceptable housing conditions.

I find it infinitely depressing that in his speech and in the speech of his hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) nowhere is the suggestion made that the private sector has some part to play in tackling the problem that has been outlined. Nowhere in either speech was there any recognition that local authorities can have a constructive partnership with the private sector, the building societies and the financial institutions to make faster progress in putting right the wrongs outlined by the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury. The Opposition's only answer is more public expenditure. Whichever Government are in control, if they continue only to look to the public sector for a solution to all these problems, they will simply have to wait far longer than if they develop the sort of partnership that this Government have been promoting.

[Sir George Young]

The narrow vision shared by those two hon. Members is not shared by Labour councillors. A growing number of Labour-controlled local authorities are recognising that there are resources waiting to be unlocked in the private sector. We announced only two weeks ago the first scheme under the £50 million housing investment programme that my Department held back, when we announced the go-ahead at Calderdale for a scheme whereby resources were made available to turn round the Abbey Park estate, a very difficult estate. This involved extra resources for the local authority from my Department but, crucially, resources from the private sector to take over some of the empty houses for refurbishment and sale at acceptable prices, initially to people on the waiting list or to other local authority tenants.

The other thing that I find so depressing about all the Opposition speeches is that they do not recognise that there is far more to tackling housing than just local authorities. The vast majority of people want to own their own homes. Hon. Gentlemen spoke about the HIP allocations which have fallen, although they have not fallen as fast as they did under the last Labour Government. They said nothing about starts in the private sector, which are up from 99,000 in 1980 to 161,000 in 1985. Opposition Members keep putting the telescope to their blind eye and concentrating on one part of the housing market without recognising that Government policies have brought home ownership within the reach of more people. Many people who traditionally looked to the local authority alone for a solution to their housing problem now look to alternative schemes, to shared ownership and to other schemes whereby the local authority makes available land that it owns for building under licence to a local builder who builds at prices controlled by the local authority for onward sale to those in need.

I had hoped that the Labour party had now accepted that my party's policy under the right to buy was not a policy to be resisted as ferociously as they tried to five years ago, and that we were developing some common ground in this sort of approach to housing problems. I was somewhat depressed that, apart from a passing reference from the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen), there was no recognition from Opposition Members of the broader housing issues and the other opportunities to tackle housing apart from the only thing they seemed to know —more public expenditure.

It is worth putting on record that more people are now being housed under the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977 than in 1979, and that a substantial improvement has taken place in the nation's housing stock by way of restoring missing amenities. There has been a substantial improvement in the disbursement of improvement grants since 1979, with the figure up from some £90 million in that year to over £400 million this year.

I say to the hon. Member, for Walsall, North, who called for more public expenditure on building houses for rent, that there is general agreement that the priority for local authorities rests with modernising, improving and making the best use of existing stock before embarking upon a new programme of building for rent. We have published a survey that we had the courage to commission showing that there is £20 billion of outstanding work on local authority stock. We have to tackle that first. We have to bring back into use the 28,000 homes that have been empty for far too long before embarking on an expensive programme of new build for rent.

I mention now local authority project control, which was the theme of the speech of the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury. Only 80 local authorities are covered by project control. The vast majority of local authorities do not come within project control because they are out of subsidy. Secondly, the Department rarely intervenes. Taking renovation, we intervene in only 7 per cent. of applications; for new build, the figure is 12 per cent. For Islington, the figure is higher, at 25 per cent. That is because Islington put forward a number of very expensive schemes.

It is not the case that, after we have rejected it, a project simply lapses. In most cases — and I take a personal interest — projects can be renegotiated and different schemes put forward which my Department approves. I hope that that will be possible in the scheme mentioned by the hon. Gentleman at Farringdon road. In that scheme, the floor areas are very generous. There is a high land cost element of nearly £20,000 per dwelling. We believe that the site could be developed a little more to achieve its full potential. I am aware that the council wishes to include a number of wheelchair users in the scheme and to build properties of mobility standard. It is right that the local authority should concentrate on those needs. If it would like to resubmit a scheme — as I have said, I take a personal interest—I will see, as has happened in most cases in Islington, whether some compromise is acceptable. The present resource cost of that scheme works out at £82,000 per dwelling. I have to ask whether that is the best use that Islington can find for scarce HIP resources, and whether there is not a better way of spending the money that we have made available to it.

I deal next with some points raised by the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes). The way we allocate resources reflects the fact that in some parts of the country there are more local authority dwellings than in others. Building new houses for rent which are then subject to the right to buy is made more difficult by the application of the cost floor rules. The local authority cannot sell at a loss. If one considers the sort of cost that I mentioned, it is clear that if the right to buy is exercised there is no discount and one has to buy at the historic cost. That would put the new properties beyond the reach of most people.

We have taken an interest in the relationship between the LDDC and Southwark. I was pleased that on one or two sites a good working relationship has been reached. I know of the case that the hon. Member makes for more local authority starts. That having been said, Tower Hamlets and Southwark, have about the highest percentage of local authority tenure in the country. The top priority is to get a better balance by building more houses for sale rather than more houses to rent if one is to try to build up a slightly more balanced community.

This has been a worthwhile debate. I shall write to those hon. Members who raised specific points, in particular the hon. Member for Leyton who asked about the Sinnott road scheme, which I remember from the last debate, although, unfortunately, I do not remember the answer. As I say, I shall write to the hon. Member and see how best we can help him. I urge the Opposition to consider whether there

might be a role for the private sector to play in tackling the problems to which they have quite rightly drawn the attention of the House.

Welfare Services (Privatisation)

7 pm

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): The House is indebted to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for the choice of this debate. It is highly appropriate that we should spend some time this evening considering the implications of the privatisation of the National Health Service, for earlier this week the press carried a number of reports which suggested that the Prime Minister is unhappy with the performance of her Secretary of State for Social Services in privatising the National Health Service. Being a good judge of her Ministers, she has, no doubt with due care, chosen the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security who is to respond to this debate to be the agent to spearhead the next stage of the privatisation of the National Health Service.

Earlier this week, a report in *The Guardian* gave us the news that the Under-Secretary of State is to have special responsibility for this campaign. We were also told why the campaign is so important. *The Guardian* report said:

> "The savings would form part of a campaign to be launched at this year's Conservative Party conference highlighting the Government's efficiency."

The report went on to note that the Under-Secretary of State's attention was being drawn to those areas of the NHS that are "ready", to use the word in *The Guardian* report, for privatisation; and particularly marked down for his careful attention are hospital catering departments. We learn from the report that only seven out of 2,500 hospital contracts have been won by private companies.

There is also a somewhat sinister aspect to the report. It refers to the reaction of one of our biggest contracting companies, Gardner Merchant, and to its feelings about the second stage of the Government's war on privatisation. Gardner Merchant does not want a move towards ordinary privatisation. According to its general manager, it is seeking long-term contracts with health authorities with fixed fees and no penalty clauses. I congratulate the private sector upon knowing on which side its bread is buttered.

My only other experience of that kind of offer being made is in defence contracts—or perhaps I should say, was in defence contracts, because the Government have gone to considerable lengths to bring Mr. Peter Levene into the Ministry of Defence to break up fixed-price contracts. This is because, in the words of the then Secretary of State for Defence, they were not a good deal for the taxpayer.

When the Under-Secretary of State replies to the debate, I hope that he will be able to tell the House about the next stage of the Government's privatisation programme. Will it take the traditional form of firms competing without knowing about the bids of their competitors? What is more important, will penalty clauses be included for use against those companies that fail to fulfil the terms of their contract?

Before the end of the debate, I hope that I shall have had time to mention the way in which privatisation has affected the constituency that I represent. I hope to refer specifically to how privatisation has affected the National Health Service, but I hope also to refer to how it has affected other services. The Wirral was proud—I use that word advisedly, as the Prayer Book tells us to do—of its pathfinding record. It was one of the first authorities

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to privatise its waste disposal service. Now it has another record. It has one of the worst waste disposal services in the country.

Many areas of the town are swept only by the wind blowing the rubbish around. The Conservative majority on the council is so concerned about efficiency and about a decent deal for taxpayers that not once has it invoked the penalty clauses that could be invoked to try to improve the standard of the service to ratepayers. When the Under-Secretary of State sums up, I hope that he will have time to say a little more about how he views his commanding role in opening up the second front of the privatisation of the National Health Service.

I think that it would be helpful, both to hon. Members who are present in the Chamber and to the electorate, to look at the progress that has been made so far and to consider whether some of the grand claims that have been made for privatisation have been fulfilled. In order to do that, I shall move around the country to see just how effectively the Government's privatisation measures are working. We shall notice, in the contributions from both Opposition Members and, no doubt, from Conservative Members, that certain words will come quickly to our lips when looking at the gains that are supposed to have been made from the privatisation programme. I shall hear about economy, efficiency, savings — words that warm the cockles of our hearts. However, before the debate ends I hope to look at what those words mean for patients and at what those words—economy, efficiency and savings—innocent though they may sound, mean for workers who face the privatisation of their industry.

I shall move around the country to show just how well the Government's privatisation programme has worked out. My first port of call, to use a nautical phrase, since I am to deal with such a great shipbuilding constituency, although I am fully aware that it is landlocked, is the Attenborough hospital at Cambridge.

Earlier this year, the press carried a report from the hospital administrator about its privatisation service, which is run by Hospital Cleaning Services. The report said that nurses and doctors found blood and bone on the floor of the operating theatre when they arrived on Friday morning to perform a hip replacement operation that was expected to take place that day. Needless to say, the operation did not take place because of the dangers of infection. However, the hospital administrator went on to note that it was the second time in two days that blood had been found on the floor of the operating theatre. This happened more than once. It was not just an odd bit of bad work because somebody wanted to get home.

That was the beginning of a trend in that Cambridge hospital. The report said how surprising it was that the health authority knew so little about the range of cleaning work that needs to be undertaken if operating theatres are to be safe for operations. According to the press report, the hospital administrator said:

"They are contracted to clean ceiling vents but this theatre has a special airflow unit and we did not allow for this in our contract specifications."

These experts were therefore pushing out to private contract work that was supposed to be done by the private sector. However, when it was found that the operating theatre could not be used they discovered that the special air vents had been cleaned by hospital cleaners. Nobody had to tell them to do this; they just did it. Those at the top — who do not know the people whom one might euphemistically describe as being at the bottom of the pile —did not know what was entailed in this contract. But they learned. So did the patients at that Cambridge hospital. When the Under-Secretary of State replies, I hope that he will be able to provide details to update the report about this hospital in Cambridge.

I move away from Cambridge to a second port of call which is also landlocked—Croydon. The district health authority published a report that drew attention to

"Stained lavatories, dirty surgeries, and potentially dangerous security lapses"

as a result of the privatisation of its cleaning services. Again I must thank the media for this confidential report which was drawn up by Mr. Roberts, Croydon's general manager. A senior Croydon official said:

"the authority was 'extremely angry' at the 'appalling standards' since the firm took over from health service cleaners in June".

That was June of last year. The general manager said in his report that by the end of the first month

"standards had already deteriorated and most premises were looking scruffy. There was an excess of dust on ledges, sills, and pipes. Toilets and handbasins were becoming stained . . . . The specification had definitely not been fully met in any of the 12 locations."

Mr. Roberts reported that by August of last year the car parks were "accumulating litter" and "many areas were skimped." By October toilet brush holders and bins were not cleaned and the bases of sinks had a build-up of soap and dirt under the rim. By November of last year toilet areas were still below standard and furniture had not been moved for cleaning floors. That dismal report on Croydon shows one aspect of the new broom of privatisation.

The confidential report highlighted another area which I should not have thought of immediately; I dare say the officials at the top did not think of it but when the privatisation programme was under way it became clear. Again I quote:

"Security and locking procedures were a problem because of the high staff turnover, Mr. Roberts reports. Eighty-seven people had held 25 posts in five months."

We may ask why. Was it because of the standards of the hospital? Was it a grotty hospital to work in—although presumably staff had not had that problem before? Was pay a problem, or was it because of a nasty individual who ran the private contracts? Again, I hope the Minister will not only update us on the state of play in Croydon's hospitals but will comment on the security lapses.

Not so long ago Ministers were answering questions about hospitals being locked at night because of the need to keep people out. We had the horrendous story of a mother giving birth to her child on the doorstep of a hospital because it was locked. I suppose one advantage of privatisation is that the doors in Croydon will be open because security lapses are such that security cannot be guaranteed. That is an unintended result. Given the state of many inner cities and of the area I represent, I fully understand why hospital doors are locked at night. If privatisation is to lead to what the report talked of as "security lapses", we should be grateful for the Minister's views.

We have been to Cambridge and we have called in at Croydon to consider progress. My next stop is Barking. The cleaning company there, Crothall, is one to which I pay particular attention because it is the leading bidder for the cleaning contract at Clatterbridge hospital in the area which I represent. I hope the Minister can answer certain

questions which I shall put to him about that company. We learn that it had been cleaning a hospital in Barking for 16 years. Under the pressure of the Government's privatisation measures it had cut the cost of cleaning from £367,000 to £211,000, a big cut. If we took the argument no further than the Government's wish for efficiency savings and good buys for taxpayers, Ministers could claim that ground was being made, but if expenditure on a cleaning contract is cut from almost £400,000 to a little over half that, adjustments have to be made somewhere. It is no surprise to discover where the adjustments were made in Barking, as they were made elsewhere. We learn that the company managed to balance its books by lopping 41 per cent. off the hours that it thought would be necessary under the new arrangements to keep the hospital clean.

I pause for a moment in my debate with the Minister on privatisation to ask what the Government did when the contracts were put in. If the company is now seriously saying that it can clean the hospital in 41 per cent. fewer cleaning hours, was it not overcharging during the 16 years that it was cleaning the hospital previously? Is there not an issue which the Government should examine if they are so concerned about a fair deal for taxpayers?

As well as being concerned about taxpayers, as the Opposition rightly are—I cannot emphasise that enough, knowing the whims of some of my colleagues—we are also concerned about the deal for patients and for people who work in our hospitals. Let us consider what privatisation meant in Barking.

The women who clean the hospital were told that their hours would be cut; not only would they lose drastically because of the number of hours worked each week but they would have to work a three-week rota of one week of mornings, one week of afternoons and one week of evenings. For those at the top of the Civil Service or, dare I say it, even for MPs, that may seem easy enough. We may ask what is wrong with working such a rota. But many of those who do this crucial work in our hospitals have other concerns; they may have to look after children.

Many cleaners at Barking said that such a contract was impossible for them to fulfil. They maintained that they could not give a first-class service to their children if their working hours changed like that. Not only were there changes in their working hours, but they suffered considerable cuts in pay. Cleaners at Barking reported that the hourly rate of £2·03 was not cut but that fewer hours of work reduced pay by an average of 35 per cent. In some cases hours were cut by 60 per cent.

The report that I draw on to show the effects of privatisation in Barking outlines how one cleaner viewed her work. I hope the Government want to foster the concern of cleaners rather than break it. According to the report, the cleaner said:

"When I first started working at the hospital 16 years ago I was working a 30-hour week. Then my hours were cut to 25. Even then I felt I'd like to have another hour to get it really clean. Now Crothall are saying I've got to do the work in 15 hours. Well, there's no way I could do that. Housework you can neglect, but not a hospital—not when you've got babies in intensive care."

I should have thought that was a feeling that hon. Members on all sides of the House should encourage rather than cripple.

I move back to Cambridge because, although the Minister nodded when I asked him to report progress on Cambridge, I have progress to report to him. I was quoting an earlier report on privatisation in Cambridge, but things have moved on. By the end of October Professor John Davis, one of the country's leading paediatricians, had resigned. I quote his reasons; he was protesting against "political decisions" to force hospital cleaning services to be privatised. He said:

"You will know that my attitudes are essentially conservative".

So Professor Davis, who is not a fellow traveller but probably a member of the Minister's party, is openly and honestly declaring where his political prejudice or principle — whichever word we want — lies. He continued:

"there comes a time when one must be seen to live up to one's professed principles and true conservatism means recognising that the economy is made for man and not vice versa".

No doubt that will be the theme tune of the debate. The professor said that his reason for resigning was the

"so-called privatisation of the hospital cleaning services and the terms of the contract that we have accepted."

He continued:

"I believe that to save money by further separating the status of the professional from that of ancillary staff would not serve this end if it means employing the latter as casual labour. On my wards we value very highly the responsible and loyal work of our cleaners and the personal help often given to our patients and their parents . . . I am not against privatisation but it should be left to the decision of the authority. We should be able to judge it on its merits."

That is a direct challenge to the Minister, as he has been given special command by the Prime Minister to open up this second front of privatisation in the NHS. Will the battle be won in the old Tory tradition of letting people at grass roots level, who we always used to be told know the problems, to set policy, or will we have the Big Brother approach and direction from the centre?

While making such allegations, the Labour party should note that it is no use, while our backsides are on this side of the House, drawing attention to the high-minded attitudes and actions of the Government if we behave exactly the same if our backsides ever touch down on the other side of the House and we form the Government. If we think that it is wrong to have such central direction of services — I do — we must keep Labour Ministers up to the mark if and when we form the next Government.

I now want to take the debate up to the north and to my constituency. As is revealed in parliamentary answers, we are unfortunately in the area that has privatised cleaning services the most. I want to consider the effect of privatisation on Arrow Park—our new, grand, modern hospital which serves all four Wirral constituencies. In its wisdom, my constituents return a Labour Member of Parliament, but others are a little slower to see such wisdom, as Birkenhead has, and return Tory Members.

The Minister will know that the health authority is Tory controlled. It wrote a letter, which every member signed, saying that it was appalled at having to push through the privatisation measure and that it did not like it. It said that it had accepted the in-house contract because it was the cheapest, but that it would have preferred not to privatise the service. Those Tories and the minority Labour section have been proved right by what privatisation has meant to those who work in the Health Service in the Wirral.

Women workers are the majority and have been divided into two groups—those who work 15 hours and those who work 30 hours. The former group are the majority and the latter will pick up £39·40 a week. Before the new

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contract, they will have been working full time, able to work overtime, and Saturdays and Sundays when required, and to gain bonuses. If they worked long hours, they would have been able to notch up £100 a week. That is not the type of salary that Members of Parliament would want, but it is far above the £40 a week that they are being offered now. They face a cut of £60 a week. All the men have been offered 30 hours a week. That is discrimination for you, assuming that men's needs are greater than women's. All the men are being offered £39 a week. I shall give the example of a 57-year-old male constituent who has worked in the hospital for 15 years and who used to take home £100 a week after shift work, Sunday work, bonuses and the rest. He is now offered £40 a week. He is substantially worse off working than signing on the dole and drawing benefit.

Has the privatisation resulted in efficiency, savings and all those grand phrases? It may have done if one takes a very one-sided view of the issue. However, I have talked to my constituents, who have been on the receiving end. Many of them, who have worked in our hospitals for much of their working lives, have had their pride broken. They thought that their job was important to the community, but their terms of contract have been torn up. Some used to cycle through the night and the early hours of the morning to arrive on time at hospitals in the Wirral, but they have been told that their services are no longer wanted. Many single parents, who are now faced with the new contracts of 15 hours a week, have decided that the only thing that they can do is sign on for benefit.

The Government's privatisation measure has been enacted in full force in the Wirral which has experienced a far greater spread of privatisation than most other areas. Supposed savings have been achieved through crippling the staff and destroying their pride. It is difficult to draw the words together to tell the Minister what it has been like in my surgery as worker after worker has come to tell me privately how broken he feels.

I do not want this misery to spread throughout the country, but the Minister has not experienced people coming in, nervously clutching the end of the table as though it can be peeled, not quite knowing how to start the sentence or even whether they will get through to the end of the sentence without breaking down and crying, saying what it means to have their pay cut, their terms of contract torn up and their usefulness to the community devalued. Perhaps the Minister would comment on those personal experiences as well as on the more general aspects of the debate.

I want to ask the Minister about Crothall, the contract cleaning company, because I gather that it heads the bids for Clatterbridge hospital, the second biggest hospital in Wirral. Much to its credit, the health authority, which is Tory-dominated, is loth to accept that bid. I suspect—I do not know because I am not party to its conversations — that it is loth to accept the bid because of the company's record elsewhere. I ask the Minister therefore whether he will undertake to ensure that no pressure is put on the Wirral health authority to force it to privatise its cleaning services at Clatterbridge with that company.

I have five questions for the Minister concerning privatisation in the National Health Service. First, can he give the House, the country, voters, taxpayers, patients and workers an undertaking that he is satisfied that privatisation has improved standards of service, or say whether he has any doubts? If so, what will he do about it? Will he press ahead, as the Prime Minister tells him, or will he slow down the privatisation programme?

Time after time, Ministers have come to the Dispatch Box and told us that cuts in wages will lead to additional jobs. We have had cuts in wages in the Wirral on a vicious scale, cuts such as we did not see even in the 1930s, and people have lost their jobs. Will the Minister tell us how many new jobs have been created in the Wirral as a result of the Government's privatisation measures and—I do not want this to be concerned just with my own area—how many extra jobs in the rest of the country have resulted from cuts in wages?

Thirdly, is the Minister proud of the record of increasing the number of people who draw poverty wages? Is that the sort of thing that he wants to encourage in this country? Before 1979, a person who was aspiring to be Prime Minister said that our children should grow tall—let them grow to a thousand different heights. Yet, when it comes to those at the bottom of the earnings pile, there is no encouragement, no floor to put under them; instead, there is a policy which makes not just marginal adjustment to their pay but, as I quoted in the cases of some of my constituents, cuts of 60 per cent. Is that the record of privatisation elsewhere in the country? Is that what the Government want, and will the second front of privatisation bring us even more people earning poverty wages than there are at present?

Fourthly, are the Government proud of their record of destroying the self-respect of the workers that I have described to the House? The Minister looks puzzled and shakes his head, but he makes a note, and I am grateful for that. I find it difficult to contain myself or to draw adequately on the language at my command to convey the pain involved in this whole process of people being treated in this way. The Minister will know that I am not someone who goes over the top, I am not someone—I think that I am correct in saying this—who tries to make an easy debating point, but I have been appalled by the response of hospital cleaning workers in the Wirral. I want to draw the Minister's attention to that and ask him to take it on board before he starts the next stage of his privatisation programme.

Fifthly, some of my constituents will be worse off than if they were drawing the dole if they continue to work for the private company. What is the Minister's advice to my constituents? Should they reduce their living standards even further by remaining in work rather than signing on and drawing the dole? Do not the Government have some responsibility here—a responsibility to ensure that wage levels are not below what is paid to people who are unable to work? That is the fifth important question that I pose.

When the Select Committee on Social Services, in its sixth report, looked at privatisation it made a plea to the Government. This again was a Committee dominated by Government Members. It asked the Government, before continuing its privatisation programme, to

> "sponsor a wide-ranging study of the past and present experience"

before embarking on any new stages of privatisation.

If this debate does nothing but get the Government to concede that point, it will have been well worth while.

7.33 pm

Mr. Laurie Pavitt (Brent, South): When I applied to Mr. Speaker to take part in a debate on this subject I did not realise that my hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) had also applied. I am most grateful to him, because we have just listened to the sort of speech which this House believes represents the House at its best—that is, a speech which puts a very human face on people's problems. He has been able to make very real some of the facts, figures, statistics, papers, documents and circulars by putting into his speech the real people whom we all meet in our surgeries, the people who are doing the jobs as cleaners, the nurses, the patients and all the ancillary staff in hospitals and, of course, the people in the community too. I am, therefore, more than grateful that when it came to the choice my hon. Friend's speech, not mine, was made first. It was one of the clearest expositions that I have heard for some time, and, as you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am not without knowledge of the National Health Service. I hope that it will have its due effect on the Under-Secretary.

In 1979 this Government's famous document entitled "Patients First" appeared. After six years, the policy could now read "profits first". This is not the first time that the Tory party has done a U-turn. As I recall, the first U-turn was by the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell), and the late Iain Macleod, who wrote a most devastating pamphlet about how they were going to destroy the NHS when the Tory party got into office. Both were intelligent people, so what happened was that the right hon. Member for South Down became a very good Minister of Health for a short period, and the best Minister of Health the Conservatives have ever had in the House was the late Iain Macleod. I will go even further and say that the best Tory Minister on the Front Bench that I can recall was the late Iain Macleod.

I therefore draw the attention of the Minister to the fact that there is a very good case to be made for U-turns from time to time, and if anything that my hon. Friend has said causes him to take another look at the Prime Minister's diktat that there must be more privatisation, he has very good precedents to follow.

Tomorrow we shall be debating the collapse of nursing morale due to another report, the Griffiths report, but tonight we are drawing attention to a further disaster area for nurses—the whole field of privatising following the Government's acceptance of the Rayner report. As the Under-Secretary will recall, the House did not have the opportunity of a debate on that report, which was a pity. By the Consolidated Fund process we have been able, at long last, to get a debate tonight. The actions that have followed the publication of the Rayner report have been devastating for the National Health Service in the three areas concerning patient care—catering, cleaning and laundry. I hope that the Under-Secretary will take the opportunity of re-reading "Patients First". It is always a good thing to go back and see what was said originally. I wish that the Prime Minister would re-read St. Francis of Assisi at some time and perhaps change her mind about some of the things that happened following that original quotation.

Of the three areas affecting patient care—catering cleaning and laundry—it is catering and cleaning that have the most disastrous effects on our nursing services. When we talk about nursing standards we are talking not about something in a White Paper, but about the 100 years of tradition and experience since Florence Nightingale. Those standards were set by what used to be called the dragons of matrons, and they operated at nursing level where nurses met patients on the ward. The key person was the ward sister. She was in charge; it was her ward, her patients, her staff, her cleaners and her command over the food that went to the patients. If she was good—and 99.9 per cent. of the ward sisters were — that organisation was the finest management organisation ever seen, because she took a pride in what she was doing, in her ward and in her standards. It did not matter that she worked long hours. She did far more than her regular hours because a good ward sister will see her night nurses off at 7 o'clock in the morning and the next team of night nurses on at 7 o'clock in the evening.

Into this comes the privatising of cleaning and catering. No longer is the ward sister in charge. These things are out of her control and as standards slip this has an effect upon the nurses over whom she has authority, because, if it is good enough for the National Health Service to have standards of that kind, why should they slave their insides out to preserve their higher standards and traditions? The concept that ward sisters had pride and a personal interest in each of their suffering patients has been eroded by the privatisation of cleaning services.

I could quote several cases, but I wish to quote from a letter of which the Under-Secretary of State has received a copy. I was so appalled by what happened to a patient that I raised the matter with the hospital administration, the district health authority, the general manager of the regional health authority, Mr. Victor Paige, and the Minister for Health. Since I knew that the Under-Secretary of State would have to pick up the pieces for the Minister for Health, I made sure that he received a copy of the letter. It states:

"Yesterday I left . . . after an operation and two weeks' stay. As usual the medical and nursing care couldn't be bettered but I am dismayed by the state of cleanliness in the ward.

When I was admitted the Sanibin in the ward lavatory was full to overflowing. Unfortunately patients continued to use it and it became really offensive. There was a bowl half full of dirty water behind the lavatory. Floating on top of the water was dirty toilet paper. On Saturday I spoke to the Charge Nurse about both of these things, she was able to get the water emptied but told me the Sanibin couldn't be emptied because it was the week-end. It was finally emptied on the Tuesday, in the meantime the lavatory was smelly and unpleasant.

The lavatory itself was never cleaned in the 2 weeks I was in the ward. The up and walking patients had no problem, they were able to use the lavatories in other areas during the day but this wasn't possible at night for patients with drips. On one occasion the lid, seat, under the seat, the rim of the pan and the pan itself was splashed with excrement. As I had to use the lavatory at night I had to clean it, and this I did twice.

The bathroom was thick with dust. I had to clean the surfaces of the table and the chair before I could put things down. I left the bottom shelf of the table so that you could see the state of place.

Whilst I was in the ward the cleaners came in twice. The first time one man went round the bits that were free with the vac. Another man sloshed a mop over the same bits and then the first went over with a polisher. At no time was any of the furniture moved"—

of course, it is a housewife speaking—

"in fact it was fascinating to see the appliances go round patients' slippers and even visitors' feet. The floor at the back of the beds and lockers was never touched and was filthy.

At no time during the 2 weeks were the lockers and bedside tables wiped over. I was able to do my own but for patients confined to bed I found this disgusting.

[Mr. Laurie Pavitt]

Walking round the corridors on other floors there was the same look of dirt and neglect.

A great pity that a great hospital should come to this."

Patients first? Patients must get out of bed and clean lavatories, yet the Government talk about putting patients first?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security (Mr. Ray Whitney): The hon. Gentleman has the advantage over me in that there are 600 major hospital units and I am not carrying the details of this case in my head. Will he confirm that the cleaning at that hospital was carried out by a private contractor?

Mr. Pavitt: I was about to do so. The hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, South-West (Sir A. Grant) has tried to persuade the Government to privatise hospital services. I do not wish to attack the hon. Gentleman, with whom I have had friendly relations on this issue, but he has business interests in the privatisation of hospital cleaning. As the House knows from the *Official Report*, 28 Conservative Members have business interests in cleaning firms. I mentioned this case to the hon. Gentleman in the Corridor because I have known him for some time. In consequence of that, I received a letter — my hon. Friends will not be surprised by this — from Messrs. Crothall and Co. which had provided the service at that hospital. The letter stated:

"We have found that the type of person presenting themselves for employment as domestics is not always of good 'professional' calibre."

What can we expect when firms pay the sort of wages that were mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead? Wages and time are skimped and no proper training is given. There are no induction courses and no proper monitoring. What else can one expect from tendering? The point of tendering is to obtain a contract by putting in the lowest tender, so firms inevitably scrape the bottom of the barrel. They exploit the labour market.

The sad aspect of my hon. Friend's speech was his reference to the people — I know them well — who for years have proudly scrubbed floors in hospitals because they wanted to work there, but who no longer feel pride in working for such meagre wages.

After I received that letter, I examined the matter more seriously. I received a letter from a friend who is a hospital doctor who became a patient in another hospital where the cleaning services were contracted out. It is a different hospital, and Crothalls did not provide the cleaning services. His letter states:

"The only time I saw a supervisor during my various stays was when she came to quarrel with me over my complaints about the standard of cleaning. As I was receiving cytotoxic drugs at the time I did not pursue the argument with her.

On that occasion my wife had cleaned all the horizontal surfaces in the room using the chlorhexidine hand soap and hand towels, including the sink in the bathroom and the toilet seat which was stained! She also got rid of the dead flies on the window ledge."

We are talking about the finest hospitals, not just in the country but in the world. The world follows what Britain does. But because some grubby little accountants are trying to make what they call economy savings, which are supposed to benefit patients, and are scrabbling about presenting documents to show that we have more money than ever before when in reality we have less, this sort of thing is bound to happen.

The ward sisters' position has changed in relation to catering services. The ward sister used to be proud of the fact that she had direct contacts with the in-house catering service, that she had known the chef and other workers for years, and that if her patients were not getting what she thought was the right food she could put the matter right directly and immediately. There was no question of her having to go through a unit manager, a district manager or a hospital administrator. Now, if patients are dissatisfied, they become like bus passengers who have waited a long time for a bus — they take it out on the conductor, not on the service. If the food is not right in a hospital, the nurses are on the receiving end of complaints. Just as the caterer must cut his tender to the limit to obtain the contract, so the food is cut. Sometimes the meat is cut with a razor blade.

Dissatisfied and unhappy patients complain to their nurses, who in turn complain to the kitchen. The complaint is probably recorded on a triplicate form, the hospital administrator brings it to the attention of the district health authority, and six months later, after the patient has been long dead or has gone home, something may be done. It is a wearisome business, and I do not blame good nurses for thinking that this is not what they were trained for and that they should not have to face such hazards. Ward morale has decreased greatly. Although the ward sister used to think in terms of, "My ward and my patients under my control", now she might say, "I am not too far away from retirement, and perhaps I can manage until then."

On the privatisation of laundry services, the Under-Secretary of State may not realise that I was able to effect a change when laundry services in my area were privatised. I represent a constituency in north-west London, yet the contract was given to a firm in Birmingham. I do not understand how that happened. I have two major district general hospitals. One is the Central Middlesex, world-famous at one time for gastro-enterology; the other is Northwick Park, which was funded jointly with the Medical Research Council. Strangely enough, I was on both the regional board and the health council at the time when that hospital was created as a clinical research centre.

A few years ago the Central Middlesex hospital laundry was entirely refurbished at a cost of nearly £500,000, so that it could take on the laundry work of Northwick Park, a sensible management arrangement. What happened? The Northwick Park contract was put out and accepted by a private company. This meant that the whole of that investment was made redundant. I ask the Minister whether he will consider this matter. Does he realise that, when an in-house tender is defeated by a lower tender from outside, he is dealing with a three-year contract? At the end of that period, if the whole of the laundry machinery has been sent for scrap metal elsewhere and dismantled the hospital is entirely at the mercy of whatever price the laundry company demands.

The Government's case is that money can be saved towards the expense of running the service if it is privatised. In other words, although shareholders must be paid a large profit, a better service will be obtained, money will be saved and that money can reduce the demands on the Exchequer from the Department of Health and Social Security. In reality, this saving is made at the expense of nurses, patients and hospital staff. I cannot think of a better illustration of this than was given by my hon. Friend the

Member for Birkenhead. I will treasure what he said, because he dealt with everything that I would have like to say, in a far more succinct fashion, on behalf of all of us who, at some time or another, have needed the care and attention for which we will be eternally grateful.

Privatisation is like a cancerous growth, imported from another world with other techniques, other approaches to things rather than to people, interested purely in material gain and money to be turned over. That cancer is eating at the heart of one of the greatest health services in the world.

7.52 pm

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Cromarty and Skye): I recall the advice that I was once given, that if I were ever to make a public speech I should not make apologies in the course of it. I have to begin with two apologies, which makes it a doubly bad effort. The first is to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and others, particularly the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), for being late and missing the beginning of his speech. The other is in advance to the Minister for perhaps not being able to stay to hear the whole of his reply to the debate. Given that I am heading north to Ross, Cromarty and Skye very shortly, he will appreciate that my time is somewhat limited. With those two caveats, I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the debate.

What we have heard—and I hope that the Minister will concur—are two profoundly sensible contributions, in that neither speaker tonight has gone for straight opposition to Government policy, nor dismissed the need to find savings within the health budget, which all of us recognise are there to be found. Legitimate savings can be ploughed back, as Government rhetoric says, into better standards of patient care. They have instead pointed out the difficulty, and, indeed, the stupidity at times, of putting a political doctrine in the way of finding genuine solutions at local level, for better standards of care, through more money released by means of greater efficiency and effectiveness.

What disturbs and annoys me greatly about the whole health and welfare state debate is that it is always the Government who portray themselves as the only ones concerned about getting value for money, which is not true. We are all concerned about achieving that objective. Where we begin to part company from the Government is in believing that what is at times a ruthless pursuit of predetermined political criteria is the only means by which value for money can be achieved. I am not convinced of this. From what I have seen—and the privatisation debate is the classic example—the most sensible approach, as the hon. Member for Birkenhead pointed out, is to leave health authorities to decide how best to run things in their own area.

Ross, Cromarty and Skye is perhaps not absolutely typical of the rest of the country, but I can think of examples where it is impossible in my own area to have in-house ancillary services of one sort or another. They have to be privatised, and it has always been so. But it strikes me that when a health authority, or a health board, as it is north of the border, such as the Highlands health board—which is neither true blue nor about to fly a red flag above its headquarters in Inverness—finds that the circulars which it receives from the Scottish Home and Health Department continually emphasise the need to go further with privatisation, and this causes it administrative problems and runs counter to the commonsense organisation of health care in that part of the country, the Government should think twice about being quite so dogmatic—if I may use that favoured, SDP-ish word—in their approach.

As the debate is about the effect of the privatisation policy on carers, I am in one respect rather relieved that we are not now going into the situation of and arguments about carers, because the subject of carers is worthy of a full-scale parliamentary debate. I know that other Members present take an interest in this matter. It is an aspect on which the privatisation programme can have a profound effect. In my own party, I have in the past two years been involved in drawing up a carers' charter. I shall not stand on a soapbox and read out all the details of that charter, but I believe that what it suggests would command cross-party support. Indeed, I know that it does.

When we are examining any system of delivery of health care to help the informal section of the welfare state, without which the welfare state would collapse, under any political programme, we must take particular account of privatisation because it can greatly affect the ability of the carer to have access to the sources of information and to the support mechanisms available in the community, particularly with the care in the community programme, the difficulties facing social services departments because of rate support grant policy, and so on. That is a huge debate in itself and I do not want to get into it tonight, but it is worth considering.

One cannot take a national view on privatisation. There are different circumstances in different localities. The best way to run the Health Service is to run it at local level, or as near to that as is attainable consistent with a National Health policy, in a way which reflects the needs and aspirations or demands of a particular community.

One of the difficulties about privatisation is the effect upon those in the ancillary services, who find a privatisation policy being railroaded through against the better discretion of those at local level, as we have heard vividly this evening. Therefore, the position of staff, be it in terms of the Whitley rates, conditions of employment or whatever, is seriously eroded.

One cannot have a business which is the biggest civilian employer in western Europe without some wastage and inefficiency. That is self-evident. But all who support the Health Service must also recognise that the marvellous thing about it is the sense of community within the hospitals. Every time I visit a hospital I am struck by the fact that the patient, who is, after all, the end product and what we are most concerned about, responds, not only to the care that he is given by the nurse, the doctor, or the consultant, but also, as has been pointed out, to the physical environment around him. Therefore, to try to hive off parts of the Health Service which are regarded as almost expendable is an act of folly if that is pursued ruthlessly with no regard to the circumstances in a particular hospital. That is the great danger of the privatisation programme that is being pushed through by the Government. There is somehow a suggestion in the phrase "ancillary services" that they are peripheral to the concept of recovery and care, yet we know that they are not. Those who provide food and make sure that the facilities are clean are as important as those who provide the immediate nursing and the medical talents for diagnosis and cure.

[Mr. Charles Kennedy]

It is when one begins to lose sight of the human dimension and begins to subject human beings to the rigours and tyranny of the profit and loss account of a balance sheet that one begins to lose sight of the principles and ethics which underlie Britain's Health Service.

I welcome this brief debate. I hope that the Minister will take cognisance of the fact that savings, efficiency and so on are extremely important. Where they lead to greater money being released for improved patient care they are welcome. However, one cannot subjugate entirely the importance of patients, a community and a team spirit, particularly within a hospital, to such rigours. The danger, as we have seen from the Griffiths report and the appointment of general managers and the privatisation programme, is that Ministers are too willing to intervene to push their policy in the face of higher standards which could be achieved and yet which, sadly, in many cases, as we have heard, are not being achieved.

8.4 pm

Ms. Harriet Harman (Peckham): My hon. Friends the Members for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) and for Brent, South (Mr. Pavitt) have dealt comprehensively and tellingly with the effect of privatisation on the Health Service. I should like to add an extra dimension, the effect of privatisation on the social services.

By definition, it is the most vulnerable and dependent members of a community who need social services — people who are physically or mentally disabled, children and the very elderly. Moreover, all families will need support services at some stage, whether it be a nursery place for a small child or help at home for elderly people, perhaps living on his own or with a family to help the family to cope.

The most vulnerable and dependent people need services on which they can depend. We in the community are entitled to expect that frail and vulnerable people will be properly looked after; that they receive the services that they want; that the services are of a high quality; that they should have a say in those services; that services will help their families to care rather than leaving them overburdened; that they should have a continuity of service on which they can rely; that the services should be provided by staff who are properly trained; and that the services are planned to meet people's needs.

Those objectives can best be met, and are met, by services provided by the community for the community — that means local authorities, health authorities and also the contribution made by voluntary organisations where they are properly funded by the Government or at local level.

I am not complacent about public sector social services or voluntary sector welfare services. Although there are many excellent and popular services in the public sector, there are still many problems. Those problems could be minimised if the Government took a lead in encouraging good practice and provided local authorities with the resources which they need and which they say they want in order to expand, develop and improve the services that their communities need. But that is not happening. The Government are telling councils to spend less and to contract out existing social services.

Councils throughout Britain are meeting an increasing demand for social services. Handicapped babies who might in earlier times have died at birth or had a short life expectancy can now be saved and look forward to a normal life span, but they and their families need support services. People who have disabling accidents or disabling diseases which in the past may have killed them now have a much greater life expectancy, but again they and their families need support services. An increasing number of elderly, particularly the very elderly, need support services, and there is an increasing demand for services due to unemployment. That has been well documented by the Association of Directors of Social Services. The increasing number of mothers with small children seeking work means a growing demand for services for children.

Yet the Government brand as irresponsible councils which want to expand such services to meet the growing need that they see in their areas. At the same time as the Government are telling councils to spend less, the Government are apparently prepared to spend limitless sums to finance an explosion in private profit-making companies providing welfare services.

The problems of privatisation of welfare services are vividly illustrated in the privatisation of services for the elderly. Let us consider residential care for the elderly. The Government are telling councils to hold social services spending. With the growing number of elderly, that will mean that services to people in their own homes, such as home helps, are spread more and more thinly. Home care services are real care in the community. They enable people to remain independent in their own homes for as long as possible; people who might otherwise be at risk from a fall or sudden illness. The home care service can also support families coping with a disabled relative who, without that support, might well feel that they could not go on caring.

Therefore, the Government's squeeze on council spending, which prevents council domiciliary services from expanding to meet the growing need, means that people who might otherwise have remained at home must go into an institution, which is the very opposite of care in the community.

Council provision of residential care has been at a virtual standstill because of the Government's spending squeeze in the past few years. Therefore, the increase in demand for residential care, which is fuelled by the lack of domiciliary services, as well as by the aging population, is pushed into the mushrooming private profit-making sector. Really, it is a misnomer to call it a private sector because, although it is profit-making, it is booming at public expense. The Department of Health and Social Security pays up to £180 per person per week in a private residential home. A modest 20-bed home can therefore earn £3,600 per week at the expense of the DHSS. At a time when the Government are nailing council spending to the floor, DHSS spending on private old folks' homes rose from £10 million per year in 1979 to £190 million per year in 1984. That is, on the Government's own figures, an increase of over 2,000 per cent. Taxpayers' money has been deliberately diverted from care in the community, provided by the community, towards institutions run for profit.

The risks faced by the elderly and vulnerable people in the private residential care sector are well known. The evidence from America, where private residential care is well established, is all bad. Not only are there cases of gross neglect and exploitation, where home owners put profit before care; it is also clear that the services provided

are the services which are profitable rather than those which are needed. What is profitable is long-term institutionalisation. Therefore, regimes to rehabilitate elderly people or services to keep people at home disappear. One cannot plan on the basis of good social policy when the free market provides services only when and where it is most profitable.

The American pattern is already beginning to take a grip here. Numerous cases of appalling conditions in private old folks' homes have come to light. I have often complained to the Government about particular homes. For example, I complained about the Inglehurst nursing home in Blackpool, where the owners engaged in twice-daily drinking sprees, failed to adminster drugs safely and fed their residents inadequately, and where there was inadequate staffing and residents were kept in squalor. After I raised that case with the Government, the Minister investigated and the home has since been closed, but not before receiving £50,000 a year from the DHSS — a direct subsidy from the public to the private sector. It is not just physical ill-treatment of the elderly in private homes that causes concern; there is also the problem of fraud.

Mr. Whitney: While the hon. Lady is dealing with badly run homes, would she tell the House about the problem of Nye Bevan lodge with which she is rather familiar?

Ms. Harman: The Southwark council investigated the allegations about Nye Bevan lodge. That investigation was submitted to the officials of the DHSS. The DHSS was directed to conduct a further inquiry into residential care of the elderly and children in Southwark and found good standards of care and residential provision. Therefore, the matter has been settled; I am surprised that the Minister raised it.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I am sure that the hon. Lady would not wish to mislead the House. The inquiry was into other homes and other residential provisions. There are still matters relating to Nye Bevan lodge in terms of internal administration and reforms, which are the responsibility of the local authority, on which we have not had any final report or any disciplinary or other action.

Ms. Harman: The reason why the inquiry of the DHSS was into residential care homes other than Nye Bevan lodge is that DHSS officials were satisfied with the council's internal inquiry into the lodge. It would have been a scandalous waste of public funds to investigate the same incident twice.

When I raised two cases of fraud on the DHSS by private homes in Kent, the Government took no action. It is impossible to guarantee the maintenance of high standards behind the closed doors of a private old folks' home. The Government will no doubt point to the code of practice "Home Life", which is excellent, but which is not legally enforceable. The Government might point to the new fees for private homes, but they have still to bring them before the House and, in any case, they are still not enough.

There is still a basic problem in trying to enforce any standards in private homes. There is a built-in and serious disincentive to councils taking action against private homes which fall below standard, because there is only one sanction—de-registration. If a council de-registers, it knows that it will have the old folk from that home on its doorstep. Councils cannot cope with existing demands, let alone deal with additional people who would need care if they were to close substandard private homes in their areas. Even the best intentioned councils are affected by that severe disincentive, because it is the council which has to inspect the homes and register them or apply for them to be de-registered, and it is the council which has to deal with the effect of that de-registration. Private companies know that, and they are cashing in on care in a big way.

It is not only the Conservative party which puts the interests of private business before the needs of our elderly. It is also the Liberals. The Liberals on Hammersmith and Fulham council voted only last night to continue with the sale of Stewart lodge, a council old people's home, to a private company — Associated Nursing Services Ltd. The council plans to sell Stewart lodge as a job lot, the home and the people in it. The 29 residents — whose average age is 88 years — are to be sold with the building, whether they like it or not. Associated Nursing Services Ltd. will apparently arrange a share issue to finance this lucrative purchase.

Mr. Frank Field: The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) was quick on his feet inviting my hon. Friend the Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman) to denounce Southwark council, which I hope she did. Will he now willingly spring to his feet and dissociate himself from the extraordinary sale in Fulham?

Ms. Harman: I can advise my hon. Friend that the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) has already said that he disapproves of the sale.

I have mentioned that if Associated Nursing Services Ltd. can win this contract it will make a share issue to finance it. I should like to read to the House from an investment brochure such as is likely to be sent out by Associated Nursing Services Ltd. It is a different brochure, but it is on the same lines. The brochure sets out how companies attract investment to expand.

The brochure was issued by Investment and Pensions Advisory Service in Surrey. It says:

"The first absolute priority for Mrs. Thatcher and her Government is to bring public spending under greater control, and already there has been much talk about cutbacks in the National Health Service. This is of course a very emotive move — so the Government can undoubtedly be expected to seek reductions in the most painless manner possible.

It is hardly surprising, then, to learn that they have indicated their wish to ease the burden on the community of looking after the aged and infirm. These people can hardly be regarded as a 'vociferous pressure group,' after all!"

The brochure goes on to say:

"Financial experts now take the view that nursing homes for elderly people are likely to become a growth industry. And that, because of the special circumstances described above, this growth will continue through bad years as well as good.

Through the business expansion scheme where investment is subsidised by the Government, Mrs. Thatcher can effectively influence the switch of emphasis to private care in this area."

That is exactly what she has been doing.

The brochure finally says that investment in old folks' homes is a

"lucrative long-term opportunity for large-scale capital growth."

That is how the Tories and the Liberals in Fulham see our elderly — merely as fodder for a lucrative long-term opportunity for large-scale capital growth. Even if the

[Ms. Harman]

council can claim that Associated Nursing Services has never been caught out ill-treating the elderly from whom it is making its money, what is to stop Associated Nursing Services from selling the home to a disreputable company? Fulham council must think again.

In a letter dated 11 March, the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Steel), the leader of the Liberal party, admitted to me:

"It is not Liberal Party policy to privatise homes without consultation with residents and their families."

That is exactly what is happening in Fulham. Unfortunately, the right hon. Gentleman went on to wash his hands of it all and to say:

"it is not our policy for the party centrally to dictate to local councils what actions they should take".

Mr. Simon Hughes: The hon. Lady said, fairly, that, when she raised the matter with me, I stated my view to her. She has quoted the letter of my right hon. Friend the Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Steel). These are important points. I hope that the hon. Lady agrees that it is not the job of the law to dictate to local authorities. The Labour party and my party stand up strongly for that. The concern that this issue arouses is sufficient, without either my right hon. Friend or me knowing the facts, for me to assure the hon. Lady that tomorrow I shall find out the facts from colleagues in Hammersmith and Fulham. My right hon. Friend proposes to deal more fully and helpfully with the specific issue. Clearly, we cannot comment on that issue until we know the facts, the motivation and the thinking behind the actions of borough councillors.

Ms. Harman: The hon. Gentleman should have obtained the facts before, because I raised this issue with him last week. He has had a number of days to look into it. I wrote to the hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye (Mr. Kennedy) about a week ago on this issue. If he is staying quiet about it, it is because he has something to hide rather than because he does not know about it.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Cromarty and Skye): What the hon. Lady has just said is accurate. Can she confirm that I have not stayed quiet? In fact, we have discussed the matter.

Ms. Harman: I do not remember that issue being discussed by the hon. Gentleman and me. If we have discussed it, perhaps the hon. Gentleman will take the opportunity to remind the House of his position — whether he is for or against the sale, whether he is for the principle of services being provided by the community for the community or, indeed, whether he has any principles at all.

Mr. Kennedy: I think that the hon. Lady genuinely believes that we have not discussed the issue. We have discussed it. I hope that she recalls that I said that I would investigate the facts more fully but that my view was exactly in line with the view just expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes). Does the hon. Lady agree that that is the sensible view to take? I hope that she is not taking the draconian view on local choice and decision making which is the hallmark of the Conservative party.

Ms. Harman: We are certainly in the forefront of those opposing the Government's measures in replacing local government by edicts from Whitehall. We stand firmly for principles. In this case, we are discussing principles of defence and a determination to protect the elderly and the most vulnerable in the community.

Mr. Frank Field: It is extraordinarily interesting to see the hon. Members for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) and for Ross, Cromarty and Skye (Mr. Kennedy) jumping around giving us their line. The real question is: where does the candidate in Fulham stand? Does the candidate back the local council or the leader of the Liberal party?

Ms. Harman: In America they call it granny farming. Is that what the Liberals in Fulham are backing? The Labour group of councillors in Fulham, who would be in the majority were it not for the Liberals uniting with the Tories, are strenuously opposing the sale. I hope that they will succeed.

It is also the staff who suffer when welfare services are privatised. To boost profits, companies cut costs. By far the major cost in social services is staff wages. Caring staff are already low paid and, in the private sector, they get poverty wages. This means that there is a high turnover of staff as well as exploitation, which means poorer services, as staff are demoralised, lack of continuity and lack of experience.

The Government have a deliberate policy of undermining community services and using public money to finance private welfare services. We really need a good range of welfare services at local level provided according to who needs them, not just to those who can afford them, so that the individuals can choose the service that suits them. Those services should be provided by the community for the community. We must go no further down the American road.

8.25 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security (Mr. Ray Whitney): We have had a particularly interesting debate in which, at one stage, it seemed that Conservative Members were redundant, given the interesting exchanges between the various Opposition parties.

The hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) started the debate on an odd note. The Government were either congratulated or accused—one can take one's pick—of launching a second front in competitive tendering. The hon. Gentleman said that that concept was based on reports in several newspapers in the past few days, but as he continued it became clear that it was based on one small report in his favourite newspaper, by, I suspect, his favourite correspondent. That story was garnered at lunchtime on Monday when our mutual friend, the correspondent, was invited to a buffet lunch given by a contracting firm to which we have not awarded contracts and which is rather upset that we have not done so.

Mr. Frank Field: The hon. Gentleman seems to prove the Prime Minister's point—that there is no such thing as a free lunch.

Mr. Whitney: I hope the hon. Gentleman understands that he should be careful in his newspaper reading and not believe everything that he reads in the press. Basing much of his speech on the press has proved to be his undoing.

The hon. Gentleman was indignant about the idea of a management fee approach. In effect, he said that it was a

licence to print money. He is probably right. That is why, as far as I know, none of the contracts awarded by the health authorities has been given on that basis. Those contracts are not within the direct gift of the DHSS. Not surprisingly, therefore, the hosts at the lunch were not pleased with the competitive tendering policy. Our mutual friend, the correspondent, had a jolly little lunch and at least gave the hon. Member for Birkenhead the starting point of his speech.

Much the same applied to our rather truncated tour around the country. I accept that this is a serious subject, but the hon. Gentleman tried to take us to the Attenborough hospital. Attenborough is all to do with wildlife and making films about Gandhi. The hon. Gentleman was referring to Addenbrooke's in Cambridge. I assure the hon. Gentleman that I have visited that hospital and was deeply impressed. Of course I asked, "What is this story we are told by the Opposition?" The story was told twice tonight. I should imagine that the same story has been recycled by the Opposition 100 or 200 times in *Hansard*. Far from finding deep, dissatifaction among the patients, nurses or any of the other 5,000 staff working in Addenbrooke's hospital, I found general satisfaction with the contracting services there.

Mr. Pavitt: I had the privilege last Wednesday of speaking to the Royal College of Nursing in Cambridge. I assure the Minister that the impression that I gained was the opposite to his.

Mr. Whitney: We shall have to rest with our differences. The hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Pavitt) may have been looking for different things, but the first thing that I was looking for was the level of satisfaction at that hospital.

I would not claim, as I said in an earlier intervention, to be able to provide instantly details of every hospital contract in Croydon. If there are mistakes or failures to meet standards they must be rectified, and rectified rigorously.

The hon. Member for Birkenhead seemed to be concerned about the situation in Barking. He seemed to be concerned about the reduction in the annual Health Service bill there from £367,000 to £211,000. To most people, the concept of a £157,000 saving to put back into the Health Service, into patient care, to pay nurses or for other purposes would be welcome. One might even have thought that such a concept would be welcome to Opposition Members.

As the debate progressed, the other main element of the Opposition's concern was revealed. The Opposition are concerned about the staff. We are all concerned about the staff and there must be good working conditions and adequate wage rates. We must, however, get our priorities right.

The hon. Member for Brent, South justly reminded the House of the excellent pamphlet issued by my party "Patients First". I assure the House that that policy has by no means changed. We believe that the patients come first. Therefore, the employees must not come first. Of course there must be proper treatment for employees, but the balance must be right. The Health Service, the Army and the Civil Service do not exist primarily, first and last, for those who work in those institutions. The Health Service is for patients, and we must use our resources to maximum effect. I was grateful to the hon. Member for Brent, South for underlining what is happening in Barking as an example of the achievements that are being recorded.

Mr. Field: I do not really want to interrupt the Minister in his stride, as he is well into his speech now and it is a pleasure to hear him in this form. I did not say, when using the Barking example, that the contract was not being fulfilled. I did not give any information that that contract was not being fulfilled. However, I wanted to know whether the Minister found it disturbing that a price tag of £367,000 had been reduced to £211,000. In this situation, either the company is getting a fair return and doing its job properly, which is to the good and we are pleased about that——

Mr. Gwilym Jones (Cardiff, North): Indeed.

Mr. Field: I was not making that point. My point was about why a higher price had been charged for 16 years. Should we not be concerned that that company was making such a rip-off?

Mr. Whitney: I agree with the hon. Gentleman and I welcome him aboard. He spoke about the concept of companies making profits. I agree with him that if for 16 years we had been spending too much in that direction —I make no party point about which Government were in power—we should bear the blame equally.

Mr. Kennedy: Yes, equally between the Conservative and Labour parties.

Mr. Whitney: I shall shortly come to the contribution made by the hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye (Mr. Kennedy). I hope we can agree that the situation should have been put right 15 or 16 years ago. We must now agree that the situation has been put right.

Mr. Field: Clearly this is a company to watch. I asked whether the Minister would back the Tory-controlled Wirral health authority, which is raising serious objections to being forced to privatise the Clatterbridge health services to that very company.

Mr. Whitney: The hon. Gentleman is seeking to take me further on and I hope to respond to most or all of his points in my speech. Obviously I can make no comment on a particular bid of a particular company in a particular health authority. That is for the health authority to decide.

Our policy is clear, and if the hon. Gentleman will allow me to do so I should like to pursue it. We believe in patients first, and we agree that the employees of the Health Service deserve, and must have, proper treatment. The hon. Member for Birkenhead and the hon. Member for Brent, South came close to, indeed I believe that they arrived at, the point where they suggested that the Health Service exists for the benefit of the employees.

Mr. Pavitt: I apologise for interrupting so often in the Minister's speech, but he is wrong in the parallels that he is drawing, because employees, patients and all the staff — medical, ancillary and persons in the professions supplementary to medicine — are one unique organisation. The Civil Service, Army and industry are different bodies entirely. His equation of those two things does not match the experience of caring for patients and the integration of those working with and for the patients and the patients themselves. Therefore, by regarding

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employees as one lot and patients as another, the Minister is showing his ignorance of the concept of the Health Service.

Mr. Whitney: If the hon. Gentleman goes round the wards at Addenbrooke's hospital, for example, he will find, as I found by talking to the staff and to the patients, that there has been no diminution of the high quality factors to which the hon. Gentleman referred and understands very well and which I modestly claim I recognise and to which the Government aspire.

We are looking for resources to put to patients. The hon. Member for Birkenhead wanted to know whether the Government are satisfied that privatisation has increased the standard of service. I cannot answer that globally, because there are so many contracts. The great majority are in-house — the same people are involved — and consist of similar teams to those to which the hon. Member for Brent, South referred. These teams are producing the tenders and are winning many of them. We make sure that that is done on a fair and level basis. We have had to issue guidance on that. I am glad that that has been done and copies of the guidance are available in the Library.

We must be clear. The suggestion seems to be that before the policy was introduced—it is not a startlingly new policy, as it is now about two years old—all was perfect sweetness and light. The impression is that everything was clean before and the sister wiped her finger on the surface and nothing came away. Hon. Gentlemen will know that that was not the case. If they do not know that, they should talk, as I have done, to the ladies of the WRVS, who work in hospitals all over the country. They will tell hon. Gentlemen that standards were falling. What about the Wakefield inquiry and the problems at Stanley Royd? Appalling things went on there. Were they due to privatisation and to an outside contractor? Of course they were not.

We should not accept that everything is wonderful in the public sector because everything is devoted to the common good and that no supervision or management is necessary, or that everything is bad in the private sector. Each sector has its problems, and each requires its own management.

I must make it clear that, before the contents of a bid are agreed, health authorities must draw up careful specifications, and consult carefully with all those concerned, including the staff side. They will write into contracts a whole variety of additional points, including the provision of flowers in the wards or whatever. There are perfectly good opportunities to ensure that those standards are monitored, and monitored they are. In some cases fines have been imposed on contracting companies where those standards have not been met.

I remind the House that we are considering the expenditure of nearly £1 billion on three areas. Savings to the end of September were running at about £29 million a year, and we shall look for more up-to-date figures shortly. Certainly those savings are worth while and are going back into the NHS for patient care. I hope that the hon. Members for Birkenhead and for Brent, South will be prepared to look more favourably at that, given their known concern for the care of patients.

I was at a loss, as I often am, to discover the particular view of the hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye (Mr. Kennedy), charming though he is. He was in favour of savings, the economic use of resources, the community, team spirit, and something which I think he called "patriotism". I, too, am in favour of all that. That is splendid. However, I was not sure whether he was in favour of privatisation.

Mr. Kennedy: I made the point extremely clearly, and it stuck in my mind because I noticed nods from both sides of the House, and I thought I saw a look of comprehension on the Minister's face. That shows how beguiling he can be. I said that if we wanted efficiency and savings to be ploughed into patient care, as we all do, the most sensible policy was to allow health authorities to decide on the most prudent, commonsense standard and nature of delivery of service in their area. I mentioned my constituency, where a privatised service makes no sense because we have no competition as it is such a remote part. Therefore, the service must be in-house. I cannot understand why the Minister cannot comprehend my point, although I can understand the Whip not comprehending it, as he was not present.

Mr. Whitney: I am glad to welcome the hon. Gentleman on board our basic policy of devolving responsibility to health authorities. However, that does not imply a complete abandonment of policies from the centre, because the Government are responsible for taxpayers' money. The hon. Gentleman may never have that experience, but central Government are responsible for allocations. He cannot get away with the easy happy-to-agree-with platitude of having as much local autonomy as possible, and team spirit.

Mr. Frank Field: The Minister said that he welcomed the hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye (Mr. Kennedy) on board for his policy of delegating power, but that is the opposite of what the Government have done. Will the Minister tell us where he stands? Is he 100 per cent. behind the Tory-controlled Wirral health authority, which wrote to him deploring the fact that the Government were forcing it to privatise a cleaning service? Do the Government believe in local control, or in "daddy knows best", as we have seen tonight? I suspect that the latter is their philosophy.

Mr. Whitney: The hon. Gentleman was a little too quick to intervene. He intervened halfway through my remarks and failed to hear the second part, which is that the Government dispense such huge sums as £17 billion and so must strike a balance. Our policy makes it clear that we believe that competitive tendering provides more money for the NHS, and so for patient care. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for providing the striking example of Barking health authority, which produced a 60 per cent. saving in one small area for patient care.

Mr. Kennedy: We are overstaying our welcome, but the Minister accused me of wanting it both ways. He then gave us a big lecture about decentralisation and said "On the other hand, we are expending vast sums of taxpayers' money and must have responsibility". Will he come off the fence and tell us whether he is wet or dry? What is he saying? Does he believe in devolved powers or not?

Hon. Members: Dry.

Mr. Whitney: I am grateful to my hon. Friends for identifying where I stand on that spectrum. I am still at a loss to know whether the hon. Gentleman supports the

Government in our concept that competitive tendering is producing good results for the NHS. To the end of September 1985 it produced annual savings of £29 million. If we had followed the hon. Gentleman's "hands-off" policy, that saving would not have been made, and £29 million would not have been available for patient care.

I have detained the House for longer than I intended, because of our stimulating exchanges, but I do not wish to sit down until I have answered the points raised by the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman). As is customary from the Front Bench, she produced a shopping list of expenditure which we were invited to consider. She suggested that great damage had been done. I offer the House some figures which will show that the hon. Lady is somewhat misguided about the impact of Government policies on personal social services since 1979.

Expenditure on the NHS has increased in real terms by more than 20 per cent., and the House knows the figures for the increase in patient care. At the same time, similar increases have occurred in the coverage of social services. Local authority personal social service expenditure between 1978-79 and 1984-85 increased by 19 per cent. in real terms. The number of social workers increased by no less than 25 per cent. The impression that some terrible harm has been done to social services does poor justice to the way in which local authorities have managed their affairs, given the significant increases in real terms both in financial and human resources.

Ms. Harman: Does the Minister accept that the increase in spending on social services can barely keep pace with the enormous increase in demand, which I outlined, and that the increase in spending is largely attributable to Labour local authorities refusing to accept the Government's strictures to make cuts? The Minister cannot have it both ways, and both claim the credit for an increase in spending and seek to make cuts. He will undoubtedly hope that rate capping will bring an end to that increased spending which Labour councils have valiantly maintained.

Mr. Whitney: I am ready to agree that too many Labour councils have had to be rate capped because of the increase in their local authority's spending. Such an increase is not necessarily spending on personal social services. It may well be on newsletters for strange sects, minority groups or whatever. The figures show that personal social services have increased by 19 per cent. and the number of social workers has increased by no less than 25 per cent.

Mr. Pavitt: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way, and I am sure that he will forgive me. Such global figures never look the same in our own patch. My authority is rate capped. We have more social workers, but the demand for them is fantastically much higher. We had the tragic case of child abuse—the Minister has seen the report — of Jasmine Beckford. If the Minister goes through the report—the result of that case—he will see that there were insufficient funds available during the period of rate capping. More social workers are needed for child abuse cases.

Mr. Whitney: I am sure the hon. Gentleman will agree that the tragic and desperate case of Jasmine Beckford and the other awful cases have nothing to do with a shortage of resources. The tragic case of Jasmine Beckford was due to failure of supervision and failure of management. It was certainly nothing to do with a shortage of resources.

The hon. Member for Peckham dwelt at some length on the question of providing more home helps. We agree that there should be more home helps. I am therefore glad to take the credit for the fact that since we came to power there has been an increase of 13 per cent. in the number of home helps.

I was extremely puzzled by the title of the motion, which refers to carers and the privatisation of welfare services, because the foundation of our welfare services continues to be based on statutory provision — the National Health Service and the social services departments in the local authorities. Opposition Members are disturbed by the fact that we are seeking to use those services more economically, to generate more services to be used for those who require care — patients in hospitals or the young or elderly—and by the fact that we are looking forward in the personal social services area to mobilising society. We do not wish to see care left entirely to statutory provision and we are introducing methods whereby we can support individual carers — friends, the family and voluntary organisations.

Government support to voluntary organisations has increased from £7·5 million to no less than £30 million. The hon. Member for Peckham objected to the fact that our increase in the amount of social security spending on residential care provision has increased—I shall use her figure, which I shall accept for the moment—by 2,000 per cent. The hon. Lady seemed to find that objectionable.

We have a fine record in combining the benefits of state provision — we have increased that provision, as has been shown by the magnitude of the figures—and at the same time we have created a framework whereby the people need not rely solely on the state, solely on the local authorities, which is what the Labour party looks for. We have brought about greater co-operation and co-ordination of provisions. We are proud of that record.

Education (Parental Choice)

8.54 pm

Mr. Michael Portillo (Enfield, Southgate): I am pleased to have the opportunity to bring to the House's attention the subject of parental choice in education. This has necessitated a change in my plans for this evening because I had intended to go to Fulham to lend my support at the adoption meeting of the Conservative candidate for the forthcoming by-election, the excellent Mr. Matthew Carrington. Nonetheless, it is a greater opportunity for me to address the House on this subject. I am gratified to see such a good attendance on the Tory side of the House—a large and spontaneous attendance by my hon. Friends——

Mr. Robert B. Jones (Hertfordshire, West): Does not the Conservative attendance contrast with the total lack of alliance representation? Does this not reveal their lack of interest in education, especially in parental choice?

Mr. Portillo: The only point that I will make in response to my hon. Friend is that he was charitable in not mentioning that the Labour party has only one representative in the Chamber.

This subject is of tremendous importance. It has moved close to the top of our political agenda for a number of reasons. The more we analyse the economic problems that the country suffers, and the difficulties of British industry in competition, the more we are driven to conclude that the shortcomings of our education system must have a great deal to do with that problem. Sadly, there are large numbers of young people emerging from our schools today with no paper qualifications. However, they also lack many of the basic life skills that would equip them for later life and for employment. That has left British industry, and the Government through the Manpower Services Commission, with the tremendous task of having to train young people to equip them for the jobs that are available. This accounts for the substantial paradox with which we have to grapple in many places where there co-exists a high rate of unemployment and a high level of vacancies. That is true of Fulham, an area which I have come to know well.

On a recent visit to Japan I was struck by what one could almost term the obsession of Japanese parents with the subject of education. It is evident that Japanese parents are willing to make tremendous sacrifices so that their children can have a good education. If one attempts to account for the fact that that country is successful industrially and economically, one is driven to the conclusion that there is a striking correlation between a high degree of motivation among the people for improving their education and the success of their industry.

This intense interest in education is also witnessed in Britain. As I go round my constituency I am struck by the number of people for whom education is the most important topic in their lives. Among the matters with which they expect politicians to deal, education is the most important. The tremendous concern that parents feel for their children's education is not limited to any one class. It is certainly not limited to the middle classes. It is something which is of interest to people of all sorts. They are willing to make tremendous sacrifices and to undergo hardship so that their children can be given a better education.

Today, many of those parents are concerned, worried and anxious about what is going on. The basis of that anxiety for many of them is that they feel that their children are not getting as good an education as they got. It is surprising that as our country continues to grow economically and makes steps forward in many ways, none the less, parents feel that their children are not doing as well in school, nor learning as much, as they did. They are concerned at the lack of basic skills taught to their children, and at the lack of discipline and poorer results, and are anxious about whether their children are well equipped for going into employment. Some people in education will try to tell those parents that what they perceive to be the truth is not so. Those parents may be told that they should not judge by examination results and that there is much more to education than examination results, and children should be allowed to learn at their own pace what they want, and when they want.

A vital step needs to be taken. Parents should be supplied with a much more objective measurement of the achievements of schools and of the output of education. One of the problems that parents face in arriving at judgments is that our public examinations tend to be grade-related—that is to say, the number of children getting a pass at a particular level will tend to be a constant percentage year by year. That is why I am so full of praise for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science for the initiative that he has taken in proposing the introduction of the GCSE, which will provide us with more objective criteria. I urge my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Department to build on that, so that parents can be equipped with better quality measurements of what is going on in education.

It is incredible how difficult it is today for parents to obtain the information on which to base their judgments and choices. My mind is driven to something that I read in *The London Standard* on 7 March about ILEA. The article said:

> "The authority's highly-respected research and statistics branch has compiled a list showing how schools are performing, making allowances for the number of bright, average and below average children each school starts out with."

That is important research, which would be valuable to parents. However, *The London Standard* goes on to say:

> "The document . . . is on the ILEA's Top Secret List, with access only by a few officials and politicians . . . It is part of the secrecy rife at the ILEA."

That is the sort of information that parents should have a right to know and it is important not only for parents, but for the Government, who have rightly been arguing that the important thing in education is not merely the money that goes in but the quality that comes out. If we are to counter the simplistic idea that we can measure the standard of education by the amount of money put into it, we must have better information, and I congratulate the Government on what they have done so far, and urge them to go further.

My thesis is that we can improve education in the state sector by giving parents more information, more rights and more control over their children's education. The traditional strength of our state system has been due to two factors. The first was the absolute quality of that education, which in the post-war years was undoubted. The second was the chance that it gave children of all classes and from deprived backgrounds to fulfil their potential.

Recently, I was disturbed to read in a speech delivered by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary the Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn), speaking in his constituency, figures for the entry of working class children to universities, expressed as a percentage of the overall entrants. In 1955, the figure was 25 per cent. and it rose in 1968 to 35 per cent. That was an encouraging rise in a fairly short time. Unfortunately, since then the picture has become much less satisfactory. By 1973, the figure was down to 23 per cent., and by 1981 it was down to little more than 19 per cent. That latter contrasts with the much higher figure achieved as early as the 1920s. It is sad to think that in this respect we are in a worse position than we were more than half a century ago.

It would be absurd of anybody to try to blame this situation on teachers. Schools are on the whole extremely anxious to respond to the needs of the nation and the wishes of the parents, but it is difficult for individual teachers and schools to do so. In the present system, they do not have the flexibility or autonomy that would enable them to do so.

My hon. Friend the Minister of State, who will be replying to the debate, in a recent speech to the Association of Principals of Sixth Form Colleges, made an interesting comment. He said that our education system was both national and fragmented. To the extent that it is national and nationalised, I think that it suffers from some of the classic faults of institutions in our country that are nationalised—that is to say, a lack of responsiveness to its users and perhaps too much concern for the ideas, the comfort and the security of the people engaged in it professionally.

The starkest way of putting it is to ask whether it is not a great irony that our education system should have two interests, the local or national Government on the one hand, and the trade unions on the other, either one of which can make tremendous changes in the education system, bringing it shuddering to a halt, with no ability in the hands of the parents to keep the education system moving in the direction in which they wish to see it go. I conclude from all that that we need to give parents more choice. As I shall explain, the very fact of providing parents with more choice is likely to lead to substantial improvements in the education system.

We have certainly taken some important steps forward. The Education Act 1980, which introduced the concept of choice, is an important landmark. I pay tribute to my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Warrington, South (Mr. Carlisle) and his colleagues of the day for that substantial advance.

Most of us on these Tory Benches might agree that we need to go further in making more effective the choice that parents are able to make. In many areas there may be only one school that a large number of parents would wish to put down as their first choice. That school may rapidly fill up with first choices, and then what happens? There is nowhere in the area parents can send their children except to the schools which, for presumably good reasons, they did not wish to put top of their list of choices.

The longer-term aim should be to direct the resources towards those schools that are able to attract children through the choices made by their parents. That will mean establishing some sort of relationship between the number of children in the school and the resources given to it by the local authority. I am prepared to admit that putting that into practice in many ways may be a messy process. It will involve having crash building programmes in the good schools so that they can go on accommodating the number of children wishing to go there. In addition, teachers will have to be more mobile. They will have to be prepared to go from school to school as the choices build up in favour of the better schools, and as parents withdraw.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): Does the hon. Gentleman not see that there might be some problem as to how large a school can get? He may feel that the resources are available for this crash building programme, but how large would he let a school get?

Mr. Portillo: It will be a very shocking idea probably to the hon. Gentleman, but I should like a school to get as large as the parents would like it to be. That may mean building on the site or on different sites, taking over buildings used for other purposes, taking over school buildings that are closing in the less popular schools, or amalgamations. I think what the hon. Gentleman is worried about is not the practicality but the implication of the scheme.

Dr. Keith Hampson (Leeds, North-West): All of us, have surely had experience of split-site schools causing enormous problems. Furthermore, from our own constituencies, and indeed from the history of the public schools, we all know that a great deal hangs on the quality of, above all, the headmaster. If my hon. Friend is going to put all his resources into schools that are, as it were, transistorily popular, what happens when the headmaster changes or it becomes unpopular?

Mr. Portillo: I respect the breadth of experience from which my hon. Friend speaks. However, I wish to get a little further in my speech.

One of the results of all this is not just that some schools will grow infinitely and others will close. This scheme is worth pursuing because it will tend to drag up the worst quality schools towards the quality of the better schools. Therefore, the reductio ad absurdum to which my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-West (Dr. Hampson) has referred will not necessarily occur.

Mr. Michael Forsyth (Stirling): Does my hon. Friend believe that parents will want to uproot their children from a particular school simply because there has been a change of headmaster? There would have to be a fairly catastrophic change in headmaster to produce that kind of result. Most parents would not wish to move their children from school to school because they realise that this creates problems for children.

Mr. Portillo: My hon. Friend has made a valuable point. However, I hope that he will agree with me that as more power and responsibility are given to parents one expects them to have a greater say in the selection of headmasters, which will eventually have an effect upon the quality of headmasters.

I should like schools to be able more readily to respond to the wishes of parents. I do not believe that that will be to the detriment of schoolteachers. They have almost as much to gain from this kind of approach as do parents. If teachers are better able to respond to the wishes of parents by providing the kind of education that parents wish to be provided, I believe that this will lead not to a diminution but to an increase in morale.

When I replied to my hon. Friend the Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth) I made the point that I wished

[Mr. Portillo]

parents to have a greater say on boards of governors in the selection of headmasters. I am pleased to see that the Education Bill makes provision for more parent-governors and for greater powers to be given to them. However, parent-governors will still be fairly heavily outnumbered by other governors. I think that the reason why the points that I made a few moments ago aroused such indignation on the Opposition Benches was the idea that if a school is popular it should be allowed to grow but that if it is less popular it should be allowed to contract is anathema to certain Labour authorities. Experience in the Inner London education authority is the exact opposite of that idea.

I shall quote again from *The London Standard* of 6 March. It reveals that a leaked document ranks schools in the ILEA area according to their popularity—according to whether parents have placed them as their first, second or third choice. The press report reveals that the leaked ILEA document shows that intakes at some very popular and oversubscribed schools are being cut while other schools that are half empty have escaped unscathed. The pattern, therefore, is that if a school is popular it is more likely to have its intake cut but that if a school is half empty its intake is unlikely to be cut. That may account for some of the indignation of the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett).

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): Is not the answer to the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett)—this is a nettle that my hon. Friend will have to grasp—that the obvious corollary of parents being allowed to choose successful schools is that the successful schools must be free to select the best candidates?

Mr. Portillo: My hon. Friend makes an interesting point, but I have a feeling that he intends to develop it when he makes his speech. Some of the ideas that I have put forward this evening were canvassed in a document called "No Turning Back." I am pleased to note that some of the authors of that document are in their places this evening, and I expect that later they may try to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I urge the Government to give careful thought to the points that are made in that document and to consider whether or not they can move in that direction. So many of the building blocks are already in place. So many of the thoughts contained in that document appear already to be in the mind of the Government. Again I refer to the Education Bill, which contains many excellent features. I have been struck particularly by clause 23, which allows for the devolution of more financial responsibility to schools. Experiments are taking place in that direction in some places. We hear much talk of expanding the assisted places scheme to which I say amen. We also hear talk of making direct grants to technical schools and to inner city primary schools. I urge the Government to pull together all these strands and to go further with all of them.

My message to my hon. Friend the Minister—he may hear the same message from some of my hon. Friends—is: trust parents; give them responsibility and they will prove to be responsible. I would rather rely on the collective wisdom of parents than on the accumulated experience of civil servants, educationists and, dare I say, Ministers. Therefore, I repeat my message to my hon. Friend that he should trust the parents.

9.15 pm

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): I am grateful for the fact that I have been called in the debate and I congratulate the hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr. Portillo) on his choice of subject. When we discuss a wide range of subjects on the Consolidated Fund Bill, I am always amused, because the Bill consists of only one page. No doubt people listening to the debate might wonder why we sit all through the night discussing such a small Bill, but the amounts involved are £155,484,000 in clause 1 and £1,032,019,000 in clause 2. As those sums affect many areas in Wales I am privileged to put on record what is happening in education in Mid Glamorgan and in parental choice in Wales.

In Wales, as distinct from England, there is a further problem because some parents who are Welsh speakers prefer their children to attend Welsh schools. The education committee of Mid Glamorgan is one of three that were formed after the reorganisation of local authority boundaries in 1973. The former Glamorgan county education authority was renowned as one of the most progressive in the whole of the United Kingdom.

Since the election of the Conservative Government in 1979, tremendous restrictions have been placed on local authorities, particularly in regard to education. In Wales, as in most of the country, there has been a gradual reduction in standards and in facilities provided in schools, such as books and desks. In my constituency some schools have still got outside toilets. On 4 March I asked the Minister, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Miss Maynard), about the number of schools with outside toilets. We were surprised to receive this reply:

> "The report A Study of School Building published jointly by the Department and the Welsh Office in 1977 found that there were at that time some 7,000 primary and some 600 secondary schools with outside toilets. Of these, about 6,000 primary and about 600 secondary schools had their oldest accommodation built prior to 1946. The Department is currently carrying out a sample survey of the improvement needs of the existing stock of school buildings. This will include information on improvements to toilet accommodation where this is below regulation standards."—[*Official Report*, 4 March 1986; Vol. 93, c. *105*.]

It is time that money was spent on improving standards in schools, especially in Mid Glamorgan which has suffered under the Government's funding priorities.

I should like to put the record straight regarding an article that was published in a Bridgend local paper. The matter was raised by a friend, county councillor Jeff Jones, at a meeting of the sub-committee on 21 September. He suggested that the article on representation on school governing bodies also referred to a decline in educational standards in Mid Glamorgan schools. The report was criticised, and the chairman of the education committee, councillor Dennis Philpen, who is my constituency party chairman, was rather surprised that the matter should have been raised as the Mid Glamorgan education authority had prepared a report on the subject.

The statistics show that, in 1980, 30·3 per cent. of school leavers left without an O-level or a CSE grade, that 30·7 per cent. left in 1981, that 27·6 per cent. left in 1982, that 27 per cent. left in 1983 and that 25·4 per cent. left in 1984. Whereas 75·2 per cent. of the fifth year group was entered for examinations in 1980, 78 per cent. was entered in 1984. In 1980, 19·6 per cent. of school leavers left with five or more O-levels and 24·4 per cent. left with the same number in 1984.

Those statistics show a significant improvement in public examination performance by Mid Glamorgan pupils during that five-year period. There is no evidence of a decline such as is referred to in the Bridgend local paper. When considering such statistics, it is essential to remember that CSE examinations in Wales are held on the same days in June and July as the GCE examinations. That is often forgotten when critics point to better examination performances by pupils in English schools. In England, CSE examinations are held in April and May.

In some subjects with an examination syllabus similar to the GCE, candidates in England can and do enter for CSE and GCE examinations. It is also possible for pupils in England who leave school at Whitsun in their fifth year to enter the CSE examination. That is not so in Wales. The result is that a high proportion of the fifth year group in schools in Wales—the pre-Whitsun leavers—cannot sit either the CSE or the GCE examinations. In 1980, 30 per cent. of the fifth year group were pre-Whitsun school leavers in Mid Glamorgan. That proportion fell to 23·6 per cent. in 1984.

It is clearly unjust and misleading to make comparisons between Wales and England and to say that educational standards are lower in Wales on the grounds that more pupils than in England leave school without one pass in GCE or CSE. A large proportion of pupils in Wales have left school before the examinations are held.

It is also, of course, equally misleading to make such a comparison between Mid Glamorgan and other education authorities in Wales. Despite the attempts made by Mid Glamorgan head teachers and careers officers to persuade pupils to stay on at school until the end of the summer term, still in 1984 over 23 per cent. of Mid Glamorgan pupils left before Whitsun. The rate in other Welsh authorities is lower.

The Mid Glamorgan statistics, of course, reflect the social and economic difficulties faced by many Mid Glamorgan communities. I well remember a recent report to the Mid Glamorgan planning committee in which the county planning officer reported on a research survey carried out for England and Wales by the county planning officer for Durham. It demonstrated the level of social deprivation in each district council area in England and Wales and found that three of the six districts in Mid Glamorgan—Cynon Valley, Merthyr and Rhondda—had the worst deprivation in England and Wales, while the other three districts were all at what was described as "the deprived end" of average conditions. It is essential to take this into account when making any judgment on pupil examination performance in Mid Glamorgan schools.

There is now no doubt that there is a clear association between the socio-economic background of pupils in local education authority schools and their average levels of attainment in public examinations. Statistics Bulletin 13/84 published in November 1984 by the Department of Education and Science gives the results of a research analysis of statistics for the maintained schools in England. This clearly shows that at least 70 per cent. of the variation between authorities in their pupils' examination achievements was statistically associated with variations in the values of socio-economic background measures.

The socio-economic background indicators used in the survey were drawn from the 1981 census and were the same as those used in the grant-related expenditure calculations for the rate support grant. Examples are: (i) children living in households whose head is a semi-skilled or unskilled manual worker, described subsequently as the low socio-economic group; (ii) children in one-parent families; (iii) children in families with four or more children; (iv) children living in households receiving supplementary benefit.

In addition, the following socio-economic variables were used by the DES statisticians in their analysis: *(a)* the population density in the authority; *(b)* the 16 to 18-year-old population density; *(c)* the rate of unemployment in the 16-18 age group; *(d)* the rate of unemployment in all age groups; *(e)* the infant mortality rate; and *(f)* poor housing.

These socio-economic indicators are the same ones as were used by the county of Durham in its survey of social deprivation in England and Wales. Although the Department of Education and Science Statistical Bulletin deals only with the schools and local education authorities in England, I am confident that its findings apply with even more weight to the schools and authorities in Wales, particularly Mid Glamorgan. The sub-committee was well aware, for example, of the recent reports of the Cynon Valley district council on the state of the housing in its area and of the Mid Glamorgan area health authority's concern about the high infant mortality rate in the county.

In paragraph 35 of its conclusions, the Statistical Bulletin is explicit about the dangers of making simple judgments about pupils' examination performance and notes that

> "All of the latest analyses have indicated that the social background, and to a much lesser extent the school-based and financial factors, provide a statistically significant explanation of the variation between local authorities in the levels of examination success of school leavers."

I have always been aware of the dangers of making unjust comparisons between schools on the basis of examination performance. The Department's Statistical Bulletin has also demonstrated the unfairness of making similar comparisons between education authorities on the basis of pupils' public examination performance. During the past year or two, local newspapers in South Wales have begun to make such comparisons, as they have been trying to make do for many years between individual schools. However, to make a fair comparison, the socio-economic background of the authority's catchment area must be taken fully into account.

I want the Welsh Office to follow the example of the Department of Education and Science in England and to publish a similar statistical analysis of the association between the socio-economic background of pupils in Welsh education authority schools and their average attainment in public examinations. If the Welsh Office does not do that, unfair judgments and invidious comparisons will continue to be made following each annual publication of school examination results. At the same time, misleading statements and unsupported generalisations will continue to be made about public examination performances in Mid Glamorgan schools.

The House will not need me to remind it that the success of many Mid Glamorgan schools should not be judged by a superficial consideration of public examination results. We must also bear in mind the many achievements of Mid Glamorgan pupils in music, art, drama, design, crafts, technology, games, athletics, many other sporting activities and, last but not least, in their involvement in the

[Mr. Ray Powell]

communities in which they live and the support and help which they give unstintingly to the elderly and the disadvantaged.

Mr. Michael Brown (Brigg and Cleethorpes): The burden of the hon. Gentleman's argument—although I do not accept it, I understand it—is that one should not have sole regard to public examination achievement when judging a school and that other social factors and social deprivation should be taken into account. However, will the hon. Gentleman consider why Highbury Grove comprehensive school in Islington—an area of great social deprivation—achieves considerable excellence in examination results?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): I remind the House that interventions must be brief.

Mr. Powell: I accept that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but it was a nice breather for me. I shall not stray down the path of discussing Islington, because I am worried about the future of schools in Mid Glamorgan, and especially about this report. Social deprivation in Mid Glamorgan is as bad as it is in any other area. In Maesteg, unemployment is about 45 per cent. Similar unemployment throughout Mid Glamorgan forces many social problems upon local authorities.

The inspectors of education produced a report on a survey of curricular provision for low-attaining pupils in the Mid Glamorgan local education authority. It deals in some detail with the great difficulties that beset the local authority. The report reminds the local authority that

"since the late 1970s the standard of work of pupils of modest and lower academic ability in Welsh secondary schools and the quality of their learning programmes has attracted widespread attention and interest within the education service, within schools, in local education authorities and H.M. Inspectorate as well as at Ministerial level within the Welsh Office."

Some years ago I shared this concern and interest, and felt that urgent action should be taken to deal with the problem. Her Majesty's inspectors summarised what has been done in Mid Glamorgan as follows:

"The Mid Glamorgan LEA has been active since about 1980 in the field of curriculum development for less able pupils in years IV and V. Teacher working groups were established in the Autumn Term of 1981 and, some months later, produced a framework of courses. Pilot studies commenced in September 1982 in selected schools for a Certificate of Education (CoE) course of 2 years duration comprising initially 8 components of grouped or inter-related studies: communication studies, numeracy, social education, physical education, leisure studies, science at work, practical and creative studies and vocational studies. Development work was also extended to embrace moderation and assessment; much emphasis was placed on the assessment of course work, while the final examination was timed for the spring period before the first eligible fifth year pupils left school.

By the time the first cohort took their examinations in 1984, certification had been taken over by the Welsh Joint Education Committee, though the LEA continued to be responsible for the associated curriculum development; few courses have been, and are being added to the original list and the opportunity to provide courses and to have them assessed has been extended to the whole of Wales.

Additional resources of staff (one or 2 per school) and capitation allowances have provided for the introduction of the courses. The LEA has also supported working groups and panel meetings, and the certificate courses have become an important focus of in-service activity within the county. Co-ordinators have been appointed in each school and have helped to ensure ready access to materials and courses and the effective functioning of assessment and moderation procedures.

Although the initial concept was to provide a group of balanced and inter-related courses, in practice the certificate has been incorporated into the existing curriculum of most schools on a single-subject basis—though of course many pupils take a wide range of the courses, in some instances comprising nearly all their curriculum. The 1985 subject entries for the CoE numbered some 17,000 and candidates were being prepared in every school in the county."

I could go on at some length about this question of education in Mid Glamorgan and its effect in Wales, but I know that there are quite a number of Members on the Conservative Benches who wish to speak. It is a pity that this was not a three-hour debate——

Hon. Members: It is.

Mr. Powell: If it is, I will go on. Seriously, a number of other hon. Members wish to take part. Because I am the only Welsh Member present, I have taken the liberty of extending my time so as to be able to present the difficulties and problems in Wales, and in Mid Glamorgan in particular.

I am glad to have had the opportunity to put all this on the record and to correct a fault in an article, published by the *Glamorgan Gazette*, from one of the lesser breeds in Mid Glamorgan, the only Conservative county councillor for the Mid Glamorgan area, David Unwin. By putting this on the record I hope to exonerate the Mid Glamorgan local education authority of any guilt conveyed by misguided representations made to the press, and enable the parents of pupils in Mid Glamorgan to understand that if they have a choice in Mid Glamorgan they have it where the education authority is thinking closely and sincerely about the future education of their children.

9.39 pm

Mr. Alan Howarth (Stratford-on-Avon): There is a problem in our education system. There is extensive dissatisfaction with the education provision available. At primary level all too often an ideology of child-centred education has been advanced to the detriment of education in basic skills in the three Rs and discipline. That is certainly the view taken by parents. It is widely held by parents that at almost every level too many teachers tend to denigrate good standards of learning and discipline as somehow bourgeois and Victorian.

There is anxiety about standards in many comprehensive schools, and indeed there is statistical underpinning to support that anxiety. The data of the Department of Education and Science, as set out in statistical bulletin 13/84, led the Department to predict an increase of about 15 per cent. in the proportion of pupils obtaining five or more O-levels or CSEs grade 1 in local education authorities with a fully selective system of schools—that is to say, 25 per cent. of pupils in grammar schools and 75 per cent. in secondary modern schools—compared with pupils in local education authorities with a fully comprehensive system of schools when all other factors, including social class and other social factors, are held constant.

Therefore, the DES expects better examination results from local education authorities with selective schools than from those with comprehensive schools. Yet the huge majority of the nation's children are in comprehensive schools. That disturbs a great many people, I think with justification.

Parents are dissatisfied and, if statistical evidence is needed to demonstrate that, it can perhaps be drawn from

the "choice in welfare" study carried out under the auspices of the Institute of Economic Affairs in 1979. Research based on national quota samples found that the proportion of people favouring freedom for individual parents to contract out from state to private education had doubled from 27 per cent. in 1963 to 60 per cent. in 1978. Many of us deeply regret the divide that has been so long established in Britain's education system between the maintained and the private sector. It is a disturbing phenomenon to find that, increasingly, parents are looking to opt out of the mainstream provision of education. That must give us all cause for concern.

A letter published in *The Times* on 25 February expressed, in a representative way, the anxiety of industrialists and those concerned with the development of technical skills under our education system at present standards. Six professors of engineering signed a letter which said:

"we are concerned at the near-collapse in our schools' teaching of the syntax of English. The power of our language, for fine distinctions and complex arguments, results only from the systematic teaching of precision, and engineers and scientists are often dismayed to find that the present-day school-leaver cannot adequately wield that power."

Why should there be that problem? I suspect that it arises in part because the public sector provision of education is virtually a monopoly and has increasingly taken on the characteristics of all monopoly producers. It becomes, to an unfortunate degree, self-serving and perhaps insufficiently regarding of the real concerns of customers.

My hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr. Portillo) rightly congratulated the then Secretary of State and his ministerial colleagues on the introduction of that worthwhile piece of legislation, the Education Act 1980. It marked a useful start along a road upon which I hope we shall travel further towards the creation of opportunities for choice by parents. That useful start has been followed up recently by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's proposals for reforms of the school curriculum and examination system.

For the first time—it seems extraordinary that it was the first time—the Education Act 1980 gave parents the right to express a preference for the schools which their children might attend. However, the Act contains one important qualification which, as subsequent experience has shown, tended to undermine its excellent intention. It heavily qualified the right of parents to exercise a preference by making it subject to the provision of efficient education or the efficient use of resources. As a result of that qualification, it has been all too easy for local education authorities to override the preferences of parents. In a written answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Mr. Fallon) on 4 February, my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State said:

"there were about 9,000 parental appeals against school admission decisions in 1985, of which some 4,000 were decided in the parents' favour".—[*Official Report*, 4 February 1986; Vol. 91, c. *113*.]

The real amount of choice that it is possible for parents to exercise has remained very limited.

At the same time, it is doubtful that we are getting the value for money that we ought to be getting from the considerable expenditure that is going into education. Many people are anxious that we cannot spend enough money and are not putting enough resources into education. Of course it would always be desirable to put more resources into education, but we have to ask some searching questions as to whether we are obtaining the best value for money out of the resources that are being put into education.

It is an unsatisfactory feature of the education system that more non-teaching staff are employed in it than teaching staff. The pattern of funding and of accountability in schools is little short of chaotic. My hon. Friend the Minister may agree with that. The Department of Education and Science is not truly in control of overall funding. Funding is almost a by-product of an annual negotiation between the Treasury and the Department of the Environment, with the Manpower Services Commission as an important tangential factor. The Department of Education and Science is held politically responsible for the quality of educational provision while not controlling overall funding and not employing teachers and while the organisation of schools locally and the detailed allocation of resources under the Education Act 1944 is a matter for the local education authority. Therefore, the Department which is held responsible has frustratingly limited powers in practice. My hon. Friend the Minister may agree with that to some extent.

Some strange things have happened over the past 20 years. I know that the grammar schools were highly regarded. They were perhaps the finest repository of centuries of educational tradition, experience and excellence. However, they were swept away in the late 1960s and in the 1970s in the name of an educational theory. I know how popular grammar schools are because in my own constituency a great rearguard action was fought in the wake of the 1976 legislation of the previous Labour Government which would have abolished the grammar schools.

In Warwickshire the grammar schools survived. Unhappily, Warwickshire changed political control in the county council elections last year. The ruling Labour and Liberal coalition has set out finally to extinguish those great schools. There are three grammar schools in my constituency. There is the King Edward school in Stratford, which is the school Shakespeare attended. That might be a reason for assuming that the school is worth preserving. Certainly, its enormous continuing popularity and academic excellence would justify its preservation. There is Shottery school for girls and Alcester grammar school in my constituency and there is tremendous local attachment to those schools. I do not think that when some misguided electors voted Liberal a year ago they realised that they were voting for the abolition of those first-rate schools to which they are so attached.

Mr. Leigh: Is my hon. Friend aware that, of the 150 grammar schools remaining, three are in my constituency? Last week, we managed to save Queen Elizabeth high school in Gainsborough, but only thanks to the good electors of Lincolnshire, who kept a Conservative county council in control last May. Does that not underline how vital it is that people should turn out to vote Conservative in county council elections so that they retain the best elements of the selective system?

Mr. Howarth: My hon. Friend has spoken some wise words. I appreciate what he has said. There are only 150 grammar schools left, and we should cherish them. No doubt they are not all perfect, but we must take enormous care to ensure that parents' preferences are heeded and that

[Mr. Howarth]

ideologically motivated local authorities do not succeed in simply sweeping grammar schools away because they disapprove of them on theoretical grounds.

The technical schools were late to flourish under the Butler dispensation. There is an excellent example in Bath in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Minister of State, but technical schools have almost entirely disappeared as well.

It is interesting to contrast what has been happening in other countries during the period in which we have lost our technical schools. In Germany, parents have the right to choose whether their children should go to a grammar school, a technical school, a secondary modern, or its equivalent. Parents have increasingly opted to take advantage of technical schools. Some 50 per cent. of German school leavers are leaving technical schools and are, on average, two years ahead of our school leavers in mathematical attainment. There is a similar differential in Japan, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Southgate referred.

I said that there is a problem. Our sense of crisis has been precipitated by the teachers' dispute, which has been running for a year in England and Wales and for longer in Scotland. It has been marked by deeply damaging disruption to schools, by irreparable harm to children in their preparation for public examinations and, more profoundly, by loss of respect of students for many teachers. Our schools exist in an atmosphere in which parents are angry and members of the teaching profession are ashamed. It is dispiriting—indeed, so dispiriting that we cannot accept it as a prospect for the future—that the National Union of Teachers and the National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers are holding out the prospect of further disruption. Under the present administrative and negotiating arrangements that is only too real a prospect.

I suspect that the reason the system does not seem to be working is that it has been captured by the producers. Education is controlled by educationists — educational academics, and bureaucrats and the activists in education trade unions. I do not disparage the excellence in our education system, but in a producer-dominated system —as in the nationalised industries and in monopolies of all sorts—dedication to the customer tends not to be the paramount quality. The right direction for reform must be to enable families to recapture control of education. I believe that we can reliably look to parents to apply continuing pressure for good standards of learning and discipline in schools. If schools are made accountable to families, once again schools will become in a much more worthwhile sense expressions of local community.

I should like parents to be empowered to exercise choice as purchasers of education in a market place. There are four principal options by which parents might be enfranchised and given the power to choose a system of education. The assisted places scheme was the Government's chosen initiative. That scheme is popular with the independent sector and is no doubt popular with families who have benefited under it. Its weakness is that it puts the emphasis on escape or exit from the system which contains 95 per cent. of the nation's children. It does nothing to overcome the unhappy split between the independent and the maintained sectors. It tends to cream off talented children and therefore weakens the maintained schools. It has not taken off on a large scale and I believe that it does not provide a suitable model for further expansion.

The second option is education credits.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I completely agree with everything that my hon. Friend said about the assisted places scheme and its basic deficiency. Does he not agree that one of the problems with that scheme is that, because it applies only at secondary level, it means that children who have not been to pre-prep schools and so on are at a disadvantage in meeting the entrance requirements?

Mr. Howarth: That is a further weakness of the scheme; I agree with my hon. Friend.

I was talking about the possibility of educational tax credits. It might be argued that it would be an act of simple justice to give credits to those who have paid taxes but who are not benefiting under the maintained provision of education. I am unenthusiastic about that route. It would do nothing to help poor families in the absence of an integrated tax credit system. There would be no benefit under such a system for families who do not pay tax. It would not help provide the resources needed to fund new private schools. I am not enthusiastic about seeing any enlargement of the private sector in contradiction to a maintained sector.

The third option is the educational voucher scheme. That scheme has enormous merit in that it empowers every parent, equally, on behalf of every child, to choose the education for that child in an educational market place. The difficulty with the voucher scheme is that the administrative procedures of issuing vouchers and coping with the paperwork would be clumsy, expensive and awkward.

The fourth possible means of making schools accountable to parents, and the one that I find most attractive, is a system of per capita funding. Under a direct grant scheme, direct grants either from the Department of Education and Science or from the local education authority receiving funds originally from the Department, could flow directly to schools on a capitation basis. That is to say, for each child that the school was able to attract and retain, a certain amount of money would be made available. The merit of that system would be that it would make schools accountable to parents.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: Is the hon. Member aware that most schools get their allowance of resources based on the number of pupils and that the number of teachers is allocated on the basis of the number of pupils in the school? That is the system that applies at present.

Mr. Howarth: There is an important distinction because, under the present system, children are allocated to schools by local education authorities. Under the system that I propose, parents would make their choice of school for the child and the child would attract, as of right, a per capita grant. That is a qualitatively different system. I am not proposing a total upheaval in all respects, but I think that there is an important difference in that my system makes the parent as purchaser sovereign and the state equips each parent to start equal on the starting line.

The Minister of State, Department of Education and Science (Mr. Chris Patten): I would like to clarify what my hon. Friend is saying as it would be interesting to get his point absolutely straight. My hon. Friend seems to be

arguing for a voucher scheme for the maintained sector. That seems to be the distinction between what has previously been discussed when vouchers have been on the table and what my hon. Friend and some of his hon. Friends are talking about now. Is that right?

Mr. Howarth: I am talking not strictly about a voucher scheme but about a scheme whereby every child at a school would be entitled to a certain grant from the state. The availability of the grant could be restricted to children in maintained schools, or extended to all children, regardless of whether they attend maintained or private schools. Either system is possible. At this stage, I am not arguing in favour of one or the other.

I find it attractive that the grant should go to each child, regardless of whether the child attends a maintained or private school because it would blur, and in the end extinguish, the demarcation between private and maintained schools in our system which has been damaging socially and culturally.

Mr. Chris Patten: I am pursuing information rather than trouble. Will my hon. Friend make it clear what the difference is between that proposal and the voucher scheme? I am still a little uncertain about it.

Mr. Howarth: The voucher scheme requires a large administrative apparatus to send parents the voucher, cheque or piece of paper which they present and cash in at the chosen school. The system that I propose is more convenient administratively. The school is entitled to collect the funds according to the number of children attending the school. The distinction is purely administrative. The system that I propose would be cheaper to run and would provide less scope for parents to become muddled by the administration, and to that extent it is preferable. But I do not wish to be dogmatic about the virtues of the per capita system as opposed to the voucher scheme. The important point that they have in common is that they both make schools directly accountable to parents.

I should like to see self-governed schools, owned and ultimately controlled by their governors, who would be trustees. I welcome the Education Bill, but it goes only some way down the road of developing the responsibility of governors. We could usefully go further with governors appointing the head teacher, who would be responsible for education policy, including staff appointments, and a bursar, who would be responsible for the administration and finance of the schools. I should like salaries and pay to be the responsibility of the school, and schools empowered to pay what they believe is appropriate in the local circumstances to attract the staff they need. That would build up the responsibility and sense of self-confidence of schools, and help us to overcome our present acute difficulty of finding teachers in shortage subjects.

Under that system standards would improve because children and resources would gravitate to the better schools, and there would be continuing pressure on all schools to satisfy. In the end, parents would have the sanction of removing their child to another school, if they were unhappy about the school. The organisation of schools would be determined gradually through the operation of supply and demand in an educational market place. As a result, some issues which at present are vexatious would be taken from the realm of political decision-making.

I am thinking, for example, of the question whether village and small schools should survive. That would be resolved by parents deciding whether the advantages to the local community of keeping a small school outweigh the educational disadvantages that it is fashionable to argue are inherent in small schools. The question whether large 2,000-plus comprehensives have a role to play would be determined by parents making their judgment in the light of experience. The question whether there should be magnet or specialist schools would be determined similarly. If the German experience is anything to go by, large numbers of parents would opt for technical schools with strong technical curricula, together with a good grounding in the English language and one foreign language. That is more or less the pattern of the German realschule.

It is offensive that under the present dispensation the permission of a local education authority must be sought before a new denominational school can be established. To judge by the over-subscription of existing denominational schools, many parents would opt for such a school, if they were empowered to make the choice and given the means to put it into effect. They would also opt for other types of new schools.

It would be naive to suggest that there would be no problems in the scheme which I have sketched. Under any system there would still be poor areas and areas of social instability. In any system some children will find themselves in the least popular schools. However, I believe that even those schools will be better because when head teachers are in control of the schools they will be more motivated to run the schools in a manner that pleases the parents. The schools will be accountable to the parents. Indeed, it will be normal for parents to take an active interest, to bring pressure to bear and to exercise responsibility to a far greater extent with regard to their children's education.

I believe there will be a tendency for standards to rise. With the streamlining of administrative costs, more money will be available for schools. On that basis no one should be worse off and many people will be better off. It would be a mark of a mature society that parents should make decisions about the education of their children rather than politicians and bureaucrats. Parental sovereignty in education is a worthy theme to accompany the themes which the Government have already introduced—wider home ownership, wider share ownership and trade union democracy. To give parents power over the education of their children would be profoundly popular and beneficial.

10.6 pm

Mr. Neil Hamilton (Tatton): First, I wish to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr. Portillo) on having the foresight to put in for this debate this evening. It is extremely important for the future of the country. I should like to follow along the lines of my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth), and elaborate some of the cogent points that he put forward.

This evening it is a pity that we do not enjoy the company of the hon. Member for Bow and Poplar (Mr. Mikardo). If that hon. Gentleman were here, I am sure that he would immediately rise to the bait and call me one of those hooligan minor public schoolboys on the Tory benches. However, he would be quite wrong, because, unfortunately for him, I have not had the advantages

[Mr. Neil Hamilton]

enjoyed by the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher), or the hon. Member for Durham, North, (Mr. Radice) Consequently, I do not have a guilt complex about introducing greater choice into the educational system.

By the skin of my teeth, I missed becoming a school contemporary of the right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock). How the course of history might have been altered by exposure to that towering intellect in some of the formative years of my development. This is personal reminiscence. However, I am part of the 95 per cent. of the population who did not have the advantage, or perhaps whose parents did not have the advantage, of being able to select the school to which their children were sent. I know that that 95 per cent. is not enough, however, for Mrs. Shirley Williams and the Social Democrats. She believes not in a 95 per cent. no choice system but in a 100 per cent. no choice system. Mrs. Williams once said—I am not sure whether she has recanted:

"Independence in education is bought at too high a price for the rest of society."

I do not know whether the electors of the city of Cambridge will agree. However, I suspect that we shall have the company of my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Mr. Rhodes James) for many years yet.

Mr. Chris Patten: He will cheer us up.

Mr. Hamilton: I agree he will cheer us up and, as Dr. Johnson put it in connection with someone else, he:

"adds to the gaiety of nations."

It is true that parents in Britain are dissatisfied with the educational system. My hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon pointed out that the Institute of Economic Affairs survey on the desire for choice in education showed that more than half of the British people believe that it would be a good thing if we were to move to a more market-orientated policy in education.

Some 81 per cent. of people in that survey declared themselves in favour of the right to send their children to fee paying schools. Therefore, 81 per cent. of the people of this country reject the Labour party policy of extinguishing altogether any possibility of choice in our secondary education system.

Although the Education Act 1980, introduced and put through the House by my most distinguished constituent, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Warrington, South (Mr. Carlisle) has made a great improvement in the opportunities for choice for a great many people, we need to go further than the Act enables us to do. The state's dictation and restriction in education are unacceptable. We would not accept such dictation and restriction in far more trivial parts of our daily lives, so I find it astonishing that, for more than 100 years, we have been prepared to put up with them in what is one of the most important elements in any individual's life and one of the most important aspects of his personal and psychological development.

Alas, in recent years schools have become tools of social engineering. The Education Act 1976, which was the brain child of Mrs. Shirley Williams, had as its main aim to impose equality on the country, but in that it failed. It did a tremendous amount of damage while its provisions were still in force. There are problems in my constituency, even in some of the most affluent parts. For example, in Wilmslow, the school is on three sites which are for apart, which results in tremendous upheaval during the day, with people having to shuttle between sites. By no stretch of the imagination can it be said that the converging of three disparate schools into one school in name but three schools in reality, has benefited anybody. The parents, still less the children, had no choice in deciding to make that change in the education and school system.

As my hon. Friends the Members for Southgate and for Stratford-on-Avon pointed out, the education system has been hijacked by those who run it. When constituents complain to me, for example about crumbling buildings, buildings that are not redecorated or a lack of books, all that I can say is, "If you had real choice in education, would you allow this situation to obtain? Would you allow your priorities to be those of the education system?" Most parents do not want this. However, because they have no direct input into the system and because the local education authority is not run directly in the interests of the consumer, unfortunately the priorities are those of people not directly involved in the system as consumers.

Dr. Hampson: Like my hon. Friend I was a grammar school boy rather than a public school boy, but I cannot help thinking of all the great public school traditions, which were not on behalf of the consumers. Had one asked Dr. Arnold whether he was doing what parents wanted him to do, one would have got short shrift.

Mr. Hamilton: Unlike my hon. Friend, I am not living a century ago—two centuries ago, perhaps. It is true that not all parents would be quite so concerned about the lack of a lick of paint on the walls, but if they are concerned, and if they have a choice, they can send their children to schools where the priorities are different. In the state-maintained sector they do not have that choice. There is no real assessment of teacher performance as yet in the state sector either, and that is disturbing. I am sure that it is also unacceptable to the vast majority of parents.

One wonders about the priorities of the bureaucrats who run the LEAs—for example, those who run the system in my authority of Cheshire. Recently, the director of education, a distinguished man, took early retirement and got a very nice little package. He received a lump sum of £36,000 and an indexed-linked pension of £14,000 a year for life. On that early retirement he did not, in fact, retire. He then became professor of education at Warwick university at whatever salary he derives from that.

I find it a strange set of priorities that allows somebody to take such a package which is beneficial to him but which dissipates the resources — the scarce resources, as Opposition Members would say — available for education. Of course, he was allowed to do that only on the grounds that his departure would conduce to the improvement of the education system, but I fail to detect as yet any institutional or structural improvements in the system, and it is to that I was referring, without intending to be derogatory to his abilities in any way.

The politicisation of many schools in the country results from the lack of effective parental imput into the system. The howls of horror which have been heard from those who derive the incomes from the system at the introduction of attempts to quantify the achievements of schools and to compare the different standards of different schools had to be heard to be believed.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: Will the hon. Gentleman accept that in this country there has been a system of inspection of schools for a very long time? Those reports have been studied carefully by schools, and the whole system of appraisal has been going on for a long time. The majority of governing bodies have taken very seriously the reports of the inspectorate. There has been a system of appraisal in the country for a very long time.

Mr. Hamilton: I accept, of course, that there has been a system of appraisal. I do not think that anybody looking at it fairly could say that it is perfect and would not be improved if there was yet another means of putting pressure on schools to raise standards even beyond the minimum which inspectors have to assess.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Would it not, for example be in the interests of the parents of the 21·3 per cent. of ILEA school leavers a year ago who failed to get even one CSE or O-level to have a system whereby at least they had some input rather than having inspectors who appear to have been able to do nothing about it?

Mr. Hamilton: My hon. Friend is absolutely right.

Mr. Bennett: Will the hon. Gentleman not accept that, in the way in which the CSE examination was designed, the intention was that, to get a grade 5 CSE, one had to be in the top 80 per cent?

Mr. Hamilton: That is true, but I wonder how many employers pay much attention to CSEs and regard them as pieces of paper worth having.

What matters is not what we put into the system and how much it costs to run, but what we get out of it at the end of the day. We seem to have reversed the emphasis. We are constantly talking about inputs and how much we are building up the school systems; we are not talking enough about the effectiveness of the resources we provide.

As a Government we have two achievements in that respect. It is now possible to compare the examination performances of schools and, under the 1980 Act, there is an increased but still imperfect choice for parents as to which schools to send their children. I stand today like Lord Clive in the 18th century when he was interrogated by a Committee of the House — aghast at our own moderation after so many years of experience when we have had great opportunities to make radical changes in the education system, but have drawn back from the brink of doing so. Real choice will come about only when we introduce more market oriented systems of choice. When one says "market system", that is perhaps an abstraction that does not attract some people. The market system means people, consumers, individuals, making their own choices rather than others making choices for them, so it is a more humane system than the present one.

This will have great political benefits for the Government who take the step of introducing it. There are many political difficulties by which all Governments are beset. There is, for example, the question of closure of village schools and the size of schools. As my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon pointed out, there is the question of religious schools and of teachers' pay. If we had a more market-oriented education system, those problems would not disappear completely, but they would be much less pressing and they would certainly be much less political than they are at the moment. We should be able to be more flexible over scales of pay for teachers. That would remedy the shortages in certain subjects and in certain difficult areas.

Many of the local government problems that are connected with the reform of the rating system would disappear if education were centrally funded, albeit directed locally. There is still much to do in order to reform the education system. There is choice of a restricted kind, but that choice is available only to those who have the resources to move to an area where there is a decent school. It is all very well for the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) to say that he sent his children to a state school, but that was Holland Park comprehensive school. There is a great difference between a school of that kind and some of the schools that one finds in some of the most deprived inner-city areas.

As a grammar school product — I hope that its product will incline hon. Members to approve of the system — I very much regret that the advantages that I enjoyed, coming from a modest background, are now denied to many people who come from the same kind of background. They are imprisoned in a system that will blight their lives. I fail entirely to understand the arguments of those on the Opposition Benches — [SEVERAL HON. MEMBERS: "They are not there."] They would deny it if they were. They would deny parental choice. The implication is that the working classes are not fit to make decisions about the educational needs of their children — which, for socialists, we ought to find extraordinary. But this is not a new phenomenon. If one looks back to the days before the introduction of the state education system, which is going back a very long way, we find that even when incomes were very much smaller than they are now poor people put aside significant proportions of their income to provide for the education of their children.

In his book "Education and the State", Professor E. G. West points out that in 1833, the year in which the first state education grants were introduced, the percentage of the net national income being spent on day schooling was about 1 per cent. of parental income. By 1965 it had risen to 2 per cent. In 1833 the average was about 0·8 per cent. for children below 11 years of age. In 1965 it was about 0·86 per cent. In relative terms, therefore, the sacrifices being made by parents today are not much greater than the sacrifices that were made by parents all those years ago.

In those days most children received day schooling and the average length of schooling was between four and five years. In Manchester, which is on my doorstep, apparently 80 per cent. of schooling in the 1830s was paid for entirely by parental fees. This shows that parents who then lived in indescribable poverty compared with the kind of poverty that may be experienced today, were prepared to make that kind of sacrifice. Today parents are very much more able to provide properly for the education of their children. In fact, the Forster Act of 1870 provided for a rudimentary form of vouchers. They were called tickets. That can be found in section 25 of the Act. These ideas, therefore, are not new.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): Is it not an extraordinary paradox that in many households where there are two wage earners and where the average take-home income is higher than it has ever been the demand

[Mr. Andrew Rowe]

for private education is so low? Does not this give us pause for thought when we consider how much discretion parents ought to have?

Mr. Hamilton: That was not characteristic of my hon. Friend's own family because he was a school chum of the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central at Eton.

It is only because the state takes such a high proportion of their income in taxes that people feel unable to pay twice for the education of their children. If the tax burden were reduced by transferring responsibility for education from the state to individuals, they could pay much more easily for the education of their children.

Mr. Leigh: Is not my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe) saying that the working classes cannot be trusted to look after the education of their children?

Mr. Hamilton: I shall allow my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe) to make his own speech in due course. I shall certainly not attempt to read his mind.

The vast majority of people, if they had a higher net disposable income because the tax burden was lower, with spending on education being lower, would much prefer to educate their children themselves. That is the basis of our approach in the publication "No Turning Back", which is familiar to many hon. Members. We made three suggestions about how the education system could be improved. The principal way would be to introduce per capita funding, as my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon has pointed out. School boards should be made more powerful through a major parental input and headmasters should be given executive powers. That could be reinforced by an absolute right to send one's child to any school where a place was available. In addition, a group of 30 or more parents should have the right to set up a school which would receive the funds which the State would otherwise have expended on the education of their children.

Under that system, choice would exist naturally. That could happen if the disposable income of parents was not reduced by the burdens of the state. It is a myth that the redistribution of income plays other than a small part in raising the living standards of those on lower than average incomes. Most people in receipt of benefits pay for the benefits which they receive. As we heard at Treasury Question Time today. If the whole incomes of those earning £30,000 a year and more were to be expropriated by the state, that would raise less than £2 billion. Therefore, the redistributive element in the educational, social security and welfare system is very small. If the State did not own the assets and pay for the provision of services, people could do that themselves.

I ask my hon. Friend to be more radical than his predecessors have been and to trust the collective wisdom of parents rather than to perpetuate the collectivist follies of politicians.

10.27 pm

Mr. Christopher Chope (Southampton, Itchen): May I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr. Portillo) on introducing the debate. Like others of my hon. Friends, I comment on the lack of interest shown by members of the SDP and the Liberal party in a very important subject. I also note that there are still only two Labour Members present.

The backcloth to the debate is the teachers' dispute, which has shown the extent to which parents have been left out of the control of the education of their children by the present system. Many parents were very disturbed at the selfish and unprofessional behaviour of teachers and the way in which parents' evenings were brought to an end and lunchtime supervision was disrupted. In some cases in my constituency parents were forced to give up work to look after their children at lunchtime. That shows the extent to which the behaviour of teachers was becoming irresponsible.

It was fortunate for some people in my constituency that there was a private sector alternative available. During the dispute an increasing number of parents took their children away from the maintained sector and put them into private schools until those schools were filled to overflowing. At least, there was that extent of choice but realistically that was available only to those who could afford to pay the fees.

Parents have been virtually powerless to influence events in the last year. I want to bring parents in from the cold, and there are two ways to do that. The first is to give them a clear choice of schools and the second is to give them greater responsibility for what goes on in those schools.

It is assumed now that we do not have to decide which children go to popular schools. In reality, there are popular and unpopular schools and choices must be made. The arbitrary and unfair system operates in almost every local education authority now in what are called catchment areas. Under this system, an outsider can buy in to an area and can send his child to a popular school, while somebody who may have been living in the community for many years and who wants to send his child to a certain school is squeezed out; he may be a council tenant and cannot get a transfer into the catchment area of that school. So let us not kid ourselves into thinking that there is not now a system of selection to decide which children go to popular schools.

There is a better system, one that would involve waiting lists and operate on a first-come, first-served basis. It would mean that a long-standing resident in a community would have an advantage over an incomer. There would be a running record of likely future demand for a given school. If people put down the names of their children at birth for entry to popular primary schools in the locality, the local education authority would have five years' notice of the likely demand. The design capacity of schools could be examined to see whether they could meet the demand.

I was surprised to learn from a recent written answer that no central statistics are kept of the design capacity of maintained schools. If Ministers are to take wise decisions about which schools should be closed because of a fall in demand, basic information should be in the possession of the Department of Education and Science about the design capacity of schools. Until we have such basic information, we shall not know the extent to which schools could expand.

If parents had their way, there would be more discipline in schools, with more emphasis on a core curriculum. Indeed, if parents had their way there would not be peace studies and political education. There would be much less sewing for boys and metal work for girls. The popular

schools would have remained open, bad teachers would have been sacked rather than transferred and prize days would still exist, rather then having been abolished by most Socialist local education authorities.

I recall what happened in ILEA when I was the vice-chairman of a governing body. At what was supposed to be a prize day ceremony, I said I thought it a pity that there were no prizes to present. Because of that, the Socialists decided that it was not right that I should even be the vice-chairman of that governing body.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Is it not typical of ILEA to spend £8,000 per child on a creche for the children of its employees, when that is more than it spends per pupil in its schools?

Mr. Chope: I agree. That is another example of the absurdities of the ILEA. My hon. Friend and I were able to get some information about that earlier this week when we visited a sports hall in Wandsworth. We were told that ILEA prefers to bus children from local schools to its own facilities rather than deign to allow them to use a facility provided by Wandsworth council. Two local ILEA schools have used their meagre resources to make the sports hall facility available for their pupils, but that has been in spite of ILEA.

If parents had had their way, I am sure that teachers in short supply, such as maths and physics teachers, would be offered more money and that we would not have lost many fine schools. It is difficult to work out how parents can be given greater responsibility for what goes on in schools unless they are given responsibility for what are colloquially known as resources, but what I prefer to call money. If parents were given responsibility for money and its allocation in schools, I am sure that it would be much better allocated. I am also sure that, if parents felt that, by becoming members of a school governing body, they would be something more than tokens of parental involvement and able to take decisions that counted, many more would come forward. We will not get major parental involvement until we give parents responsibilities, and governing bodies control over resources.

More maintained schools might operate like those in the private sector, which have bursars. It is amazing that, in the private sector, a school with 1,000 or 500 pupils is capable of being virtully self-sufficient and can employ local jobbing people to do maintainance whereas a school of similar size in the public sector probably takes a month to get the various forms filled in. In Southampton, those forms are sent to the area office, which sometimes has to refer matters to county hall in Winchester. That system is absurd.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): My hon. Friend is making an interesting and important speech. I suspect that he agrees that parents have no say over the curriculum in an independent school but have an indirect say in that they are the customers. How does he envisage parents controlling the curriculum in the maintained sector —by indirect means or by more direct means? Is he trying to bring maintained schools into line with independent schools or the reverse? I would like to know where he is going.

Mr. Chope: That is an interesting intervention. I would like governors to take responsibility for the curriculum. There is obviously a state involvement in that the Department of Education and Science has an interest in ensuring that there is a core curriculum in all schools, and I would not want to remove that. If, however, governing bodies had responsibility for deciding the curriculum, they would probably take wise decisions, especially if they comprised fewer teachers and contained more parents and people interested in the school. One of the great assets of many schools in the private sector is their alumni. We do not have such involvement in the public sector as there is no scope for them to be drawn on to governing bodies. Perhaps that idea could be added to the Government's proposals for giving governing bodies greater breadth.

As has been shown, working class pupils are being excluded from entry to universities because of the system. It is a disgrace that only 19 per cent. of university entrants in 1981 came from working class backgrounds. That is reflected in what the vice-chancellor of Southampton university said at the launch of Industry Year. He said that, when he was at Durham university, engineering courses were almost entirely filled by people who had been to public schools. There is a mass of evidence to suggest that where parents are involved in their children's education those children perform better. I can think of no better reason than that for increasing parental involvement in our schools.

10.40 pm

Dr. Keith Hampson (Leeds, North-West): I notice the ingenuity of the Opposition Front Bench in spreading their talents to the Back Benches. I am sure that the House will enjoy the contributions from this side of the House.

I speak in the debate with a sense of déjà vu, of turning back. A decade or more ago I took part in these debates. My remarks tonight are not directed against the sentiments, criticisms of analyses of my right hon. and hon. Friends. We have the same arguments and they are absolutely right. Standards in British schools are not what parents would like, nor what universities and polytechnics expect. They are not producing people with the talent that is necessary for the professions and industries of this country to compete in the world. I believe that that is common ground. It is a feature of the past 10 years. It is a tragedy that we have not progressed effectively over that period. The sands are moving, but not so dramatically as we wish.

We would like to see more changes in the curriculum in schools, because it has gone on the rocks. Too many subjects, including peace studies, have been shoved in at the cost of basic disciplines—the core subjects which the Secretary of State does not have the power to impose on the system. The balance has also been wrong.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) spoke of the German tradition of polytecknik technical schools. That has not been the tradition in this country. There is a certain inconsistency in what is said about the desire for market forces in schools, while at the same time lauding the independent sector. The key reason why we do not have a German tecknik philosophy or its equivalent polytechniques in France in our schools is the public school tradition. It was dominant, and fed through to our grammar schools. It was all about the educated and civilised man, and was not concerned with the practical application of skills. The philosophy has filtered through the school system and into higher education as well.

[Dr. Keith Hampson]

Time and again in the past 150 years people have tried to break that tradition, as in the middle of the 19th century, when Manchester university and other institutions were deliberately created to oppose the classical tradition of Oxbridge. Other great civic universities followed in the latter part of the century, supported by the local customers if one likes — the industrialists, the Frys, the Boots family, the tobacco people in Nottingham and the Wills family in Bristol. The Prince Consort, Prince Albert, constantly criticised and attacked the traditions of British education and compared them with those of Germany. The reports of the education commissioners at the turn of the century refer time and again to this, and it has continued to the present age.

Since the war there have been several attempts to break the tradition. We started with the technical colleges and a tremendous impetus by David Eccles, now Lord Eccles. There was a major breakthrough in British education to counter what prevailed at the time. There was a phase during which colleges of advanced technology were established to compete with the rest of Europe in high technology. Those institutions were merged into the university tradition. In the 1960s Tony Crosland attempted to re-establish the polytechnic tradition.

Now here we are again, with all the same arguments being put forward, starting with those of the right hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Callaghan), the then Prime Minister, and moving on to the new impetus by the Conservative party, when the Prime Minister, then Secretary of State for Education and Science, published a White Paper in 1970 to continue the debate. Therefore, it is not enough to say that there is something sacrosanct about the private sector, and I hope that my hon. Friends are not saying that. Unfortunately, that is the impression given by some of their arguments, and it is the preception among the public. We do ourselves no service if that is what the public believe to be the arguments of Conservative Members.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: My hon. Friend makes a valid point, but the public school ethos, as opposed to its attainments, has survived to influence adversely the way in which we do things in industrial Britain because no alternative source has produced people of high educational attainment. We have set out to destroy the grammar schools and technical schools by which people from working-class backgrounds and with a different ethos could have challenged the public school values in industry.

Dr. Hampson: There is some sense in that. Several of my hon. Friends, including my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr. Portillo), talked about the system being controlled by the producers. But that is exactly what the public school tradition was about. It set the standards of the system. That is why Britain is unique in almost the entire Western world in the authority that we invest in teachers and, above all, in headmasters. Britain gave more power to the professionals—the teachers—than did any other country, and that is a tradition to which the National Union of Teachers, in its present warped fashion and with its Left-wing leadership, still pays lip service. The tradition that the professionals know best goes back a long way.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I cannot allow my hon. Friend to get away with the suggestion that producer power in the public schools resulted in their turning out people who were suited to running an empire. Surely that happened because the consumers — the parents — wanted their children to leave school with those qualities, and the schools responded to that demand——

Dr. Hampson: No.

Mr. Forsyth: In no way can my hon. Friend argue that the producers — the teachers — insisted on turning out such products.

Dr. Hampson: I am sorry to have to correct my hon. Friend, but that is exactly what happened. The large growth in British public schools occurred in 1851 after the Northcote-Trevelyan reforms, which brought Civil Service examinations into British Government. To get through those examinations, they needed schools to prepare people for the syllabuses. That is why so many public schools were created. Schools such as Cheltenham and Clifton burst on the scene to produce those people. It was not in response to the customers—the parents of the children attending the schools—but another example of the professionals calling the shots.

Another problem with the argument is that we become confused between choice of course and choice of school. There are completely different solutions, and it is easier to obtain one than it is to obtain the other. If we mean a choice of course, we must consider the composition and powers of governing boards. We went through all this in the mid-1970s. I could claim that I coined the phrase "parent power"; indeed, although my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office is now attributed with coining the phrase "magnet schools", I claim copyright on that, too, because I heard it first during a visit to Boston in the early 1970s.

Our arguments then were strong, but the Education Act 1981 did not go far enough. We did not accept the logic of what we called in opposition the parents' charter. We said that it was nonsense for governing bodies to be dominated by local authorities. That is the crux of the matter. My hon. Friend the Member for Wandsworth mentioned this——

Mr. Chope: No; Southampton, Itchen!

Dr. Hampson: I apologise for that understandable mistake. We know where my hon. Friend's fame lay. The point was that local authorities, especially Socialist ones, packed the governing bodies of schools so that parents could have no effect on courses or curricula. Indeed, all the perversities in the present system, such as peace studies, were pushed into the schools by the lackeys of local councils, who were put on to governing bodies as political nominees, not because they had any real interest in the schools. We said that that must be removed. We said that parents ought to be the largest force, because it was their children who were involved. That was fundamental. But we let the parents down. We have taken two bites at the problem over five years. We could and should have done it as soon as we came in, in 1981.

It is also a matter, not just of the composition of governing bodies, but of the powers that they are given. I agree with everything that has been said about giving them more strength, provided that one has the right governing body. Otherwise, why give more powers to a governing body which is as warped as those that we have seen in so many schools? Once the membership is right,

one can talk seriously about giving financial power to the schools; far more than we have ever dreamt of doing so far in British education. It is something for which I have long argued.

The ultimate logic of having a say or an input or having control over the curriculum is to go the American way. Instead of having rates as we now do, a subject dominated by the cost of education, and trying to get rid of the rates, the answer is possibly to turn rates, as in the United States, into a property tax to fund education. One could than have a real parental say, because then local communities would be paying and understanding, and therefore taking a greater interest in what goes on in schools. I am not saying that that is the way that we should go, but that is the logic of dealing with choice. Choice is about what is taught in the schools.

Many of my hon. Friends are not just talking about that, or even wanting to. They are really talking about the choice between schools, and accepting the imperfections of the present system. Now we get into how one tackles the problem. I trust the people—I think that that is the phrase that was used tonight. I trust the parents. I want to give them a greater say. Unfortunately, on the basis of our present legislation, it is not good enough. In Leeds in the past month I have had constituency case after constituency case because the Labour-controlled city council is now engineering catchment zones for primary schools, the most popular schools in Leeds. It is absolute chaos and is causing enormous anxiety, concern and upset.

The *Yorkshire Evening Post* has exposed what is going on inside the Labour group on the city council, which controls education. These are the abuses to which I alluded in discussing the Bill which the Government thankfully brought in; abuses by councillors with regard to propaganda on the rates. I have said time and time again that it is not just a matter of publicity. It is about the people who are there and who write the publicity, who are hired to write it, and the increasing role in the system, not of the officials themselves, but of the professional politicians.

The *Yorkshire Evening Post* has exposed what is happening in Leeds, where Councillor Driver of the hard Left is supposed to be a lecturer in another college, but he is a full-time council member. He has moved in, he has a desk, and he is sacking or not reappointing the professional staff. The director of education is being increasingly isolated and has very few staff. I said in Committee—I knew then—that before Christmas they were out to get the director of education in Leeds because they found his views unpalatable.

We have serious problems with the present system in terms of the composition and powers of governing bodies. Parents should have more say and we should have done more than we have done, but the problem is to find the way to do it. I have told my hon. Friends that they are strong on theory but lacking when it comes to the practicalities, as I have heard them so far—whether it is the direct voucher system or the interesting variation of my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon.

I have to say what I am about to say simply because of my American experience. My hon. Friends are aware of all the time that I have spent in the United States, but I went on one specific occasion to look at both the voucher experience in California and, what is usually forgotten by friends of ours in this country who have written about it, the voucher experiments in East Hartford. These systems do not work as the theory dictates they should. Who, even here in this House tonight, is prepared to cite any American experience? It was all the fashion 10 years ago, but nobody uses it now.

I shall tell Members why. The bureaucracy is appalling in getting the vouchers out to the parents, getting them into the schools, the staff at schools having to handle them and not wanting to. One cannot duck the fact that trade unions exist in the teaching professions. They do not want vouchers and make it very hard to work the system. That is one of the practical reasons why vouchers have not been successful.

Secondly, even the credit system of just allocating money to schools, which is much more tolerable and possible, is costly. It needs sophisticated computer programmes, which no doubt we can develop, and a lot of staff, if not in the schools. That was the experience in East Hartford.

The third reason is more telling, and that is the so-called dragging-up effect which my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate mentioned in reply to my intervention. My hon. Friend accepts that there is possibly a problem in expanding a school ad infinitum to meet the numbers, because moods change. Interest in schools varies, fashions change, the quality of staff alters and heads disappear. Therefore, schools and their reputations change, although that is often the result of perception rather than reality. Then there is a problem because the school has been expanded. Sophisticated caravans cannot be wheeled in and out of playgrounds.

The converse of that is that the poorer schools will be dragged up and we shall never reach that logical ad absurdum position, as my hon. Friend put it. But that does not happen; rather the reverse. There is a spiral downwards of depression and deprivation in the schools, which start losing numbers. We see that in our constituencies in the cities, where there is already a rapid decline in numbers. The morale of staff declines, the better staff go to other schools, the subject range starts collapsing and parents become conscious that a school has a bad reputation. It gets worse and worse. Therefore, there is no dragging-up effect.

Mr. Peter Lilley (St. Albans): Precisely the same problems must occur in the private sector as schools change in popularity and effectiveness. There are limitations on the amount by which they can expand, and so on. Yet I am not aware that that has brought about the downfall of the private education sector. It has occasionally brought about the downfall of bad schools, but I should have thought that that was something to be welcomed and to be hoped for in the state sector as well.

Dr. Hampson: Unfortunately, it has not brought about the downfall of enough of the worst private schools. Standards in the state system, particularly in inner cities, are so bad that a false market is created. People who are desperate not to go to state schools which they perceive to be bad, and also for prestige and other reasons, are using schools in the private sector on which if they had any sense, they would not waste their money.

Mr. Greenway: My hon. Friend is making an interesting and important point, but in the end every parent has to decide whether to send a son or daughter to a school that is running down such as my hon. Friend has described. Would my hon. Friend do that?

Dr. Hampson: I accept that point, because I want to find ways in which that becomes a real choice, but the scale of the problem cannot be avoided. Britain has seen a fall in pupil numbers of a third over 10 years, and in some parts of our cities a 40 per cent. fall. How could any voucher or pupil credit system work in those conditions? The movement of people is far too acute. That imposes an extra pressure on the better schools and a faster decline elsewhere. There is no evidence of the dragging-up effect working.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Will my hon. Friend concede that under the present system there is little incentive for a bad school to get better because local education authorities are allocating pupils away from the schools of parental first choice in order to maintain the input of resources into the schools which are less popular, and that hardly provides any incentive for or pressure on those schools to make themselves more attractive to parents?

Dr. Hampson: Of course, that is true, but some of the schemes, including my hon. Friend's scheme, are no answer. They do not grasp that fact because they perpetuate the problem of the relative decline in the perception of schools, which can be related to the dramatic fall in numbers of some and the improvement in others. The voucher schemes of various kinds make matters worse. That is what we are living with now. We have to try to find ways of coping with that. One can get parental choice systems and change the balance of power between local authorities and governing boards and parents, which is at the heart of it, to deal with the problem.

The system has not worked for a number of reasons. East Hartford is the best researched area to help us to understand why, because the American research had all sorts of oddities about it. It was largely an ethnic population, for one thing. East Hartford is an average lower middle-class semi-skilled to skilled professional catchment area. What was found, which is relatively true given the adjustments for California, was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth) in an intervention. He mentioned the unlikelihood of parents wanting to move. He was using that to attack a point of mine that one could not go on letting the schools get bigger and bigger, because when the Head changed and the reputation fell, what would happen to all the empty buildings?

The fact that parents are not readily prepared to move is the reason why the system would not work. The evidence of the American schemes is that no more than 7 per cent. of parents are prepared to move. The overwhelming majority of parents opt for their nearest school, and it was proved that there was no need for all the cost and bureaucracy of a voucher scheme. There can be a straight parental choice system without the cumbersome nature of the voucher system, because it is theoretical and ignores the practice.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: I do not want to spoil my hon. Friend's enjoyment of his shadow boxing with the voucher system, which to my knowledge has not been introduced by anyone this evening, except my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth). However, there seems to be a lack of internal consistency in his argument. My hon. Friend the Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth) rightly said that once people have opted for the secondary school system or for a primary school they would be reluctant to change. That is not the same as avoiding shifts at the point of choice, which is generally the transition into the primary school system, or from the primary school system into the secondary school system. It would also act as a trigger to the school management to see how successful or unsuccessful its school was and give it a warning to do something about it for the following year.

Dr. Hampson: It is the same point. I am talking about human psychology. We all know from our own areas that parents normally prefer their nearest school. Of course, if it is evident that there is a better school not too far away they may make an effort, but if they are offered a choice, whether it be a transfer between sectors, from primary to secondary or within secondary schools, parents actually prefer their own schools. There are many studies which show that. When one talks about parental choice, that is the reality that one has to face.

The heart of the problem is not solved. The problem is declining standards, particularly in city schools, and good schools which have been mucked around by local authorities. One has to deal with particular aspects, whether it is local authority power, Government power, composition of governors or alternatives. One obviously could expand the assisted places scheme, which is a very useful way of enabling those who have little choice to go for more specialised schools. The magnet school idea must come into this country.

With the state system, one should be able to offer parents a choice of specialist subjects, not at 11 on supposed ability and future potential, but between schools that are good at mathematics or physics or specialise in modern languages, above the core range of subjects. We already do that with music, ballet and with the choir schools. Even the Labour Government had to accept that choir schools were the one exemption that they had to make in their comprehensive legislation. They had to leave choir schools to produce good choristers. That could be applied across the board. There are ways in which we can cope and give more choice to parents.

It seems perverse that I have to say, I hope not too strongly, that we appear to be talking about some of the attractive theoretical schemes, impractical as they are, on the heels of the teachers' strike, from which unfortunately we got little credit. I know that parents have increasingly started to blame the obstreperousness of the National Union of Teachers, and for years I have been preaching about what has happened to the NUT. However, parents are upset. The strike has gone on for a long time and they are worried about their children. We are in danger of telling parents that we are looking after a narrow group of parents and children. We are in danger of trying to help not only those who want to go to the private sector—they are by no means the majority—but those who are already in it. That is the greatest risk of all.

The last time we considered the voucher system, when the Conservative party was in opposition and then in Government, it was not to apply to private schools. The idea was to put choice into the state system. If the system were applied to private schools, an enormous bonanza of financial assistance would be given to those who have already selected private education. That would not be palatable politically. That is why the Government at that time, would not accept the broad range of that idea and why, despite the arguments of some of my colleagues, we

cannot have that system now. If we had such a system, we would be giving tens of millions of pounds to those who are already in the private sector. It would be perceived not only as an unnecessary increase in public expenditure but, in the context of the tragedies in the state sector of education, as favouring the private sector, encouraging the growth of the public sector, encouraging a certain part of the middle classes to use the private sector and, above all, giving them financial help to do so.

11.15 pm

Mr. Mark Fisher (Stoke-on-Trent, Central): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Leeds, North-West (Dr. Hampson), who has brought a wiser and wider perspective of education to Conservative contributions. If there is one criticism of the hon. Gentleman it is that, in 26 minutes, one could possibly have had too much of a good thing.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr. Portillo) on his luck in being selected in the ballot and on his choice of subject. Listening to his contribution and those of his colleagues who followed him, I began to feel that some of those hon. Members might have been more interested in parading their theories of choice for each other's interest, entertainment and delight than in showing concern for the education of our children. Most hon. Members seemed more interested in the theory of choice than in the reality of education.

That interest in the theory of choice led the hon. Member for Southgate to put forward a rather glib description of a market force philosophy in education in which the only operation of choice was through buying and selling education. The idea that one could choose through the ballot box did not seem to occur to him. It led some other hon. Members to make bizarre remarks. The hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) seemed to criticise primary education for being child-centred. I should have thought that hon. Members on both sides of the House believed that education should be centred on the child. The Plowden report andall that has been best in the enormous achievements of primary education have been centred on the development of the child.

Rather less happily, the theory of choice led the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton) to make some rather tasteless and ill-considered remarks about the personal circumstances of the former director of education for Cheshire. I think that hon. Members on both sides of the House will recognise that he has made an enormous contribution to education ideas and practice.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: I am sorry to contradict the hon. Gentleman, but I made a specific point of saying that I was not in any way seeking to be derogatory about the former director of education for Cheshire. I was merely saying that the local authority showed a peculiar set of priorities by dispensing with his services and replacing him with someone else rather than using those resources in ways that would benefit the children in school.

Mr. Fisher: The hon. Gentleman must judge for himself whether it is right and proper that he should use parliamentary privilege to bring in the circumstances of an individual's pension. As that man has given so much to public education, not only through his contribution to the Cheshire local education authority but through the Schools Council, the hon. Gentleman's criticisms were less than considered. He may well wish to reflect on them and perhaps drop a line to the gentleman concerned.

The debate seems to have centred on the idea of choice. Opposition Members, after hearing the contributions from the Government Benches, believe that it is impertinent that the idea of choice and the bastion of choice should come from there. The Government have destroyed the most important choice of all in the past six years, or at least have gone a good way to limiting it. That is the choice of quality. If parents now wish to find and choose a school which has well-paid and well-motivated teachers, they must look very carefully, as there are no well-paid teachers and motivation is hard to come by.

If parents want to find a school where there is a sufficiency of good textbooks and library books, that sort of choice is hard to make after the past five years. Similarly, maintenance and supervision and well-cared-for and clean schools are all much harder to find after the way that the Government have capped the rates and made it extremely difficult for local education authorities to respond to the parents' choice, through the ballot box, to spend more of their rates on education. That is a real choice and a real way of expressing that choice.

Mr. Lilley: Has the hon. Gentleman not read Her Majesty's inspectors' report on the impact of spending policies on local authorities, which concluded that there had been an improvement in the supply of books yet again in a recent year, that of all local authorities only a third had a shortage of books and that the shortages in 90 per cent. of that third were due not to a shortage of funds but to the inadequacies of management by teachers or by the local authority? There was no sign, except in 3 per cent. of all schools, that a shortage of funds had led to a shortage of books.

Mr. Fisher: The hon. Gentleman should look at the statistics provided by the National Book League and the Publishers Association; he will then see that that is not the case.

I should like to concentrate on the element of choice on which the debate has focused; that is the choice of school. Exactly what does that involve, and for whom is the choice being made? The reality is that the choice to which Conservative Members were referring is a choice which very few people can enjoy. To operate the sort of choice that Conservative Members talk about, one would have to live in an urban or suburban area, be better off and, most important of all, be mobile. If one lives in a rural area which has only one secondary school or it cannot afford transport, there is no chance to make a choice between schools.

Similarly, there are difficulties about how to make such a choice work. Hon. Members spoke about attractive schools, but what does that mean? What makes a school attractive to the public? It may be attractive because it has a young and dynamic new headmaster with a fresh attitude and a way of getting publicity in the local paper. It may be attractive because it has good examination results. It is difficult, however, for parents to understand those examination results in the context of the intake of the school, the enjoyment of the children in the school or the achievement in relation to the children's potential.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East) *rose*——

Mr. Fisher: I cannot give way any more: I want to allow another Government Member to speak and I have already given way several times.

Choice has been extended over the past three years, but that choice is an incoherent one. As there are dropping school rolls, many of the articulate and intelligent parents who see the main chance can choose their schools, but that does not always have a happy effect on the balance of education in an area. Some very attractive schools are attracting parents who are able and mobile enough to move

their children to them. That is causing wider and wider disparities between schools; because some schools are attracting the more able academic children, there is a disparity between intakes and the potential of intakes.

The hon. Member for Southgate recognised the illogic in his choice of subject when he spoke about having to give more money to more schools, but he failed to see the stupidity in that, as that would enrich the good schools and further run down the poor ones.

To be fair to the hon. Gentleman, he did not concentrate only on the idea of choice in schools. He also talked about the importance of information, parental rights and control. Unfortunately, he made a mistake in linking information and control, because they are different. The hon. Member for Leeds, North-West was wise and sensible enough to recognise that the idea of a shift from a professionally focused education system to a consumer and parent-focused one is new. Political parties have yet come to terms with it, or may have begun to do so only during the past few years, as has the teaching profession. Indeed, political parties are probably ahead of the teaching profession.

There is an enormous difference between information and scrutiny, and access and control. It is right and proper that parents should have more information about curricula, schemes of work and homework, especially what it is for, how it is set and how it fits into a child's development. Parents should have more information about school ethos, discipline, admission and exclusion policies, safety, health and midday supervision. They should have far more information on the fabric and resources of schools. Few parents know what capitation is spent on their children. When they are told that in a primary school in a top junior class only 10p a day is spent per child on consumable resources for that child, they are shocked and are given a wholly new perspective of the difficulties of teaching children with minimum resources.

Moreover, parents should have greater access to teachers, reports and discussions, not only for their child's school, but for the locality's schools, so that they can see the plurality of choice, and how their child's education at his school fits into local education. None of that is easy. It all costs money and takes teachers' time, which is an extremely scarce and expensive commodity. The problem is different with control, which should not be solely with parents. Education must be a partnership between teachers, parents, others in the community, pupils, especially in secondary schools, the local education authority and the Government. The seductive idea that because parents should have more rights and involvement they should have more control is mistaken. They should have more partnership and involvement, but not more control.

It is interesting that we have talked solely about the choice of school and not about the choice of curriculum or subjects. No hon. Member has mentioned second languages, music, drama or three-dimensional art, between which children must choose at school. They all require additional resources. It is not merely a matter of choosing the totality of a school, but of making choices inside a school. Above all, there is the choice by the ballot box—the right of electors to choose to spend more on education. Only in that way can we open up the choices, information, rights and involvement that parents should have.

11.18 pm

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): I was much derided in my intervention when I suggested that it was not beyond the bounds of possibility for a much larger number of parents to exercise their choice under the present system by spending money on private schooling which they at present spend, for example on a second car. None of my hon. Friends who has spoken has suggested that the money should be handed to parents to spend as they choose, because they know that parents will not spend additional income on education. The fact that the percentage of income that families spend on education has not risen in 100 years is clear.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-West (Dr. Hampson) that, at a time when the education system is reeling from the teachers' strike and other difficulties, the electorate will look to the Conservative party to improve the standard of education in the short term.

Everyone knows that this can be best effected by the standard of the head teacher. The standard of most schools depends heavily on the standard of the head teacher. One of the lamentable features of the present education system is that most head teachers receive the minimum amount of training for their job and most have a nugatory amount of power compared with the power that a good manager ought to be given. Head teachers also have a limitless tenure which is absurd. I believe that most head teachers should be given, as they are in the independent sector, a limited tenure which can be extended if it is considered beneficial.

Governors should be given a proper job. I agree with my hon. Friends who have spoken earlier that the present education system is bizarre. The money is provided by central Government, but the Government neither hire not fire a single member of staff. The local education authorities may hire or fire the staff but they have no control over the day-to-day deployment of that staff. Those that have control over the day-to-day deployment have no control over the amount of resources they receive. If we wish to improve the educational system, we should look at some of the in-built weaknesses which have been allowed to survive for so long.

I am aware that time has run out. I urge my hon. Friends to be wary of approaching the electorate with some high flown theoretical scheme when there are many more less high flown things which could improve education in the short-term.

11.22 pm

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): I congratulate the hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr. Portillo) on getting this debate for the Boyson Glee Club and their rendering of "No turning back".

I am a little puzzled by this theme of no turning back, because they seem to be returning to privilege and selection in education. However, I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on emphasising the responsibilities of parents and the right to trust parents. That is important.

However, I caution the hon. Gentleman that the responsibility of parents is an onerous one. We can either as parents, or as those interested in education, pick out the first class schools and the rotten schools. However, it is a more testing task to decide between the very good school and the school which is of a slightly poorer standard. We

[Mr. Andrew F. Bennett]

sometimes put an unfair burden on parents by suggesting that they should exercise choice when they have a difficult choice to make. I enter the caution that, although it is possible to make a judgment on the present standards of the school, one must also take into account what the school will be like next year, the year after that or seven years hence. If we could predict which will be the good schools of the future and which will be the bad, it would be easier to prevent schools from deteriorating.

A choice based on future standards is a difficult task to perform. The danger is that, because people exercise a choice, they start to preordain in which direction a school will be pushed. If one is not careful, one can push a school downhill. Based on objective criteria a school may not go downhill but for the exercise of parental choice.

However, because of the areas in which people live there are often no choices. There may be too long a distance between schools and thus one cannot offer a choice. In the large cities, those who choose a denominational school do not get a choice between two denominational schools because of the distance between the schools. Choice is important but must be treated with care.

The hon. Member for Southgate did not touch on vouchers, but other Conservative Members did mention them. The first problem is that schools do not have rubber sides and it is difficult to move a school building and take it away to another site. It is extremely difficult to add or take away from a school building, although many local authorities would love to be able to expand the number of children that they can take on a site. When I was a teacher, I felt that one of the most depressing things was to have to teach in overcrowded schools. Now, because of falling rolls, the extra class room, where things can be left out and developed is an extremely useful resource, and it would be unfair to schools to press them to take more and more pupils when they cannot provide the extra buildings.

The hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton) was keen on market orientation, but schools are not like cans of beans. The danger is that the more we encourage parental choice, the more we encourage them to look at the outside appearance—the label on the can—rather than at the contents. I have talked to heads who are worried about the way in which, because of falling rolls and parental choice, they have to do a public relations job for the schools, rather than putting the emphasis on what goes on in the schools. Sadly, that effort goes into convincing parents that that is a good school, when the reality is different. We should be wary of that.

We should be making sure that we give all children a passport to achievement, which should allow parents and pupils to make a choice. However, the choice should not be between good and bad education but between different types—as the hon. Member for Leeds, North-West (Dr. Hampson) said—of good education. Parents want to be able to choose between two good schools and then look for varieties in the curricula and so on, not between a good and a bad school.

Spare resources should be spent on the existing schools to make sure that they are good. Children should get off to a good start, which should make nursery education universally available, for those parents who want it, to all three-and four-year-olds. In Gloucestershire, there is no nursery education, in Somerset there is 1 per cent. provision, and in West Sussex, Havering and Bromley there is a 2 per cent. provision. Some local authorities still let no children into primary school before their fifth birthday. All this shows that we have a long way to go before we can start expanding the choice of good schools.

Too many parents choose schools on the state of the buildings. It is extremely depressing to go to schools where the head, the local authority and the parents would all like to spend money on improving the fabric of the schools, but cannot. A major problem, for example, is leaking roofs. There is no money because of rate capping and all the other Government measures.

We should ensure that parents can choose between well-maintained schools. Tameside, for example, is greatly displeased at the way that the Government are giving capital allocations to improve buildings. In Leeds, next year, the local authority will be able to spend only 6 per cent. of the money that it estimates it is necessary to spend on school buildings. All around the country is a depressing picture of delapidated school buildings.

I would argue strongly that class size is one of the most important factors in education. I pay a tribute to the Government in that they have managed to improve the pupil-teacher ratio. However, in many cases, we have to go still further. Many parents want small classes so that the teacher can take into account the needs of the individual pupils, not just to teach them and give them information, but to ascertain the children's problems and help them to overcome their learning difficulties. If we offer parents that, we are offering them real choice.

I would argue strongly that we must look at the width of the curriculum. It is appalling to discover that in Trafford in 1986 no swimming lessons are given in the schools. When I went to school in Trafford just after the war, swimming was in the curriculum. All these years after, it is sad that we cannot afford to let children enjoy swimming lessons, bearing in mind the implications for children's safety.

I could offer many arguments about ways in which I should like to see choice. I am very concerned at the way in which education is beginning to cease to be free. It is worrying that the parents in some schools are being asked to raise ever more money for basic school resources. However carefully that is done, it puts unfair pressure on parents who are on low income. In Solihull, one finds that in one school the capitation from the local authority is £31,000, with the parents contributing round about £12,000 this year for the basic requirements. If we want to start talking of choice, it is far more important to ensure that all schools are adequately resourced and that there is free education at the point of use rather than putting on to parents charges, particularly when some parents find this very difficult.

I would argue that many youngsters are turned off school by the continual demands at school for children to produce more money. As hon. Members will know, a child comes home from a school and always asks for money at a wrong or inconvenient time. The parents may have spent a bit too much at the weekend so that, when the child says that it has to have 50p on Monday morning, the parent does not have it. The parents then start passing comment about the school, and the feeling builds up in some children that there is a conflict between parents and school. I notice some Conservative Members shaking their heads, but they obviously do not represent areas such as

mine where parents are hard up and find it difficult to meet demands to pay for some of the facilities that in state education, I believe, should be provided free.

I could make many other points about primary and secondary schools in the country. Before we start talking about giving people choice, we have to make that sure that it is a choice between first class schools for all children.

I fear that those who have spoken of vouchers are not referring to choice as between first class schools but are referring to the introduction into the country of a rationing system such as existed in wartime. Conservative Members say that there are not enough resources available in the country for the first class education of every child. They are saying that there will have to be a rationing system. This would encourage a black market; some parents would be encouraged not to take up their share but would put up with a second or third rate school, while others would be able to buy privilege by topping up their vouchers. Before contemplating such a system, we should first face up to the fact that in this day and age the country ought to be able to provide all children with a first class education. If we do that, there will be no need for a voucher system. Parents would then be choosing between different education resources and different education systems rather than between a first class school in one place and a second or third class school somewhere else. It is important that we offer an education that is excellent in all schools. That is the key, rather than referring to making a phoney choice.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Will the hon. Member give way?

Mr. Bennett: No, I shall not give way. If I do so, I will end up by being unfair to the Minister.

If Conservative Members do not realise that their voucher system is a rationing system, they should look at it again. The Opposition want a first class education to be provided for all children.

I want to deal briefly with one other point: that there has been no increase in the number of working class youngsters who enter higher education. The problem is not that the number of working class youngsters who enter higher education has gone down; the problem is that the percentage has gone down. The participation rate of youngsters from the middle classes has increased rapidly but the same increase in participation has not been achieved by working class youngsters. That is worrying, but I stress again that the numbers have not gone down.

The only way in which to raise educational standards is to get parents, pupils and teachers to co-operate. Before that can happen the teachers' dispute must be settled. That will raise morale in schools. We must then ensure that conflict does not arise between parents and teachers. That is another aspect of the voucher system. There must be partnership.

Mr. Robert B. Jones On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) to keep on referring to Conservative Members as having argued for vouchers when not one single Conservative Member has done so?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): That is a point of argument. It is not a point of order for the Chair.

Mr. Bennett: That was a rather poor and spurious point of order. Several Conservative Members referred to vouchers. Those who did not do so did it by implication. I should be delighted if all Conservative Members denounced vouchers, but they will not, of course, do so. Parents, pupils and teachers must co-operate. Vouchers will not achieve co-operation. Parents should be not only involved in the management of schools but partners with teachers in the education of their children. Children are in school for only part of the day. It is therefore most important that parents should participate in the education of their children and that they should take an interest in the details of their education and back up the teachers. If co-operation and partnership between them can be achieved, standards will be raised.

If people are encouraged to measure schools by means of a voucher system, the opportunity for building up that kind of confidence will be destroyed. I hope that we have heard the last of the voucher system in this debate and that the Conservative party will consider seriously the raising of standards in schools rather than the introduction of divisive proposals.

11.38 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Education and Science (Mr. Chris Patten): I begin by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr. Portillo) on introducing this debate in so interesting and thoughtful a manner. My hon. Friend and I have done business before. This is quite like old times. Indeed, I come from the same stable as a number of my hon. Friends who declined to turn back. We represent a touching example of pluralism inside the Conservative party. I should confess that at one time I, too, helped to write a pamphlet. I wish my hon. Friends as much success with theirs as we had with ours.

The main contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for Southgate and those of many of my hon. Friends should make us all look afresh at things that we take too easily for granted. In particular, he reminded us that parents are the educators par excellence. They bear a huge part of the burden of educating our children and young people. This Government have long recognised that most parents do this job well. We recognise, too, that many would like to contribute more to it than the education system has in the past allowed. We further argue that, if parents were allowed to make a fuller contribution, our school system would be the better for it. I am with my hon. Friends on all that.

It was for those reasons that we took action, prodded on by my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-West (Dr. Hampson) and others, in the Education Act 1980. It is interesting to note how little the Education Act 1944 had to say on parental rights. It contained only a very general assertion of the parental right of choice which could often not be effectively exercised when it came to practice. In the 1980 Act we gave parents a statutory right to express a preference for the maintained school to which their child should be admitted, and we supported that right by requiring parents to be adequately informed about the schools in their area.

We obliged the local education authority and the governors of the school to meet that preference to the greatest practical extent, provided that, if there were special entry requirements for the school, the child satisfied them. Parents were also given the right of appeal in case their expressed preference was not met. The appeal arrangements led each year to several thousand successful appeals. The House may be interested in the broad figures.

[Mr. Chris Patten]

It is my understanding that between 90 per cent. and 95 per cent. of parents are successful in securing their first preference. I speak as a parent who has just been successful in my choice for the education of one of my children.

The 1980 Act did not guarantee that every expressed preference would always be met. No law could do that. There are always bound to be some schools which are over-subscribed — schools which either cannot be physically enlarged or where an increase in size might impair those very qualities which make them so popular. Nor ought we just to accept that less popular schools should be half-empty. It may not be possible to close them, because the schools could not go elsewhere. That is not only a problem in rural areas. The right answer could be to keep schools like that reasonably full but to make them better so that they become more popular.

The 1980 Act also widened parental choice through the assisted places scheme which serves to provide the same kind of alternative to the maintained school that the former direct grant grammar schools provided. I thoroughly deplore the wanton destruction of that well-tried alternative, and I say that not just because I am a product of a direct grant school. In my view, the direct grant school provided an admirable bridge between the maintained and the independent sectors, over which many children like myself were able to cross. My hon. Friends will recall that the last Labour Government can fairly be said to have created more independent schools than anyone in history, including Edward VI.

It was the destruction of the direct grant schools which led to our introduction of the assisted places scheme. That scheme gives parents of bright children with a low or modest income the opportunity to choose for their child a school which is not part of the maintained sector. That is a valuable freedom. When the assisted places scheme began in 1981-82, just over 4,000 pupils benefited. That figure has gone up to over 21,000. When the scheme is fully operational after the September 1987 intake there will be about 35,000 assisted places in the 226 participating schools.

The 1980 Act did more than widen parental choice. It increased parental influence by requiring most schools to have a governing body which serves only that school, and it provided for parent governors on every school governing body. The Act was fully implemented only in September 1985, so the system of parent governors is still in many instances in the developmental stage. Parents are still in the learning stage about how to use their new influence to help improve their children's schooling.

A number of people have urged the Government to go beyond the 1980 Act by a further widening of parental choice through an expansion of the assisted places scheme beyond its planned size, or by creating or re-creating direct grant schools. We should, and will, give serious attention to those proposals. There has been a good deal of media speculation about those and other matters. I am sure that none of us believes everything that we read in the newspapers unless it is complimentary, but I should like to say a word more seriously about the speculation.

For at least a decade and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) has said, arguably for longer, there has been concern about how we can best raise standards and the quality of our education. The former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Callaghan), made a famous speech at Ruskin college almost 10 years ago on this subject. I agreed with most of what he then said. Only a few years before that he and his hon. Friends would have denounced the very sentiments he was expressing then as the ravings of Right-wing extremists.

There is still considerable concern about standards and quality in education. In my judgment, that is related not only to worry about the consequences of the teachers' dispute. Nor should it be taken as an outrageous attack on our education service, which does marvellous work, much of it ill reported, if reported at all.

It does not seem to be self-evident that the way in which we try to deliver education in Britain is necessarily the best way to provide for the needs of our young people. Many of the things that were assumed when the 1944 Act was drafted—such as the system of financing education and the leverage given by that to central Government, issues to which my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon referred—have changed over the years.

It is right that all these matters should be openly debated. Discussing them is not a sign of lack of faith in the maintained sector of education, or what my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon referred to, in a happy phrase, as the "mainstream education sector". It is an indication of our passionate concern to see education improved. It is interesting to note that the only serious debate on these matters is taking place in the Conservative party. Doubtless others will follow where we lead. I notice, for example, that the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen), who is not able to be here tonight, has already sniffed the wind, and I suppose a few others will lift their nostrils to it in due course.

In that spirit, I come to discuss—I am not sure what to call them now, vouchers or credits; there is, clearly, an administrative distinction between the two — access arrangements, which some have called the direction of resources to schools which can attract parents. My hon. Friend the Member for Southgate referred to it in that way.

It is ludicrous for the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) to suggest that the subject interests my hon. Friends only because they want to strengthen the independent sector of education or undermine the mainstream sector. I have read carefully what they have written and I have listened to them on the subject on more occasions than tonight's debate. I dare say that I shall have to listen to them on more occasions still, and that will be to my benefit, if not to theirs. *[Interruption.]* Flattery is all right so long as one does not inhale. They have made it abundantly clear that they want to improve the quality of education for all children, and it is a travesty of their argument to suggest otherwise.

The possibility of introducing vouchers—I take the point about the administrative distinction between vouchers and credits—was examined thoroughly during the last Parliament. The central idea is that parents should be given the financial power, by means of a voucher or other notional entitlement, to act as the customer of the school. Under credits—as, I imagine, under vouchers—each school would stand or fall financially by its ability to attract and retain parental custom.

As the Secretary of State explained in his answer of 22 June 1984—when I was happily engaged as a junior Minister in Northern Ireland—a voucher system could not reproduce a true free market. Market forces would

have to be constrained in three ways. While on another occasion I should be happy to have the point explained to me if I am wrong, I should have thought that the same argument about market forces would obtain were one talking about credits or the direction of resources, in the way in which my hon. Friend the Member for Southgate discussed the matter.

I think that my hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton) would regard the three constraints as state dictation or restriction, but they are these. First, the customer could not refuse to consume. Schooling would remain compulsory. I cannot really believe that anyone seriously opposes that constraint, at least in terms of the national interest. Secondly, the provider cannot be allowed to charge what the market will bear. I think that the House will acknowledge that as well. In the maintained sector, schooling has to be free of charge to parents, but that does not mean that they are not allowed to make a contribution. Thirdly, the customer cannot be allowed to accept a shoddy service. The national interest requires a minimum quality.

I concede straightaway that, to the extent that quality is not guaranteed now, the arguments for finding other ways in which to deliver it grow more attractive. If we thought that we were doing everything perfectly, this debate would not be taking place. The third constraint highlights another important issue. It is not strictly true that the parent is the customer. The customer is the child. The parent acts as proxy for the child, but not all children would get a fair deal in their education if they depended wholly on their parents. I suppose that that is the Dotheboys Hall argument. That underlines the need for minimum standards of quality.

Some of my hon. Friends argue that such paternalism, however well meant—I hope that we will not doubt one another's motives—cannot be delivered. I imagine that they would also argue that it will anyway discourage responsibility. They argue that parents should be free to make good or bad choices and that they will become responsible parents and citizens only if they are treated in that way. Dignity and freedom, they would argue—I think that I am drawing on some of their propositions—depend on the responsibility that goes with choice. I understand those arguments, but I say again, as my hon. Friend the Member for Tatton said, that, for a century or more, like every other country, Britain has worked on the premise that the state should be the final trustee for children's education. We have believed in striking a balance between that responsibility and the choice accorded to parents.

Nothing that I have seen in education or elsewhere in life leads me to conclude that to talk about balance in this way is as preposterous as some people seem to suggest.

If full account is taken of the constraints that I have mentioned, a voucher scheme and the transition to it become extremely complex and involve long, complicated and controversial legislation, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said three years ago. They also threaten to become very costly. Hence my right hon. Friend's earlier conclusion that a voucher scheme is not a simple or easy option.

Mr. Lilley: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Patten: I have two minutes. I am sure that there will be other opportunities to discuss this matter.

Mr. Lilley: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Patten: I have two minutes.

My right hon. Friend's conclusion does not mean that he and the Government are satisfied that the present system gives parents the choice and influence to which they are entitled. The surest way in which to give parents choice is to have more good schools to choose from. Raising the standards that are achieved at all schools is the central aim of the Government's policies, as set out in our White Paper, "Better Schools", which was published a year ago. Those policies are designed to make every school in the maintained sector better by a curriculum which develops the potential of each pupil, whatever his or her abilities and aptitudes, and prepares all adequately for the responsibilities of adult life, of citizenship and for work.

Our policies involve a large reform of school examinations and a range of measures to improve teaching quality. I believe that the proposals in our Bill, which we should soon have an opportunity to discuss, will also increase parental choice and help schools and the quality of education.

We have set out a range of sensible policies in "Better Schools" and elsewhere. I am less convinced that we have either the hammer or the nails to enable those policies to work as effectively as we would like. I am sure that we will have any number of chances to discuss how to provide a delivery mechanism for the policies on which, in so far as they concern the quality and content of education, we are substantially agreed. I am sure that we shall have many chances in the weeks and months ahead, as we discuss legislation, to discuss the provision of a delivery mechanism for the policies in relation to quality and content of education, on which we are substantially agreed.

Afghanistan

11.55 pm

Mr. Colin Moynihan (Lewisham, East): It is not impossible to envisage the content of briefing papers put before Mr. Brezhnev and his colleagues early in 1979. Military strategists saw the opportunity to give the Soviet armed forces combat experience in difficult country, where new weaponry and lethargic conscript troops could be tested and toughened, safe in the knowledge that Afghanistan lay within a sphere of influence certain to be left alone by the Western world, however angry it might become in its opposition.

Idealogues may have pressured the powers that be to consolidate political ties with a strongly pro-Muscovite lobby in Kabul, albeit a small one—a lobby that, if granted power, must never be permitted to set precedent and retract from its Marxist-Leninist grip. Nor would the remaining pragmatists be left in doubt: Iran's instability; the conventional, if overrated, argument supporting Soviet allegiance to the need for a warm water port; President Zia's then unpopularity; closer proximity to Gulf oil; a further foot abroad; and, thus, clear political opportunism were strong arguments indeed.

Only history stood in their way — a nation unconquered, unoccupied and unbeaten, imbued with a spirit and culture that had protected generations against foreign incursions and achieved the blend of religious fervour, independent vision, unabashed individualism and the love and embrace for the wild yet beautiful terrain that produced freedom fighters capable of fighting a dedicated holy war to protect their very being.

There, at Christmas time in 1979, were the seeds of the conflict with the Mujahidin that lasts to this day—a war that occupies at any given time 120,000 Soviet troops on active service; a war likely to continue, which has led to a quarter of the population leaving Afghanistan for destinations outside their borders, primarily in Pakistan, where are now the world's greatest concentration of refugee camps.

The war has become a subject matter of super-power summits, and provided General Zia with a Christmas present in 1979 that has sustained a Western-oriented and relatively stable Pakistan for the past six years, thus creating an acclaimed statesman out of a man whom the Western press then branded as an international pariah.

When I visited the frontier of Pakistan on December 27 last year, the demonstrations against the Soviet Union, Washington, Islamabad and London brought with them a renewed optimism about a fast-approaching political settlement to a six-year-old war. I believe that it is hollow optimism, founded on rhetoric, not reality.

In part, the Geneva talks in November had offered Gorbachev a far greater opportunity than Reagan for creating the subtle media environment conducive to political accord. By adopting a conciliatory tone and soft approach towards the West, the Soviet Union was in a position to insist firmly that an end to the war required in the first place direct talks with Afghanistan and Pakistan. The purpose of such a move was clear. It was an attempt to put pressure on the Pakistan Government to change their position, and part of the long-term process of weakening Pakistan's support for the Mujahidin; a policy which in turn poses a considerable threat by the Soviet Union to the geopolitical stability of the region.

Neither historically nor in military strategy throughout the six-year war has the Soviet Union suggested that a new, non-aligned Afghanistan free of Soviet troops from its soil was a reality or beneficial to them. The signals and informal reactions to the six rounds of Geneva talks provided a lacklustre shop window from which the Soviet Union could offer an acceptable face to the West.

The Soviet Union has annexed Afghanistan. Its short-term strategy is to stay there with the least amount of military and political support necessary to ensure the pro-Soviet regime. To minimise their presence, the Soviet Union must minimise the threat from the Mujahidin, reduce Western hostility and create sufficient discomfort in Pakistan's internal policies to reduce its support for the jehad.

The Russians are pursuing a "running sore" policy against Pakistan, variously and vigorously. It constitutes a scorched earth policy inside Afghanistan, drawing more refugees to the camps in Baluchistan and North-West Frontier province, and putting a further burden on the Pakistan Government's increasingly onerous position, under pressure from aid-fatigued international agencies.

The policy constitutes further border incursions, which place additional pressure on Pakistan's defence budget. It constitutes the development of a tribal network of well-paid, pro-Soviet informers instead of military cover along the porous mountain border dividing their countries. That is more effective than any military blockade of the Duran line could possibly be. It constitutes continued pressure at the Geneva talks and in international forums geared to alleviate Western hostility, thus drawing Pakistan into the political solution and thereby restricting direct American support for the jehad. It constitutes an escalation of the process of destabilisation and friction in Pakistan's towns in Baluchistan and North-West Frontier province, through the activities of the Khad, especially in Peshawar, the winter capital of Afghanistan.

The position of refugees is an integral and important part of the policy. Since 1975, when 1,400 refugees were registered in the North-West Frontier province, a steady influx has led to the establishment of 380 refugee tented villages in 15 districts along the 1,500-mile Pakistani-Afghan border. With an influx of about 3,000 a month at the beginning of 1986, those camps hold 2·6 million registered refugees and a growing number of unregistered, and therefore unsupported, refugee families established around the refugee tented villages. The Pakistan Government registered support from United Nations agencies and voluntary agencies, both of which have expanded the scope and extent of their relief operations. As early as 1981, the Pakistan Government saw their supervisory role as a major drain on domestic resources.

From a simple process of cash maintenance allowance, the relief assistance now entails the distribution of basic and supplementary food rations, shelter in different forms, such as tents, tarpaulins and temporary huts, portable water supply ranging from hand pumps to open surface wells to machine-operated tube wells, comprehensive medical and health and hygiene care, primary education facilities and religious instruction, veterinary cover and numerous communal services and facilities, such as income-generating vocational training and self-reliance projects.

However, the refugees' problems are escalating. Even when I was there about two months ago, between 4,000 and 5,000 refugees were arriving each month. Registration

in many areas has stopped. Many refugees are moving to urban centres. Necessarily, the Pakistan authorities are considering setting up refugee camps in the Punjab, where there is no natural Pathan affinity as exists across the Afghan-Pakistan border. Shelter for the refugees is badly needed from the international community.

Many camps have received no sugar for six months because of the diminishing resources going to the international agencies. Donor fatigue has combined with the need last year to transfer many resources to Africa —in many cases, rightly so. Although each person used to get a tea ration of 90 g per month, the present ration is 45 g. The kerosene ration, which used to be 20 litres per person per month, has been reduced to 12 litres in incredibly cold conditions. In 1979-80, the wheat ration was 23 kg; in 1981, it decreased to 20 kg and it is now 15 kg per person per month. Health problems are growing considerably; TB and dysentery are on the increase and malaria is still evident.

The problems of the refugees are a major drain on the resources of the Pakistan Government, which adds to the difficulties of that Government, tests their resilience and their tremendous generosity to the Afghan refugees, and adds weight to the long, running-sore policy of the Soviet Union to try to destabilise the North-West Frontier province and Baluchistan.

I was keen for the House to debate the subject because it is vital for us regularly to assess the current position in Afghanistan, to set the contemporary developments against the historical backcloth of Soviet penetration in that country; to provide an opportunity for the House fully to assess the appalling evidence of human rights violations which continue inside Afghanistan; to give the House the opportunity, particularly at the present time, to look at the humanitarian assistance now required to assist the growing number of refugees; and to enable us on the Back Benches to question the Government about the extent of our practical, humanitarian assistance to those in need, to the refugees outside the country and to the displaced people inside Afghanistan. I hope that this debate will give us a short but important opportunity to make an assessment of some of those areas.

But I believe—it is important to place on the record my view and why I hold it—that the Soviet Union is in for a long stay in Afghanistan and has every intention of being there for a long time. The historical involvement of the Soviet Union must be clearly understood before hon. Members draw any conclusions about the lack of any real success with the proximity talks or the true intentions behind the propaganda initiatives launched since Christmas by the Soviet Union.

The long-term policy of the Soviet Union is its determination to stay in Afghanistan until the puppet regime is consolidated. The Government and people of Pakistan have accommodated more than 2·6 million displaced Afghans on their soil and on that of neighbouring countries. The Soviets have started air violation of Pakistan's territory, have spread disinformation among the Afghan refugees and Mujahidin, and have put pressure on the Government of Pakistan to begin direct negotiations. There is a hectic struggle by the Soviets to undermine the correct policy of the present regime on the Afghanistan issue, as well as the very integrity, sovereignty and solidarity of Pakistan. The Soviets try to avail themselves of the chance of a longer stay in Afghanistan in order to impose Sovietisation on the younger generation there, and to wait for political change in Pakistan's attitude which, they think, may be to their benefit.

Political propaganda to the contrary is misleading and without substance. Soviet military assistance will not be withdrawn, although it may decrease in size, commensurate with the reduction of the perceived threat, until a pro-Soviet Government is firmly in place. Nothing short of that will suffice.

More proof of this point comes from an assessment of Soviet policy, which is divided into two sectors. In the occupied areas the process of military, political, economic, religious, social and cultural Sovietisation has been accelerated. In the liberated regions, the villages are sometimes suddenly attacked and the dwellers killed, their shelters demolished, the harvest burnt, the economic resources destroyed and the strategic localities depopulated. These brutal tactics were used against the Muslims of central Asia. By repeating them in Afghanistan, the Soviets want to induce the population either to accept the rule of a Communist Government or to emigrate to Pakistan or Iran. They are more than amply documented in the long catalogue of human rights violations in Ermacora's two United Nations reports on human rights in Afghanistan.

Eight important criteria need to be fulfilled with regard to human rights. They are the right to self-determination; the right of the Afghan people to choose their own economic, political and social system, free from outside intervention; the immediate removal of foreign troops from Afghanistan; a political settlement in Afghanistan, based on the withdrawal of foreign troops, and respect for the independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity and non-aligned status of Afghanistan; a strict observance of the principle of non-intervention and non-interference in the event of a settlement and afterwards; a recognition of the right of the Afghan refugees to return to their homes in safety and honour; and the observance of the tenets of the Geneva convention, and the convention against torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment during the war in Afghanistan. The final criterion is the observance of the principles of the international covenant on civil and political rights by the Government.

However, as much as I wish to see those eight important criteria fulfilled, I am not optimistic. On the contrary, as I have said, the Soviets have a long-term policy to stay, or at least to Sovietise the Afghan people. They want to establish a status quo. They want time to educate and indoctrinate the younger generation along Communist lines so that after a decade the Soviets will have dedicated sons working for their interests in Afghanistan.

Even if the Soviets do not annex Afghanistan physically, they would like to annex it ideologically to the Soviet Union to ensure the maintenance of an underling Communist regime in power in a strategic land. That can be achieved only by indoctrinating the younger generation and for that they need time.

Moreover, an overall campaign in educational, cultural, social, political, economic, military and religious institutions has been intensified to accelerate just such a process of Sovietisation in the occupied areas. The Soviets have concentrated on the Afghan youths. Every year, thousands of students from the elementary schools up to

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university level are sent to the Soviet Union and other satellite countries where they are indoctrinated in Soviet policy.

For the freedom fighters, the position is clear. The Afghan Mujahidin would be well advised to prepare themselves for a protracted war of national liberation because there is no alternative except the continuation of their armed struggle against the occupation forces.

There is further evidence of that in an assessment of the Soviets' intervention in central Asia. It took them 10 years to consolidate power in central Asia. There was the Basmachi revolt in central Asia. Well-armed ground forces fought against the effort to extend Bolshevik control to the area. Eventually, by the end of the 1920s, the Bolsheviks had won by a combination of military repression, unwavering determination and economic development.

But the Soviets' task in Afghanistan will be that much more difficult, not least because rapid social transformation is hard in any country, but in Afghanistan it is almost impossible because the country has never been a colony of any of the imperial powers. It has no tradition of local administration which is so essential to a successful Sovietisation of an economy, and gives me much hope that this will not be implemented effectively by the Soviets as they would dearly like to see.

I have mentioned two of the Soviets' advantages—the armed force combat experience and the idealogues, the cementing of political ties and the strongly pro-Muscovite lobby in Kabul. But they face substantial disadvantges. Economically, it costs the Soviet Union some $100 million a day to run the army in a rugged country against stiff resistance. In the Islamic world they have substantially alienated themselves. This is a jehad, a holy war. The threat to Islam is felt throughout the Islamic world.

In the Third world the Soviet Union has lost the confidence of the non-aligned countries, as exemplified by the vote in New Delhi which was unanimous against the Soviet Union's involvement in Afghanistan. That is costly politically. The Non-Aligned Movement constitutes some half of the world's population.

Furthermore, the presence of the Soviet forces in Afghanistan has cemented NATO policy. Major question marks have been left for the eastern bloc. After all, there was the Rumanian condemnation of their actions. I am firmly of the opinion that it made Soviet intervention in Poland much harder, and indeed put them in a position whereby strong action in Poland was minimised if not negated.

Then there is the critical domestic problem faced by the Soviet Union as a result of its continued presence on present lines in Afghanistan. That is the domestic problem of the Soveit Asiatic republics. The Muslims constitute one in five of red army conscripts. A Muslim population in 1982 of 18 per cent. in the Soviet Union is likely to be a population of nearly 25 per cent. in the year 2000. However, the Soviets fear that the impact of the Iranian revolution will spill over into the Soviet republics of central Asia and I think that they are extremely cautious and aware of the consequences of asking central Asians —for example there were some 9,000 conscripts in central Asia in 1980—to go in and fight against people who historically, culturally and traditionally are far more their brothers than Russians from Moscow.

Meanwhile, proximity talks continue. The four critical points essential to a political solution are well known to the House. They are preservation of the sovereignty, territorial integrity, political independence and a non-aligned character of Afghanistan; the right of the Afghan people to determine their own form of government and choose their own economic political and social system without restraint; the creation of conditions which would allow the refugees to return voluntarily to their homes with safety and honour; and the immediate withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan.

As *The Times* lucidly put it in a leader in the autumn of 1985:

> "As UN 'proximity talks' between Pakistan and the Afghan regime continue at Geneva there seems no hope of a way out of the impasse. The appointed mediator, Diego Cordovez, makes optimistic noises in vain. Broad agreement may exist between the respective parties on the subjects of eventual Afghan non-alignment and the return of refugees with 'safety and honour', but as ever there is intransigence on the all-important matter of Soviet troop withdrawal."

Anyone can draw up a timetable for withdrawal. What is needed is a clear sign of conviction to implement such a timetable; and Soviet policy and history militate strongly against such a course of action.

Meanwhile, among the resistance groups, there have been remarkable successes, in military terms worthy of the admiration and respect of the world. Afghanistan is a mosaic of a country. Its people form a patchwork quilt bringing together families and villages, fiercely loyal to their traditions and localities. Islam is the only unifying factor. It is wrong to attempt to emasculate the tribal system, but the Afghan people, represented by the party organisations in Peshawar, have in recent months shown greater unity, a unity of purpose which is much admired and needed by the international community. It is an international unity of purpose for which they should be commended and which will gain the Mujahidin increased international credibility.

All Afghans speak of the need for humanitarian aid. I believe that it is important that the Government consider how they can help on a bilateral, as well as multilateral basis. Today there is an acute need for food supplies in nearby areas and cash for the remote areas inside Afghanistan, where the price of local food is cheaper than the outlay for transportation of extra food would be. Certainly the supply of medical assistance and food within Afghanistan are most important factors in helping the people in their localities. The Government can then not only do a great service for the Mujahidin but also lessen Pakistani economic and social problems.

Whenever the Soviets intensify their bombing in strategic rural areas, thousands of victims pour into Pakistan which eventually will increase the population of refugees to an enormous number, posing threats to the political stability of the north-west frontier. That again necessitates the forming of a co-ordinated command and policy for the people inside the country. The more refugees there are, the more tension will build up between the locals and refugees and among the different refugee groups which can lead to clashes and insecurity among the locals and refugees.

Undoubtedly there is a great amount of good will between the refugees and the people of Pakistan. That has been achieved by the sincere efforts of the people and Government of Pakistan and the bond of the Pathan

people. The refugees and Pakistanis must strive to maintain the existing good will. It is here that the West and Britain can help.

It is in Afghanistan that the greatest need exists for international aid. The refugees abroad are looked after, more or less, by Pakistan, Iran and the international community. But if no help is offered in Afghanistan itself, the country will bleed to death. Chanelling aid to the Afghans is not easy, because of the war, but it is still possible. Reliable ways have been found by foreign aid organisations. It should be borne in mind that large parts of Afghanistan—80 per cent.—are under the control of the resistance organisations, which co-operate more succcessfully all the time. If Western democracies offer no help to the victims of this cruel war, they will have abdicated the knowledge of what peace and freedom are really worth.

This assistance can come in many forms. It can come in the form of food aid, medical assistance—in training Afghan doctors and nurses outside Afghanistan who then go inside Afghanistan to assist, in providing medical supplies and in sending the very sick abroad—clothes, shoes, tents, help with education and scholarships via the British Council. Food assistance is critical.

The Mujahidin's continued struggle, however, rests on the classic Maoist principles of warfare — guerrilla activity with the support of the Afghans' rural population inside their country and active propaganda outside, sustaining the Western support that they need. We should as a Government consider how we can assist with that publicity. There is a need for good feeders of information and training for them. Unconfirmed news is not used. There is a need for good quality news footage — not from Afghans with super-8 video cameras but from professionally trained foreign cameramen. There is a need then to stimulate interest in that film.

On humanitarian grounds, there are many aspects which we should consider actively. I firmly believe that west European countries now need to assess the level of support they give to Pakistan to assist the Afghan cause. Financial support for the refugees is dwindling while their number increases to form what in today's terms is the largest single concentration of refugees, which was officially put at 2·6 million in January 1986.

Undoubtedly, the Soviet Union has the will and the means to subdue Afghanistan completely. The single aspect of public opinion, which ultimately may spell success or failure for a United States venture, does not appear to have proved to be even a minor factor for the Soviet planners inside Afghanistan.

The spread of conflict beyond Afghanistan would invite outside powers into the region and might even lead to further conflict. The only alternative which should be acceptable to both parties is a neutral Afghanistan. A neutral Afghanistan would be a face-saving measure for the Soviets as well as for the Mujahidin. Neutrality as a means of policy should not, however, be imposed on the Afghans; rather it should be a policy that they adopt by preserving the independence of their country.

The Soviets may insist on a "neutralised" Afghanistan; the Afghans may insist on a "neutral" Afghanistan—that is a significant difference. The Soviet troops should withdraw and troops from Islamic countries or any other country should take over under an international agreement, mutually acceptable to both parties, to control law and order, if the need arises.

The Afghan factions based in Peshawar have continued to cement their unity of purpose, which is so important. A guarantee should be given by both sides not to interfere with each other's political affairs or with each other's nationalities. Both the Soviet Union and Afghanistan have the same ethnic groups living across each other's borders. Because of its geo-strategic location, Afghanistan always has played and still plays a vital role in the stability of the region. Any major event which takes place in Afghanistan has repercussions on the Persian gulf region and on Soviet-Asian security. A Soviet-dominated Afghanistan would affect the Persian gulf region and a prolonged war would affect Pakistan, which in turn would affect other countries of central Asia and the Indian ocean.

I believe that the only solution to the problem in the long run—I have outlined the difficulties which would have to be faced to achieve this solution—is to work towards a neutral Afghanistan, to give Afghanistan non-aligned status and, in due course of time, to turn it into a Switzerland of the East.

I hope that I have made a useful contribution. I hope that this debate will mark the beginning of a regular review of the situation. Above all, I hope that tonight's debate will give the Government the impetus to consider further humanitarian assistance for the Afghan refugees in Pakistan and the displaced Afghans in their homeland. I believe that the many areas that I have considered can best be achieved through the British charity Afghan Aid. As I have said, if the Western democracies offer no help to the victims of this cruel war, they will have abdicated the knowledge of what peace and freedom are really worth.

12.25 am

Viscount Cranborne (Dorset, South): I think that the House owes a great debt of gratitude to my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, East (Mr. Moynihan) for the way in which he has presented his case this evening. I shall not, of course, attempt to follow him in the comprehensive manner in which he attacked the extraordinarily complex and distressing question of Afghanistan, but the House will know that I have tended to interest myself in the question of Afghanistan for some time; in fact since Christmas 1979.

If the House will bear with me, I should like to underline one aspect to which my hon. Friend drew attention, in view of the kind remarks he made about the British charity, Afghan Aid, of which I have the honour to be the chairman. It is worth reminding ourselves that in 1979 the population of Afghanistan was somewhere between 15 million and 17 million souls, although no one knows the exact figure. In Iran there are now about 1,500,000 Afghan refugees, and in Pakistan there are just under 3 million refugees. Inside Afghanistan itself there are perhaps another 1 million or 2 million displaced people.

I have heard various hon. Gentlemen who grace the Opposition Benches with their presence from time to time—but who, rather surprisingly, in view of their regular and stated interest in the subject, seem to prefer their beds to the subject of their choice this evening—say that there is an extraordinary event in Afghansitan which has led to the bombardment and the displacement of people. As I understand their analysis, that event has something to do with the bandits of the Mujahidin.

I find it difficult to square that assertion with those of my many Afghan friends who have been driven from their

[Viscount Cranborne]

homes and who readily associate themselves with the Mujahidin. The refugees in Iran and Pakistan, the 1 million or 2 million people who have been displaced and the population that remains in spite of the danger of bombardment and reprisals, continue to help the very people who Labour Members constantly assure us are resisting the civilising influence of the Soviets.

It is curious that the majority of the mosques and schools which we are frequently told have been destroyed by these bandits have in fact been destroyed by aerial bombardment. I should like to know how the Mujahidin have managed so quickly to acquire an air force, which is embroidered, apparently, and no doubt by some extraordinary machiavellian scheme, with the stars of the Red air force and the models of the MIGs and SUs which do the bombing.

My hon. Friend has investigated the politics thoroughly. I should like to emphasise the humanitarian cause, which should excite the sympathy of the House perhaps more than any other. It has been detailed with chilling simplicity by the two Ermacora reports presented to the United Nations General Assembly. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State on the remarkable and heartfelt job that he did in an Adjournment debate earlier this year when he drew our attention to the provisions of the first Ermacora report.

The humanitarian difficulty is a tragedy without parallel in the world, including Sudan and Ethiopia. Perhaps officially as many as half the refugees in the world today are Afghans. The bulk of those whom we can help directly in Pakistan are not too badly off. My hon. Friend drew attention to the funding difficulties which the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has begun to experience this year, but by and large they are not too bad. The real need is inside, where people are threatened by starvation, and are bombed, maimed and wounded. Until recently we have been able to rely only on anecdotal evidence, which is easily debunked by journalists of a rather pro-Soviet inclination. Aid organisations interested in the position inside Afghanistan have tended increasingly to try to become a little more professional in the way in which they assess the difficulty.

Such is the scale of the problem that it is extremely difficult for someone, however good his intentions, to go swanning into a country, disburse large sums and hope that they will reach the right place. Such resources tend to disappear and are sometimes disbursed in areas where there is not such a great need. The House will know that starvation can occur even in a village where there are adequate food supplies. Those of us who have taken an interest in the tragedies of Ethiopia and Sudan, as my hon. Friend has done, have seen similar events there.

Professional assessment and research of a dispassionate and academic sort into the position inside Afghanistan has been needed. The organisation Afghan Aid, of which I have the honour to be chairman, has taken a leading role in that endeavour, and some years ago commissioned, I am glad to say with the help of the Overseas Development Administration, a report by Dr. Frances de Souza entitled.

"The Threat of Famine in Afghanistan",

which pioneered for the international aid community the thought of techniques which enabled us to make the professional assessments of need which are commonplace in areas such as Africa, which are more accessible to aid organisations.

As the professionalism of voluntary organisations grows, it becomes possible to build a picture of what is happening inside a country. It would be right to draw the attention of the House to Dr. de Souza's report and the famine indicators which she used in Afghanistan. These compared unfavourably with similar famine indicators used in Biafra in the 1960s.

The Government have been generous in their aid to refugees in Pakistan, and all of us are grateful for that. If the Minister will forgive me for saying so, he and the Minister for Overseas Development have not been slow to draw our attention to the Government's generosity on our behalf. However, the time has come for the Government to recognise where the real need lies.

That need has been recognised by other aid agencies working for other Governments. I have only just returned from Norway—a country which in per capita terms is rather better off than the United Kingdom, except in view of the recent decline in oil prices — which has been generous and is aware of the need to help inside Afghanistan, rather than where it is easy, which is outside.

When my hon. Friend the Minister replies to the debate we will expect more than mere sympathetic words for those inside Afghanistan. He is aware, as is my right hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development, that the need exists. I delivered to him Dr. de Souza's report, which highlights that need. It is not good enough to give a little money and hope that that will be conscience money which will satisfy the House and the public.

The publicity and knowledge of what is happening in Afghanistan is growing. More journalists go there, better pictures are taken and therefore the world is becoming more conscious of what is happening.

People will ask what Governments and the United Nations agencies have done to help where the need exists. The answer is that they have done virtually nothing. It has been left to voluntary agencies, such as the one with which I work, to take the lead. It is obvious why Governments have done that. Government aid organisations like to deal from Government to Government. They do not like to send aid in on the quiet to countries like Afghanistan without the support and encouragement of the Government in the capital city.

The House is aware that, if the Government tried to do that, none of the aid would reach the people in need. It would either be stored in cardboard or be given to Russian soldiers. Therefore, if we are to do something more than merely wear our hearts on our sleeves, we must realise that extraordinary times demand extraordinary measures.

I ask my hon. Friend the Minister whether he is able to give us an assurance that the Government, whom I am pleased to support, will do something practical and on a sufficient scale to remove the shame which I feel because they have failed, for reasons of their own convenience, to sent help where it is needed. There is plenty of evidence that other countries are thinking of doing this. I have repeatedly been told that over the past few months.

If my hon. Friend can give us that assurance, the lead which voluntary agencies have given, which should have been given by the Government, will not have been in vain. I urge him to take note of that above anything else,

because, as my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, East pointed out, the need is urgent and the situation is getting worse.

12.40 am

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): I follow the hon. Member for Dorset, South (Viscount Cranborne) in congratulating the hon. Member for Lewisham, East (Mr. Moynihan) on his presentation of the tragedy that is Afghanistan today. The hon. Member for Lewisham, East was able to draw on his experience of the refugee situation on the borders, particularly in Pakistan, and draw attention to the burden that has been imposed on Pakistan by the weight and sheer volume of the refugees who are there. He was right to draw attention to the victims of the war in Afghanistan, both the victims who perhaps are marginally better off in Pakistan and those who suffer in Afghanistan.

I look forward to hearing how the Minister responds, particularly to the request for appropriate mechanisms for channelling aid to those who suffer within the country. I agree with what the hon. Member for Dorset, South said about the need for a Government response on this. He would be the first to recognise that in the peculiar circumstances of Afghanistan, probably that response will have to be through non-governmental organisations such as his, because of the flexibility that they can bring. I congratulate that voluntary organisation on the work it has already done, and I trust that the Minister will respond positively to what has been said.

So much for the key and most important part of the debate — the victims and the humanitarian aspect of what is happening in the Afghanistan war. We know that on Christmas day 1979 the USSR sent an army of occupation into Afghanistan. The leader, Mr. Amin, was killed, and, within four or five days, the Soviets controlled the cities, the airports and all the key strategic points.

Six years later, there are an estimated 118,000 Soviet troops remaining in the country. In spite of the torture, the scorched earth policy, the mass of sophisticated weaponry —the helicopter gunships and so on—the Soviets have failed to subdue the Mujahidin within Afghanistan. Therefore, we must admire their resistance against all the odds. The civilian casualties have been high, there have been mass movements over the borders into Pakistan, and into neighbouring Iran.

However, in condemning the invasion as what the Soviets, in another context, would have called a dirty colonial war, we recognise that, although the invasion was clothed in ideological garb, the reality is consistent with long-standing Russian—not Soviet—policy in the area. They have not learnt the lessons that we learnt to our cost, particularly in the last century, in 1838-42 and 1878-80, which culminated, almost 80 years ago, in the Anglo-Russian convention of August 1907, when Russia recognised Afghanistan as outside its sphere of influence.

We also recognise that it is false to idealise the status quo ante, as the hon. Member for Lewisham, East was in danger of so doing. The position prior to 1979 to Christmas day 1979 was not some typical western style democracy. The invasion was only the culimination of an increasing sovietisation of Afghanistan which had been built up during the 1970s. The human rights record prior to Christmas 1979 left much to be desired, and perhaps one does a disservice by too liberal a use of phrases like freedom fighters and clothing the Mujahidin, in the language which President Reagan and his friends so frequently use, the black and white language which clearly is far from the reality that has developed during the 1970s.

The position was that Afghanistan had become increasingly dependent on the Soviet Union during the 1970s and to a large extent, because of super power realities at that time, there was acceptance by the United States Government of that time of Afghanistan being within the Soviet sphere of influence.

There is another point which I think was not sufficiently stressed by the hon. Member for Lewisham, East. I note his conclusion that the Soviets are there to stay, and his cynicism about any of the apparent peace feelers by the Soviet Union. There is, however, some real evidence that there has latterly been movement on the part of the Soviet Union in its Afghan policy. It may be because of a recognition of the costs which it has incurred and is incurring. In part, those costs are human—the 10,000 Soviet troops who have been killed there—but that in terms of the total military manpower available to the Soviet Union is probably tolerable. It may be because of the economic burden both militarily and in terms of civilian aid to Afghanistan which has had the effect, as he said, of sovietising and distorting Afghan development towards the Soviet Union in terms of infrastructure, education and training.

But perhaps the largest costs—and in this I fully subscribe to the views that the hon. Gentleman proposed —is in the political field. At the time of the invasion, it may have been one of the factors contributing to the breakdown of SALT II. Latterly, of course, it has been increasingly recognised by the non-aligned movement, particularly by the Islamic part of that movement, that here we have a clear example, the only example, of a direct Soviet invasion of a third world country. The Soviets were, and are, embarrassed at the United Nations and in other international fora by the clear concensus of those whom they seek to court against their actions. I personally at the Inter Parliamentary Union conference some 18 months, two years ago moved a relevant resolution condemning the Soviet action in Afghanistan, and had very wide suppport from a range of countries which are not known to be partial—ready—to criticise the Soviet Union in other spheres.

Measured against those costs has been the prospect of a strategic gain within the area because of the instability of many of the countries. The balance perhaps now is being seen by the Soviets as increasingly moving against that invasion. Perhaps there is now a clearer recognition that there was a miscalculation, and the influence which they had over the Government prior to 1979 might have served their strategic and regional purposes in many ways better than the position—the anarchy, the mess—that they have now helped to create.

However, there are some signs that the Soviet Union is thinking again about its policy and wishes to consider how best to disengage itself from the quagmire and end the stalemate. The examples are well known to right hon. and hon. Members. I refer to the articles in Pravda in December 1985 and January 1986 which called inter alia for a positive dialogue among all Afghans. The political report by Mr. Gorbachev to the twenty-seventh party congress of the Communist party of the Soviet Union has not been cited, but it contains the famous reference to the "bleeding wound." In the relevant part of his speech Mr. Gorbachev said:

[Mr. Donald Anderson]

"Naturally, like any other country, we attach considerable importance to the security of our frontiers, on land and at sea . . . We have no territorial claims on any of them. We threaten none of them . . . For instance, counter-revolution and imperialism have turned Afghanistan into a bleeding wound. The USSR supports that country's efforts to defend its sovereignty. We should like, in the nearest future, to withdraw the Soviet troops stationed in Afghanistan at the request of its government. Moreover, we have agreed with the Afghan side on the schedule for their phased withdrawal as soon as a political settlement is reached that ensures an actual cessation and dependably guarantees the non-resumption of foreign armed interference in the internal affairs of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan."

It is a matter of judgment whether, as the hon. Member for Lewisham, East thinks, that is an attempt to buy time, a cover for the increased Sovietisation of Afghanistan, or whether it is a sign of the new Gorbachev era in seeking to disengage from a problem that has caused such embarrassment to the Soviet Union in world forums.

The United Nations package that was negotiated at Geneva has been mentioned. The components include non-interference and non-intervention in the internal affairs of Afghanistan, the voluntary return of the refugees and international guarantees of neutrality in which the United States would play a part. The stumbling block, as ever, has been the withdrawal of the 118,000 or so Soviet troops who now occupy the country. There has been substantial United States military assistance to the Mujahidin. Again, with the cynicism of great power rivalry, this may be prompted by a wish to continue to embarrass the Soviet Union, as earlier the United States had shown signs of being prepared to acquiesce in the Brezhnev doctrine in respect of Afghanistan and to trade off Soviet disengagement from central America, which is in the backyard of the United States of America, for a reduction or for an elimination of United States assistance to the Mujahidin.

The lesson, in part, is not to romanticise. It is likely that whatever happens within Afghanistan for geographic and strategic reasons, the Soviet Union will always have a major interest in that country and that the outcome will probably be that Finland and Mongolia will act as a model. It would be unrealistic to expect there to be a wholly independent and wholly neutral Afghanistan, because of the geographical position that it enjoys — or perhaps does not enjoy.

The tragedy of Afghanistan, with all the human victims who have been so well described by the hon. Member for Lewisham, East must be seen in the East-West context. Hopes were raised by the autumn summit between President Reagan and Mr. Gorbachev. At that time the President raised the question of the resolution of regional conflicts. The high moral ground which the United States seeks to hold in regard to Afghanistan is clearly put in question by its own activities in central America, particularly now that President Reagan is leaning so massively on Congress to agree to substantial financial assistance for the Contras, with no serious hope of overturning the Government within Nicaragua without direct United States military intervention.

As we consider Afghanistan in the East-West context, we must ask ourselves how serious the British Government and the United States Government are about the building of bridges to a second summit with the Soviet Union and, in our case, about the proposed visit of Mr. Shevardnadze. If we claim to be serious about improved relations, what game are we playing because there are certain signs of late that both our own Government and that of President Reagan are conducting themselves in a contrary manner? For example, one can cite the totally negative response of the Prime Minister to the Gorbachev peace proposals and the United States decision now to insist on the reduction of personnel in the Soviet mission at the United Nations. Why should now be chosen for that decision as we reach the foothills leading to the summit?

I regret that on Tuesday of this week the Prime Minister received Mr. Abdul Haq, a representative of the Mujahidin. As we prepare for discussions with the Soviets, such a meeting was unhelpful, clumsy and lacking in restraint. As in so many other personal initiatives of the Prime Minister in foreign policy, as she elephants around the world—one thinks of the infamous speech in Hong Kong in September 1984 which almost torpedoed the negotiations with the Chinese Government — it is the Foreign Office which has to pick up the pieces.

Such initiatives at this time are bound to raise questions as to how serious we are about improving relations and firming up in advance of the Shevardnadze visit. If we wish to adopt a moral stance in respect of Afghanistan, that can so easily be compromised by selective action and by selective indignation on our part. If we wish to have a realistic stance in foreign affairs some of the recent initiatives of the Government must be questioned. They should be seen as provocative, shortsighted, one eyed, indulgent and counter productive.

I am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Tim Eggar): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, East (Mr. Moynihan) on having his debate selected tonight. We enjoyed listening to his erudite assessment of the situation in Afghanistan. I thank also my hon. Friend the Member for Dorset, South (Viscount Cranborne), who in the last six or seven years has given much of his time and effort to assist the people of that country.

I welcome the hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) to what are becoming regular debates on Afghanistan. I was sorry that he felt it necessary towards the end of his speech to indulge in some party political polemics. I thought during the earlier part of his remarks that we would have a more or less agreed position on the considerable problems that face the people of Afghanistan. While I appreciate the temptation that Labour Members have always to bring party politics into our debates, even at one o'clock in the morning, I had hoped that the hon. Gentleman might have resisted that temptation and taken a more measured attitude to the discussion.

The hon. Member for Swansea, East was not in the House on 20 December, when we last debated Afghanistan. It is appropriate that we should be discussing the subject now, because at this time the UN Secretary-General's special representative is engaged in a shuttle to try to bring the war, now in its seventh year, to an end. We support the efforts to find a solution based on successive UN resolutions. Those resolutions would allow self-determination for the Afghan people and enable Afghanistan again to take its place among the independent, non-aligned nations.

I note the optimistic assessment of the hon. Member for Swansea, East of the change in the attitude of the Soviet Government. I hope, on behalf of the Afghan people, that

his optimism is well placed, as it is essentially for the Soviet Government to decide whether it is possible to reach a settlement in Afghanistan.

When the House last debated Afghanistan, I quoted extensively from the report of the special rapporteur to the UN commission on human rights. His latest report was published on 17 February and it is available in the Library. To summarise the current position in Afghanistan, I can do no better than quote from that report's conclusions. The rapporteur said:

"The Afghan Government is attempting to legitimise itself by trying to build up a democratic power base, but the number of refugees is still rising and has now reached nearly 5 million."

That is the number, not 2·4 million as my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, East suggested. The rapporteur added:

"This is a key issue, as it affects the problem of self-determination and the question of a political solution. Without due representation of the refugees and respect for their wishes in the political discussions, no humanitarian solution to the problem can be found.

The kind of warfare has changed. Guerrilla warfare has reached the cities, whereas in outlying areas there is now direct confrontation. This influences the human rights situation in the country as a whole. Large parts of the country are out of the Government's control.

Where the Government has control, it uses all forms of anti-guerrilla activities to combat opponents or presumed opponents of the regime."

The next passage is particularly horrifying:

"The practice of torture continues and more death sentences have been carried out without observing the safeguards set out in Article 7 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Afghanistan is a party.

The methods of warfare are contrary to humanitarian standards and the relevant instruments to which the States concerned are parties. The massacres of the civilian population, the use of anti-personnel mines, the looting, the methods of retaliation used and the disproportionately heavy bombardment of villages are, in any case, contrary to humanitarian law. The way in which both parties to the conflict take and treat prisoners is also contrary to humanitarian law. Brutalization of warfare can be imputed to both sides.

The civilian casualties in 1985 are estimated to be about 35,000.

The prison conditions of political prisons . . . are contrary to the Standard Minimum Rules for Treatment of Prisoners.

The Government controls the larger villages and cities in most cases mainly during the daytime. There is therefore a *de facto* partition of the country. In the government-controlled areas, the educational system does not appear to respect the liberty of parents to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions. The governmental educational system, based as it is on ideological considerations, allegedly fails to give due regard to the rights enshrined in the Covenant.

As a result of the conflict, the Government is unable to guarantee social and economic rights to the entire population. However, the specialized agencies and intergovernmental organizations, which could help improve the enjoyment of those rights for the whole population, are not permitted to work in the areas outside direct government control. Therefore only the efforts of non-governmental organizations can assist in meeting the economic, social and cultural needs of the population, which has no other assistance.

The Special Rapporteur has the impression that the only solution to the human rights situation in Afghanistan is the withdrawal of the foreign troops, because more than one third of the Afghan population is now outside the country and is unwilling to return while foreign troops control it, and because the will to resist foreign domination seems to be stronger than it was in the so-called Basmachi rebellions. Continuation of the military solution will, in the opinion of the Special Rapporteur, lead inevitably to a situation approaching genocide, which the traditions and culture of this noble people cannot permit.

The Government's tendency to seek broader support and democratic legitimization through a series of *Jirgahs* deserves recognition. It can, however, hardly be considered as a free exercise of the right of self-determination, which is enshrined in article 1 of the International Covenants on Human Rights. The circumstances under which *Jirgahs* have been assembled and the present war situation make it difficult to accept the claim that they complied with the recommendation of the Special Rapporteur to hold a *Loya-Jirgah*."

I have quoted extensively because those are not the words of a Conservative Minister or of a partial observer, but of a United Nations rapporteur.

Mr. Anderson: Does the Minister agree that this valuable report constitutes a good answer to those who try to dismiss the United Nations as some form of Communist conspiracy?

Mr. Eggar: Oh dear! It is very sad that the hon. Gentleman has to try to make cheap points such as that. Of course we recognise the important role played by the United Nations and its organisations. If the hon. Gentleman had been present on 20 December, he would have heard me draw extensively on the first report of the same rapporteur. I shall be happy to go on doing that. If the hon. Gentleman is good enough to attend subsequent debates, no doubt he will hear me draw on that rapporteur's later reports. I should like to pick up the conclusion that the only solution to the human rights situation in Afghanistan is the withdrawal of the foreign troops. I believe that the House will wholeheartedly agree. I hope that the hon. Member for Swansea, East will not jump up and deny that.

We should therefore note carefully the words of Mr. Gorbachev at the recent party congress on 25 February, which the hon. Gentleman quoted in full. I shall refer just to the first sentence. Mr. Gorbachev said:

"Counter revolution and imperialism have turned Afghanistan into a bleeding wound."

It is nobody other than the Soviet Union who has turned Afghanistan into a bleeding wound. This cri de couer effectively confirms the conundrum the Russians are facing in trying to explain themselves to the outside world.

The sad litany I have recorded today offers, to my mind, devastating and conclusive proof that the Soviet Union intervened with massive military force, and has remained in occupation in the name of a tiny minority, who could never command the support of the Afghan people. The problem now is how that mistake can be acknowledged and the position repaired, so far as it can be.

It is not for me to recommend a definitive solution. But in their own institutions of tribal assemblies, or Jirgas, the people of Afghanistan have their own democratic machinery which, in its way, is just as representative as our own. Let the Soviet Union recognise that the regime it is imposing from the outside can never command the support of the people of Afghanistan. For stability, peace, and a humanitarian solution to the largest refugee problem in the world, there is no alternative to Soviet withdrawal and to allowing Afghanistan to exercise its right to self-determination. There is urgent work to do to rehabilitate this nation of 15 million, with its youth decimated by war, its economy in tatters and its administration disrupted. None of these appalling problems can be rectified until Soviet forces leave Afghanistan. If they do leave, that would represent no threat to Soviet security and interests, any more than that situation in 1979 represented a threat when they invaded.

My hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, East referred at some length to his concern about the Soviet wish to sovietise Afghanistan. I agree with my hon. Friend that there is evidence that the Soviet Union's leaders want

[Mr. Eggar]

to achieve a transformation of Afghan society that would ensure permanent Soviet influence. They seek the creation of a stable client state with institutions modelled on their own Soviet institutions. But as we have heard, and as my hon. Friend said, the cost of such action is high, at home and in the international community. As we know, they will never bend the Afghan people to their will.

The Afghans themselves have shown what they think of the regime and its activities. The resistance have made it clear that their struggle started and will continue with or without help from outside, although one has to admit that the regime and its Soviet allies simply cannot blame counter-revolution, imperialism or foreign armed interference. The opposition comes from the Afghan people.

The dedicated and courageous opposition of the Afghan resistance to the almost overwhelming superiority of troops, weapons, technology and communications of the invading and occupying forces must command our respect and support. We shall continue to do what we can for the victims of the occupation, and I believe that the entire free world recognises the need to do so. We fully support the United Nations Secretary General's efforts to reach a negotiated solution, but I repeat that the key to the sad problem remains a withdrawal of the Soviet forces. Until that occurs, I have no doubt that Mr. Abdul Haq and his courageous colleagues will continue to fight to free their country and, indeed, will do so with or without help from outside. They deserve our admiration and support.

I note that 21 hon. Members have signed early-day motion 560, which expresses grave concern that Abdul Haq should have been received by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary. It is extraordinary that the Kabul 21, if we may call them that, who attacked the Afghan resistance leader, did not think fit to express any concern about the 118,000 occupation troops who are employing the full force of modern weaponry against the Afghan people. The plain fact is that the resistance is fighting a tremendous battle to repel a foreign invader. Hon. Members should express concern about that invader, not attack the resistance leaders.

Mr. Anderson: The Minister misses the point of the early-day motion. Of course we condemn the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, but by selectively seeing only one freedom fighter, the Prime Minister lays herself open to the criticism that she who says nothing about United States aid to the Contras and has blocked progress on sanctions against South Africa is prepared, in this one-eyed way, only to support the freedom fighters—as she terms them—in Afghanistan.

Mr. Eggar: The hon. Gentleman's loyalty to his colleagues who are far to the Left of him in the Labour party is an appealing aspect of his character, but he does not do himself justice.

Mr. Anderson: There is no one to the Left of me.

Mr. Eggar: That is a surprising revelation. The hon. Gentleman would have done better to have remained seated, because the House will have noted that neither he nor any of his Front Bench colleagues signed the early-day motion. That is a better reflection than his remarks tonight of the way in which the Labour Front Bench views the efforts of the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Brown) and others. It is interesting that my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, East was happy to spend Christmas on the Pakistan side of the Afghan border. On the other side was the hon. Member for Leith, who is notable yet again for his absence from a debate on Afghanistan, and who is used to receiving attention and all-expenses paid trips from the puppet Kamal regime in Afghanistan.

My hon. Friends the Members for Lewisham, East and for Dorset, South asked about assistance to Afghan Aid and to other non-governmental organisations. I have taken very careful note of the support given for assistance to Afghan Aid by the hon. Member for Swansea, East. It goes without saying that we are only too well aware of the appalling conditions faced by many people still inside Afghanistan. As on previous occasions, I pay a warm tribute to the work done by Afghan Aid.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dorset, South realistically expressed the difficulties experienced by Governments in giving assistance to organisations such as Afghan Aid. I am, sadly, unable tonight to give him the assurance that he asked of me, but I can assure him that I will be drawing his remarks, the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, East and those of the hon. Member for Swansea, East to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development and my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary. We have taken very careful note of the strong expression that the House has allowed itself tonight.

To reinforce the message that I have already tried to give, there is no obstacle to the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan. There is no threat to Afghanistan or to the Soviet Union should this withdrawal of Soviet troops take place. If Mr. Gorbechev is really serious, as the hon. Member for Swansea, East thinks he may be, he should show that he is serious by withdrawing those 118,000 troops of the occupation force. More than well-turned phrases and artificial preconditions are needed. Withdrawal is essential. Afghanistan has suffered enough.

SDI Research

1.21 am

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): If I am fast to the point of gabbling, it is partly because both the Minister and the Hansard reporters have had the text of what I am going to say since 2 o'clock, and partly because there are very important debates to come, not least on Leyland, which should receive time during the debate on the Consolidated Fund.

I ought to be candid with the House and say that, in raising the issue of SDI research in general, and the visit of Mr. Clarence Robinson in particular, I am passionately opposed to the militarisation of space. In his excellent pamphlet, Beyond Nuclear Deterrence, my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) said that

"The only man in the world who believes that star wars might make nuclear weapons 'impotent and obsolete' is President Reagan himself."

In this matter, official Labour party policy has no more ardent supporter than me.

It will be within the recollection of Ministers that on 26 February, column 993, during the Royal Air Force debate I raised a series of relevant questions on SDI to which I have had no reply. I understand the vexation of Ministers having to be up half the night, but you see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if Ministers do not reply by letter to Commons speeches made during the Services Estimates, the Members who make speeches have no option but to look back and back, until someone takes notice of what is said on the Floor of the House. I say to the Minister of State that the parliamentary process ought to take precedence over radio broadcasts from Brussels on "Any Questions?"

Could we establish the basis on which Mr. Clarence Robinson came to Europe? He was hardly a tourist. A tourist does not contact the SDI participation office requesting Ministry of Defence approval to visit British firms, such as Ferranti, British Aerospace and Plessey, in order to discuss work with the highest security classification. A tourist does not call the research director of GEC Marconi, contact its research director, to be told by the research director's office that he must have MoD clearance, then approach the MoD, to be told by Mr. Ken Hambledon, then head of the SDI participation office, that no such clearance would be given, and return to GEC Marconi in the hope of pursuing his original request.

May I say that I believe that Mr. Ken Hambledon was acting wholly properly, wholly in accord with the British national and scientific interest, and, I believe, probably, though it has not been published, within the terms of the memorandum of understanding? Can the House be told why this distinguished civil servant, Mr. Ken Hambledon, appointed specially by the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) to head the SDI participation office, who spent a year grappling, first, with the intricacies of international law, secondly, with delicate matters of diplomacy, and, thirdly, with the technology of SDI, has been moved sideways? Does his successor, Mr. Stan Orman—no personal criticism of him from me—have equal knowledge of what is self-evidently a mighty complex subject?

Has Mr. Ken Hambledon, an honourable man doing his job properly, been the fall-guy for the Americans, so that Ministers can turn round, after the Clarence Robinson fiasco, and say, "It was all a mistake—help yourselves to British advanced technology, classify what you will, and we have removed any obstacle to your doing this, since that man Hambledon, who was awkward to Clarence Robinson, has been shifted elsewhere"?

What is the justification for taking up the time of the House? It is this. First, Paul Hopler, a technology specialist in the technology transfer unit of the Pentagon, within the research and engineering division of the Pentagon, is engaged in a study of SDI technologies. Secondly, Hopler commissioned two companies, the Institute for Defence Analysis, and BK Dynamics, to carry out a survey of NATO countries, to discover SDI-related technologies, which would have to be brought into the study, and which might have to be classified. Thirdly, BK Dynamics has admitted that Mr. Robinson was recently in Europe to elicit information from companies, including about 10 in Britain, that would subsequently be fed into the study for Mr. Hopler.

In answer to one of my questions, the Minister of State replied that either United States law or United Kingdom law would apply, depending on the contractual circumstances. I asked the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) when he was Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether, when he went to Washington, he argued that the writ of United States law would not run in the United Kingdom. Has that changed with the memorandum of understanding, or, indeed, the addendum between Professor Richard Norman and General Abrahamson?

Let me dwell on the money. In my previous speech I referred to John Pike of the American Federation of Scientists, *Official Report*, column 994, 26 February, on the question of American financing. He estimates that Europe might receive some $300 million. I understand from the journalist, Mr. Paul Walton, that, although $5 billion has already been placed in America for SDI contracts, only $1·2 million, not billion — I repeat million—have been placed in Britain with Heriot Watt, where some of my constituents work; Ferranti in two areas, one adjacent to my constituency; Marconi Projects, in two cases; Plessey, and English Electric Valve. A little other money may have gone to Rutherford Appleton or Culham. An estimate has been given that Britain would be lucky to win one tenth of 1 per cent.—0·1 per cent. by 1990 of the $26 billion available. Do the Ministry of Defence dispute those figures?

Are we British really going to allow ourselves to have our advanced technology milked by the Americans in the hope of comparatively paltry sums? It is the old, old story of European, and particularly British, brains, having the ideas, doing the research, and finding that the Americans do the development, and reap the rewards.

Bluntly, the House will have to be persuaded that Mr. Clarence Robinson was not on an artful, thieving mission. I have not met Mr. Clarence Robinson, and for all I know he may be a very serious and decent man, ex-journalist on *Aviation Week*, successful business man, trusted by the American Department of Defence, for whom he does most of his work. Is it conceivable that the Ministry of Defence did not know about his visit; and would Ministers like to correct or amend their answers to Tuesday's questions?

Can we really suppose that the Ministry of Defence had no knowledge at all of the work of Mr. Paul Hopler, with whom Clarence Robinson has a working relationship? After all, in *Jane's Defence Weekly*, on 15 February, Mr. Hopler's intentions were outlined in full. Subsequently, on

[Mr. Tam Dalyell]

17 February, the anxious directors of our leading high technology companies were demanding an explanation of Mr. Hopler's intentions from General Abrahamson, at a briefing of the Conservative Bow Group on SDI. General Abrahamson promised to reply before leaving Britain. Has he yet done so? Not to my knowledge.

I understand that Paul Hopler certainly thought that the visit of Clarence Robinson had the full approval of the British Cabinet. Is he correct? Were the Americans deluding themselves about British Cabinet agreement, or did the memorandum of understanding imply that a visit, such as Robinson's, was a matter of course? Have the Government been entirely candid about their involvement? Ministers should be careful in answering this question, which I shall repeat endlessly until it is answered, because I shall be sending a copy of this debate to Mr. Hopler and Mr. Robinson. It would be best to be candid now.

If the Government truly knew nothing about the visit attempted by Mr. Clarence Robinson, are Ministers really suggesting that Mr. Robinson was discovered trying to undertake a covert tour of highly classified British companies, universities and research establishments? The House of Commons was told that Britain would participate in SDI research as another example of the special understanding with the United States, reinforced by the only memorandum of understanding, with its recent addendum, so far made by the American Government. Perhaps the House should be offering advice to the West Germans, and Herr Genscher, that the memorandum of understanding, is more like a memorandum of misunderstanding.

Present misunderstandings have not been dispelled by different explanations, originating from officials of the American Government as the true reason for the visit by Mr. Robinson. I have already referred to the explanation by Hopler that necessary Cabinet level approval had already been given for a visit by Mr. Clarence Robinson to discuss classified research in British firms. However, Mr. Clarence Robinson told Mr. Ken Hambledon that he was "an advanced scout" for the award of SDI contracts specifically set aside for United Kingdom firms. Do Ministers accept that explanation? The SDI office in Washington does not. Major Rigby, chief spokesman for the American SD organisation office, provided this statement:

"Mr. Robinson is a Defence Consultant with contracts with various Defence Departments. Mr. Robinson was in Europe conducting an unclassified study for the Deputy Under Secretary of Defence for Research and Engineering. He was not working for the SDI office."

That is the Americans, not me, speaking.

The SDI office dispelled any idea that Mr. Clarence Robinson was offering research contracts to British companies on its behalf. Surprisingly, he was here to consider unclassified research. Perhaps the House should be told why Mr. Robinson asked to see classified research. It is no good British Ministers passing by on the other side of the road from Mr. Robinson, because Mr. Robinson, in the words of the SDI office in Washington, was working for the Deputy Under-Secretary of State for Defence for Research and Engineering, who is Dr. Hicks, the boss of Paul Hopler. Ministers and their Departments must have known something about the American initiative. What? Do they not read *Jane's Defence Weekly*?

Are we to understand that last Tuesday the Secretary of State for Defence authorised a request to the Pentagon, via the British embassy in Washington, for a full explanation of what Mr. Clarence Robinson was up to? Is the Minister in a position to let the House have a response? If so, could we have it? If not, is it not an astonishing snub to Her Majesty's Government? It raises the whole critical question of what kind of relationship we have with the Americans on this issue.

The Minister will have studied the important article in Saturday's *Financial Times* by Peter Marsh. I repeat the questions put by Mr. Marsh in that article. Why were Ministry of Defence officials kept in the dark about the true purpose behind Mr. Robinson's tour? Is Mr. Robinson due to return? If they have any difficulty about eliciting information from the Americans, why do not the Ministry of Defence officials phone Mr. Robinson in Washington? I can give them the phone number. His work telephone number is 0101 703 522 8155 and his home telephone is 0101 703 255 9852.

Does the memorandum of understanding allow for such visits? Why on earth cannot the memorandum of understanding be published, since publication might put at rest all the rumours? The notion that it cannot be published on grounds of commercial confidentiality does seem absurd. Why, in Heaven's name, cannot the memorandum of understanding by published?

One of the issues encapsulated in this episode is the way in which the Pentagon is seeking to arrange mechanisms for the classification of militarily sensitive SDI-related technologies on which British firms are working. Those classification procedures could, if implemented, either by the decree of the United States Government by themselves or by the COCOM organisation in Paris impede the ability of British firms to commercialise their technologies in the world market place.

I have reason to believe that Mr. Hopler has already gathered, on the Pentagon's behalf, a great deal of sensitive information about British technology. Is this a healthy relationship? I am not anti-American, but I express doubts about the Pentagon's motives.

As a former Labour science spokesman, sacked over the Falklands, with a sustained interest in British science, I am concerned about something else. We have seen the development of United States controls over the commercial exploitation of science and technology and even products which we now take for granted — for example, computers. This Robinson affair demonstrates that there is a danger, if such controls are deployed, with reference to more fundamental science and technology, as represented by the SDI. Having extended control over products emanating from British and European science, on the grounds that they should not fall into the hands of the Soviets, the Pentagon now apparently wishes to control research and development, simply because it is defined as SDI-related.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara), to the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) and to the Under-Secretary of State, for staying up until this hour. I should like answers to some of my questions.

1.35 am

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil): This is not the first time that, early in the morning, I have followed the hon.

Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) in an Adjourment debate. This debate is of as much consequence and importance as the previous one.

This is not the first time that such an incident has occurred in Britain. More than a year ago I tabled a parliamentary question which showed that Mr. Jack Lacey on behalf of the American Government had visited a certain British firm — Plasma Technology in Avon — without the British Government's permission or knowledge, to seek information about attempts by the United States Government to impose upon British firms United States law, which does not operate in Britain.

The Attorney-General has already commented to me in general terms about this example of extra-territorial application of United States law. He said that it was a direct infringement of British sovereignty and was illegal under international law. That happened more than a year ago. As far as I know, since then the Government have taken no steps to ensure that what happens in Britain is subject only to British law and to protect British firms from actions which the Government acknowledge are an infringement of our sovereignty and are illegal under international law.

I am concerned about the fact that we are beginning to see direct attempts by the American Government to impose restrictions, not only on the activities of British firms which obey British law, but on the knowledge in people's heads. This is happening in the United States. The Pentagon is attempting to restrict the free movement of certain American citizens because they happen to have information in their heads.

It would be a grave infringement of our liberties, our sovereignty and the laws that govern our activities and behaviour if we allowed similiar controls to be imposed on our people. I hope that the Government will concede that this is yet another example — a serious and damaging one—of activities taking place on behalf of the United States Government which are not only a direct infringement of our laws but which act as a serious inhibition on the commercial activities of firms that operate in Britain. Unless the Government are prepared to take serious action and to stand up to the United States they will diminish not only the rights of British subjects but the capacity of much of our high technology industry to trade effectively.

1.40 am

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull, North): We are again indebted to my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) for an opportunity to discuss this most important of issues. Normally when we have discussed the SDI initiative it has been on a question of general military policy, strategic policies and foreign policy implications, and we have not always had the opportunity to examine the matter in terms of its straight defence industry implications and its implications for British industry generally.

The reason for this debate lies in the two strange replies that my hon. Friend received from the Secretary of State for Defence on Tuesday. When my hon. Friend asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether he was

"consulted about the visit of Mr. Clarence Robinson, and for what reasons did he go back to the United States without having talked to British industry?"

the Secretary of State replied:

"I was not consulted about the visit of Mr. Clarence Robinson. It was therefore entirely up to him whether he came or went." — [*Official Report*, 11 March 1986; Vol. 93, c. 793.]

Six columns later my hon. Friend returned to this point and asked the Secretary of State:

"Could we be clear? Is the Secretary of State saying that he heard nothing from the British embassy in Washington about the visit of Mr. Clarence Robinson and that Mr. Clarence Robinson never asked for security clearance?"

Mr. Speaker intervened to say:

"Order. Has this anything to do with NATO?"

Despite the protection given by Mr. Speaker on that occasion, the Secretary of State for Defence found it necessary to come back and say:

"I can confirm that we heard nothing of the visit of that gentleman, but we have asked for a report about it." — [*Official Report*, 11 March 1986; Vol. 93, c. 799.]

The question then arises, where and when was the report asked for? Did it arise between columns 793 and 799, or had it already been asked for? If that was the case, why was my hon. Friend not informed about that when he first posed his question to the Secretary of State? If we had had that information, we would have had a better reason for knowing why the Secretary of State and the Government have been so diffident about the whole of this SDI agreement and memorandum of understanding with the United States.

It is strange that the original reply should have been by the Secretary of State asserting that he knew little or nothing and that nothing was asked for and nothing had to be given. Somebody in the Secretary of State's Department must have known that Mr. Clarence Robinson was sniffing around British industry, that he was going to some of the most highly secretive and classified institutions in the land and that he had been looking for a security clearance and that it had been turned down.

The Department must have known, as my hon. Friend has said, of the role that Mr. Robinson had played in the past for BK Dynamics in its search for information about European technologies relevant to SDI. That role must have been known to the Department and to the Embassy in Washington.

The Secretary of State must have known of the transfer sideways of Mr. Ken Hambledon and whether that was or was not the direct result of the Civil Servant refusing to give the necessary security clearance to Mr. Robinson. We ought to know about these matters from the Secretary of State or from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State who is to reply. I would have thought that on an issue like this, we should have had the Minister responsible for Defence procurement replying on these matters and I endorse the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow on that point.

On Tuesday the Secretary of State gave the impression that he did not know what was going on in his own Department. We are concerned with something rather more important than the antics and knowledge of the Secretary of State. We are concerned with the control of fundamental research and technology in the United Kingdom and whether that will be swallowed up and lost in the United State's SDI programme. My hon. Friend's question and the questions which he listed so succinctly in the RAF debate, were of a fundamental nature which needed to be answered and which did not, in any way, seek a degree of commercial confidentiality. My hon. Friend did not want to know what the percentage was that Plessey was going to receive and he did not even want to know the

[Mr. Kevin McNamara]

significance of particular orders; rather, he wanted to know — and I believe that the country and the House want to know—what was conceded in the memorandum of understanding? What did we understand by it? The Government would like us to believe that British science and technology, like the National Health Service, is safe in their hands, but we have seen what has happened to the NHS, and we are likely to see British research facilities, knowledge and technology disappearing, as fast as hospitals are being closed.

We want to know not the commercial secrets but the understanding on which we entered into negotiations with the United States and agreed to take part in the SDI programme. We have made, not a treaty, but a memorandum of understanding with the United States. It has not been agreed by the foreign affairs committee of the Senate, and so the Senate is not bound by it. Through a variety of ways, the United States can get our knowlege, science and technology, and change the rules and move the goalposts as often and quickly as it wishes for what to it are proper reasons. I do not deny the right of Americans to look after their national interest, but occasionally our Government should look after ours as well.

The United States Government's history is of restriction followed by restriction on the ability of their allies to develop, and sell to third parties secrets, products and ideas, if they have the remotest defence implications. Presidential and COCOM powers have been extended. We have seen how contracts are drawn up, and the limitations placed on people who attend intellectual seminars in the United States. They are all based on the idea of restricting knowledge outside the United States. However, that knowledge goes into the hands of United States' industry to give it an edge, to enable it to develop ideas from outside, and to delay their application and development outside the United States while they are developed inside.

My hon. Friend asked whether British or American law applied to the contracts, and what the intellectual property rights were. While in the letter of the law that is important, it is not terribly important. It is more a question of the spirit in which the matters are entered into, and we are worried about the lack of spirit. It is no consolation to say that if an idea comes from a British firm we shall maintain our intellectual property rights. That is equivalent to a man who owns the freehold of land which has a 999 year lease. That is what is likely to happen in this case.

The Minister will have read the important article by Mr. Paul Walton in *Jane's Defence Weekly* last month which sought to examine the nature of the memorandum of understanding, and the question of the United States extra-territorial claims. We have witnessed their development, and the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) tried to compare the activities of Mr. Lacey with those of Mr. Robinson. I am not sure whether one can do that.

Mr. Walton argued that the memorandum of understanding was drawn up because of a desire by the British Government, especially the Prime Minister, to get away from the extra-territorial arguments, objections and fights, and to establish matters on a new, better level. We could in fact work together on these matters. If we look at the matter in the way the Prime Minister, the United States, the Pentagon and Mr. Paul Hopler have looked at it we see that there is a different attitude.

Mr. Walton in the article published in *Jane's Defence Weekly* argues that the extra territorial debate has taken a new turn towards fundamental research and development.

"The Pentagon is now studying any technology, in any country, which might have some military application for SDI research. The Star Wars programme is based on fundamental technologies not yet out of the laboratory . . . the Americans wnat the right to classify any technology, and any product, in the field of electronics, computing and telecommunications,".

That means that the whole of the role of information technology and the future that has for industry in general, not only in defence matters but more fundamentally in civil matters will be at the mercy of this Committee and the way that it examines these things. Mr. Hopler's Committee is searching for relevant technologies in NATO countries outside the United States and two countries in particular are under the microscope — the United Kingdom and West Germany.

Mr. Hopler told his British counterparts tht he wished to study SDI related technologies—it has been quoted in Jane and has not been denied either by Mr. Hopler or the British Government. He said:

"We're not necessarily going to go into all companies in all countries although I am sure we will in the case of Great Britain".

That is a nice position to be in. The man responsible in the Pentagon for the Department of Defence, the guardian of the Military Critical Technologies List, says that he will go in to every company in the United Kingdom. That is overstepping extra territoriality in terms of SDI.

The article continues:

"Mr. Hopler was working closely with the SDI office, but he has been advised to distance his study from their work. The politicians—"

I presume that that is the Government—

"do not want to link SDI and the Co-ordinating Committee on Multi Lateral Export Control (CoCom). It is thought that this combination would be dynamite. One seeks European co-operation in R and D, the other denies them easy access to advanced technologies."

That is indeed a contradiction and it is indeed dynamite. I find the conclusion of Mr. Walton's article the most frightening:

"Eventually, Pentagon staff close to the MCTL process feel, Britain will have no choice but to take part."

that is, in SDI and to accept extra territoriality.

"The memo which committed Margaret Thatcher to Star Wars also implied that full security be maintained when, and if, SDI contracts were placed. Several contracts have now been placed by SDI research, Pentagon officials argue, so the UK is obliged to open up for inspection *Fait accompli*. Whether the firms which Hopler wants his teams to visit will feel similarly obliged is another matter. In the long term, the process of classifying work not yet out of the laboratory will undoubtedly have a detrimental effect on computing, electronics and telecommunications. More precisely, it will be Information Technology outside the USA and beyond the military industrial complex which will suffer most. Without the free flow of information and people, and the ability to trade in state of the art products, such industries will always play second fiddle to the USA."

If they are playing second fiddle to the United States, it means that our defence industries are playing second fiddle to the United States. It means that on those occasions when we may wish, for our own sake and in our interests to defend and develop our own defence potential we will be able to do so only if we have the consent of the Military Critical Technologies List. We have to ensure that we have the ability to pull back our technology and use it without the consent of the United States.

The real fear of the country is not about the strategy, or SDI itself, but about the future of British industry and our ability to invent, develop and innovate for our

industrial well-being and the defence of our country, which has been put at risk by the Government's actions. That is why we are particularly indebted to my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow for his tenacity in giving us the opportunity to debate this subject this evening.

1.55 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. John Lee): The House recently had the opportunity to debate the strategic defence initiative, on 19 February, when my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave a very full exposition of the British Government's policy towards the United States strategic defence initiative and towards participation in the United States research programme for SDI. That was only three weeks ago. Within a week, the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) sought to re-open the debate in the course of the debate on the Royal Air Force, and tonight he has returned to the subject once again. One cannot—I say this in the nicest way—but marvel at the hon. Member's tenacity in this as in other matters. He will hardly expect me tonight to elaborate further on the Government's position, so recently and fully set out before the House.

The Government's approach to the strategic defence initiative continues to be guided by the four points which were agreed by the President and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister at their meeting at Camp David in December 1984. The points are; first, the United States and Western aim is not to achieve superiority but to maintain balance, taking account of Soviet development. Secondly, SDI-related deployment would, in view of treaty obligations, have to be a matter for negotiation. Thirdly, the aim is to enhance, and not to undermine, deterrents. Lastly, East-West negotiations should aim to achieve security with reduced levels of offensive systems on both sides.

Within the framework of these four points, including our clear commitment to strategic stability and to arms control, the British Government have viewed the question of participation in SDI research. In March last year, the United States Secretary for Defence wrote to his opposite numbers in NATO and Australia, Israel and Japan inviting each country to participate in the United States programme of SDI research. The Government could, of course, have responded by saying simply that the British companies and research institutions were free, as always, to seek involvement in the United States research programme through their own individual efforts. It would have been possible, in other words, for the Government to refrain from making any positive response to the United States invitation, but this would have been to ignore the long and successful history of Anglo-American defence co-operation to under-estimate the significance of SDI. Research for the development of technology generally; and to turn a blind eye to the problems facing any offshore supplier to the United States, in circumstances when it is the little as well as the large who have something to offer.

Mr. Dalyell: I read in an article by an arms control reporter on 25 December 1985:

"The US was contemplating asking Brazil and Argentina to join the SDI research programme."

The reference is cited as *El Economista*, as stated on Moscow domestic radio, on 15 December 1985. It is true —perhaps the Minister can answer this in writing—that the Americans asked both Brazil and Argentina, and should they be added to the list?

Mr. Lee: I am indebted to the hon. Gentleman, as always. I cannot comment on what he said, but I shall look into it.

The Government support the SDI research programme, for all the reasons set out by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in the debate on 19 February. We believe that it is right that British participation in an endeavour of such magnitude and significance as this should take place within the framework of an intergovernmental agreement. The negotiations leading up to signature of the memorandum of understanding on 6 December last were constructive, purposeful, and fruitful. A sound framework has been established for British participation in the SDI research programme, on a scale commensurate with what this country's research base has to offer such an advanced programme, and on terms and conditions which fully protect British commercial interests.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow behaves as though SDI is a new concept. The technologies now gathered under the generic title of SDI have been the subject of research and development in the East and the West for close to 20 years.

Perhaps the hon. Member has forgotten that a decision was taken by the then Labour Government, and wisely so in my opinion, to develop Chevaline. At that time we relied on Polaris as a strategic deterrent and the Russians embarked on the establishment of an ABM defence—the first deployed strategic defence initiative — which would have rendered Polaris ineffective. Wisely, we took the decision to design a system capable of outwitting their defence, and that system remains our effective deterrent today.

There is nothing new in the laser technology, there is nothing new in advanced computing, there is nothing new in electromagnetic guns, there is nothing new in terminal defence missiles. What is the bogey of SDI that so worries Opposition Members?

The hon. Gentleman referred in somewhat disparaging tones to the contracts that have been signed, in an attempt —illogical in my view—to suggest that there would in fact be no very substantial United Kingdom participation in SDI research. If he were right, I would expect not scorn but expressions of delight, and that is precisely what he seems to be saying he wants. But it simply does not follow.

My hon. Friend told the House on Tuesday of this week that seven contracts had so far been announced. These were, of course, the result of negotiations pre-dating the signature in December 1985 of the intergovernmental memorandum of understanding and the approval only last month of the more detailed supporting administrative arrangements. The fruits of these agreements remain to be seen. I am in no doubt that they open up the prospect for extensive and rewarding — rewarding for the United Kingdom in general as well as beneficial to the Alliance —research work. I believe that British participation can and will be significant, but it is not just the volume that counts; it is the opportunity to participate in the research at the most advanced levels using funds from the United Kingdom Government. The hon. Gentleman may believe what he will, but I know that British scientists of our companies, universities and our own MOD research

[Mr. Lee]

establishments who can take advantage of this kind of exciting opportunity will have far more to offer to the actual level of the technological capability of tomorrow than those left on the sidelines.

I am not prepared in the early hours of the morning to speculate about contracts that may now be under negotiation, or in prospect. It is, anyway, the commercial responsibility of the firms concerned, but they know that they have the full support of my Department and the SDI participation office to get business, to get business in the right technical areas, and to get business on the right terms.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow complained at the start of this debate that he had received no reply to the points he raised in the debate on the Royal Air Force on 26 February. He did, indeed, raise a considerable number of points on SDI research during that debate.

However, I would genuinely like to impress upon the hon. Member that, far from wishing to appear evasive on issues related to British participation in SDI research, the Government are intent on being as open as possible in order that such issues, and Government support for them, are fully understood. From the numerous questions that he raised during the Royal Air Force debate and, indeed, on other recent occasions, which bear upon the various aspects of SDI, it is clear that he feels very unhappy about the Government's approach.

In view of this concern, I have been considering an involved and full reply. Obviously this takes some time. I hope to be in a position to give the hon. Member a very full and considered reply early next week, however, in view of the hon. Member's insistence, I will respond to some of his points this morning.

One issue on which concern has again been expressed is that of the confidentiality of the agreement reached with the United States Government on British participation in SDI research. The Government well understand why there should be concern on issues such as this. But I put it to the House, as did the then Secretary of State for Defence, my right hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) when he gave evidence to the Select Committee on Defence in December, that the United States Government could hardly be expected to publish the conclusions of a negotiation with one allied Government when discussions were taking place or were in prospect on the self-same issues with one or more of the other allies. There is nothing unusual or sinister about this as a means of conducting international business.

Mr. McNamara: Will there be publication when the other negotiations are completed?

Mr. Lee: We shall consider that.

Concern has been expressed in the debate, and by no means for the first time, about the possibility that controls on the exploitation of technology generated by SDI research carried out in the United Kingdom may have been agreed which have an inhibiting effect on the exploitation of this technology. Questions in this general field of technology transfer controls were among the many questions given very careful thought in the course of the negotiations on the memorandum of understanding. The need for such careful consideration arose, as much as anything, from the fact that the SDI research programme is first and foremost a defence research programme and, as such, directed towards generating results with potential defence applications. Labour Members have made much of the United States approach towards control of sensitive military technology. But let it not be forgotten that we too in this country have a duty to ensure that classified information of military value does not fall into the wrong hands. It is perfectly proper, and quite normal, that there should be controls on the use of sensitive defence information. SDI research results falling into this category will accordingly be subject to the appropriate control procedures. There is, however, one characteristic of the SDI research programme which may be regarded as untypical of defence research programmes. Much of the research work is of a fundamental kind and, indeed, there is a special part of the programme under the control of the Innovative Science and Technology Office—the United States SDI office in Washington—which is concerned solely with the fundamental end of the research spectrum. It is in this area particularly where it will remain important to ensure that research results are available in unclassified form, save in the most exceptional cases.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow referred at considerable length to the reported plans of Mr. Clarence Robinson to visit a number of British firms.

Mr. Ashdown: I am sure that all right hon. and hon. Members accept that there will have to be appropriate controls over security technology, but is it not more appropriate that the controls within Britain should be British controls and is it not wholly inappropriate that another nation, whether or not an ally, should seek to impose its laws upon what happens in Britain? Will the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State give an undertaking to the House that the memorandum of understanding contains no provision that would allow any law other than British law to operate in respect of British firms and, specifically, that the memorandum of understanding contains no requirement that British companies working on SDI contracts should obey extraterritorially the Export Administration Act of the United States?

Mr. Lee: The hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) is a very skilful parliamentary operator, but I am not prepared to be drawn on the details of the memorandum of understanding.

There is one point that has been raised in this context —the Clarence Robinson visit—on which it is important that there should be no further misunderstanding. If Mr. Robinson or anyone else is employed as a consultant or agent of an overseas Government and wishes to visit the United Kingdom to discuss equipments and technologies with United Kingdom firms, we would certainly expect to be consulted in advance. For a visit involving access to classified information, a formal clearance is required and requests for clearance are handled by the Ministry of Defence directorate of security. No such request was made on Mr. Robinson's behalf by the United States authorities. It would have been a matter of considerable concern if a visit involving access to classified material had taken place without the necessary authorisation. But — I ask the House to note this carefully—no such visit took place.

Early on in his speech, the hon. Member for Linlithgow described an approach to Mr. Hambleton of the Ministry of Defence that was made by Mr. Robinson. The approach was made by telephone from Paris, and the hon. Member's account is substantially correct on this point. He also asked

whether the visit had the approval of Cabinet. It did not, as my earlier remarks implied; nor is there any provision in the memorandum of understanding on participation in SDI research waiving the requirement for visit clearances, where appropriate.

We have consulted the United States Government about the role of Mr. Robinson and the background and purpose of his visit. Mr. Robinson is not an official of the United States Government but he is employed by them from time to time as a consultant. In this capacity, he was acting, I understand, for the United States Government in relation to a general study of advanced fields of technology in Europe with the object of identifying potentially fruitful areas for greater co-operation. Although originally the study was concerned solely with technologies relevant to the SDI programme, it was subsequently extended to cover high technology in general.

I hope that this helps to clarify the hon. Member's mind as to the background. It has been a puzzling episode, which need have caused no difficulty had it been handled with greater care.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow saw fit on Tuesday, after Questions, to mention an official's name across the Floor of the House. I rather regret that he chose to do so on that occasion, and the terms that he used, but I am glad tonight to have the opportunity to repudiate without qualification the suggestion that Mr. Ken Hambledon may have been moved from his former post as head of the SDI participation office for any reason of the kind put forward by the hon. Member. Mr. Hambledon played a leading part over many months in the process of setting up the intergovernmental arrangements, and brought the participation office into existence. He worked exceptionally hard and did a first-class job. He has been re-appointed to the post which he took up early in 1985, shortly before work on SDI participation began to loom large. It is a challenging appointment, and I am sure that we all, including the hon. Member for Linlithgow, wish him well in it. His successor in the participation office, Dr. Orman, has had a long and distinguished career as a Government scientist, including a period from 1982 to 1984 in the British embassy, Washington. He, too, is extremely well qualified for this task.

I should like to conclude by pointing out that these are, of course, early days in our involvement in the programme, but a sound start has been made. We are not talking here of a sell-out for British science—quite the reverse. We believe that the formal agreement we have reached places satisfactory safeguards on the results of work carried out by British companies and universities. Moreover, by securing such arrangements for British involvement we are confident that our best scientific brains will be content to pursue their research activity in the United Kingdom instead of moving to the United States, which might well have been the case in the absence of the bilateral arrangements we have secured.

Self-Employed

2.10 am

Mr. Michael Fallon (Darlington): I am delighted to have the opportunity to discuss policies for the self-employed. I am especially grateful to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for agreeing so readily to take part in the debate. I note that he among the ministerial team volunteered to do this duty in the House, quite oblivious to any question of rank. I am grateful also for his continuing interest in and unflagging hard work for the self-employed and small businesses since his appointment.

One might think that this is rather a late hour to raise the question of self-employment, but I do not think that it is entirely inappropriate. The self-employed do not work regular hours—not for them a nine-to-five existence. They work very irregular and long hours, especially in their early years of self-employment. I know that because I was myself self-employed from November 1981 to June 1983. We owe it to the self-employed in the economy to devote a little time to their affairs and to the problems they face.

Who are the self-employed? There are now some 2·6 million, a substantial increase on 1979 when there were 1·8 million. I believe that one in 10 of the working population are now self-employed and that in the north-east nearly 90,000 are now self-employed. So we are speaking of a sizeable and very active part of the work force, an entrepreneurial corps at the heart of the British economy.

The self-employed are important in another sense, in that they are a growing part of the economy. Indeed, we might describe them as one of Britain's best industries. Small businesses have created between 800,000 and 1 million new jobs since 1979. Of that figure, one fifth or one quarter have come from new businesses, and the Forum of Private Business has estimated that there are 1 million more jobs to come. Its survey, published last month, shows that each small business aims to take on at least one more employee in the next few months. A Legal and General survey last autumn showed that one self-employed person in three hopes to take on an extra person within the next two years. If we think about that, it means 750,000 new jobs in the economy over the next two years. In the north-east, that is 25,000 potential new jobs. That is a huge potential of new employment. It is a massive reservoir of talent and skills seeking new opportunities. The House and the Government should say to the self-employed, "Go for it, help to make it happen."

Small businesses have thrived under this Government as they have never thrived before. I shall concentrate not on small businesses with perhaps five or 10 employees but on the self-employed who have just got started. It is curious that in Britain, unlike elsewhere, there is no clear definition of self-employment. Nothing in the statute describes a self-employed person. Instead, we leave it to the Revenue to determine employment status.

In other words, self-employment is a privilege subject to the inevitably arbitrary discretion of Revenue officials. We must change that privilege into a right. Anybody who wants to be treated as self-employed should be permitted legally to be so treated after completing a short and simple form of declaration. That would avoid people having to plead with the Inland Revenue for several years for the status of self-employment. There can be many

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ramifications if the decision goes against the person applying for that status. For example, he may in the meantime have been paying fees on a contract basis.

Thus, it should be a right to be self-employed for those who consider that they have that status, with a right of appeal perhaps the other way round—with the Inland Revenue Commissioners appealing against that right if they believe that the income of a self-employed person derives principally from the same source.

I urge the Minister to try to persuade the Treasury and the Inland Revenue that self-employment should not be considered simply as a loss of revenue but as an entrepreneurial activity that contributes to the growth of the economy and as a right that those who go it alone deserve.

We must also consider the taxation status of the self-employed. They pay—I think too much—income tax. It should be lowered quickly. They also pay too much in capital gains tax, and I hope that the review of that tax will include provision for the self-employed. They are also subject to VAT and, as self-employed people, they have the relatively low ceiling of £20,000. Many have argued in recent months that that ceiling should be lifted for small businesses and the self-employed to about £100,000. More important, qualification for VAT should be made an option for the self-employed. It would benefit some to be able to claim back VAT, while others would lose. People should have the option to decide whether to be part of the VAT system until they reach a turnover of £100,000.

I hope that my hon. Friend will persuade his colleagues to make that a theme of our forthcoming presidency of the Council of Ministers. It is up to his Department to persuade the Treasury that we are talking not of revenue lost but of entrepreneurial activity which is a gain to the economy. The Revenue will be aware of how much of such activity is in the black economy from the tax point of view. We must make that black economy legitimate. We must nationalise it. We must bring the world of Arthur Daly into the Chancellor's system and make those nice little earners the legitimate right of everyone who decides to be self-employed.

Planning is the bugbear of the economy. It is far too complicated and difficult and it takes far too long. I welcome the Housing and Planning Bill, which would simplify planning procedures and establish special planning zones. I am aware that the critics regard them as yet more planning areas to administer. Perhaps we have to go further and to reverse the burden of proof in planning—to put the onus not on the proposer of change who wants to start a business in a garage, shed or living room, but on the objector if the business will not cause noise or nuisance so that those who want to get into business, especially in residential areas, can get on and do so. There is no better proof of the need for that than the present system and the delays that are built into it. I understand that approval for a light commercial development takes some six weeks in Belgium, some five weeks in the United States, some four weeks in Canada and an average of 32 weeks in Britain from the submission of the application to the granting of planning approval.

We should consider the dead hand of the state—the legislative and administrative requirements that successive Governments have piled on business. One of the criticisms of the "Burdens on Business" survey was that business complains about taxation rather than such administrative burdens, but the businesses that were discouraged and did not start up are not around to be surveyed. They are the self-employed who did not go it alone. Such people and businesses are not counted.

The "Burdens on Business" consultative document and the subsequent White Paper concentrated on small businesses. I would like a fresh survey on the burdens on the self-employed, or those hoping to be self-employed, to find out what discourages people, what the disincentives are and how we can make it easier for people who want to go it alone to take the plunge and risk loss of security, and possibly prospects, for their families. I would like to see a survey of the burdens of the self-employed, as well as burdens on small businesses.

In the more general area of education, self-employment is rarely suggested in our schools as a career option. It is often trailed as a last resort. We need to break down increasingly the employee mentality and big company recruitment, especially in the old industrial parts of our country.

I know that there is increasing liaison between my hon. Friend's Department and the world of schools and education. I should like to see added to that dimension the concept promoted by teachers and the Manpower Services Commission, and by all those involved, that there is nothing ignoble or sleazy about working for oneself, and paying taxes. That is working likewise for the community.

With regard to representation, the self-employed, rather like the unemployed, by their very nature do not have a powerful voice in the House, or in Whitehall. There is not an organisation to speak solely for the self-employed. They are busy enough trying to earn a living without taking time to get involved in representative bodies. There is no CBI for the self-employed. Even the Small Firms Council does not speak for the one or two-man businesses. The National Federation of Self-Employed and Small Businesses has a powerful voice, as does the Forum of Private Business. Due to the absence of a powerful representative trade union for the self-employed, I would like the Government to consider the possibility of regular quarterly meetings between Ministers at the Department of Trade and Industry and representatives of the self-employed, in the same way as the Chancellor and his colleagues regularly consult big business and the big trade unions.

I should also like the national federation and other organisations to be consulted about appointments to Government bodies and organisations such as wages councils, even if they themselves are not appointed, or the Government committee or wages council about which they are consulted is not directly concerned, because it does concern all those working on their own, whether it is an appointment to the MSC area boards or the Health and Safety Executive.

There is evidence, from the huge growth in the numbers of self employed, from 1·8 million to 2·6 million in just six years, that people want to be self-employed and like to be self-employed. They want the chance to go it alone. They appreciate the freedom and scope to explore new opportunities. I see that growth as part of a changing pattern of work in our culture. It is seen, too, in contract working and the huge increase in part-time working.

There has been a swing away from the employee mentality and the notion that the employer will always

provide. There are now more people out there in our society who want to work for themselves. I believe that it is up to the Government to help them to do it.

2.28 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. David Trippier): I warmly welcome the opportunity to consider the Government's policies on self-employment, and I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Mr. Fallon) for focusing attention on an area that is central to the Government's efforts to foster the development of enterprise, innovation and growth.

I remember visiting Darlington during Enterprise Week in June 1984 and being impressed by the industrial exhibition which I was invited to open. Subsequently, I have been impressed by my hon. Friend's interest in small firms in general, and the self-employed especially. It is characteristic of him to have initiated such an important debate.

The growth in self-employment has been staggering; my hon. Friend referred, accurately, to a figure of 2·6 million. It has been a striking and encouraging feature of recent employment trends. Of the 2·6 million, about 91,000 are in the north-east. Numbers have increased by about one third since we came to office, which means that one in 10 of those in employment is working for himself. The expanding population of self-employed is the pool from which new goods, services, idea and talents will be drawn, and it is the base for growth in output and employment. It is also testimony to our conviction that there is a wealth of entrepreneurial talent among the unemployed and among employees that has in the past been stifled. As my hon. Friend suggested, in the right climate, it could flourish.

It is also testimony to our belief that people, not Governments, create jobs. The Government can create the conditions that will encourage the establishment and growth of new enterprises. That is the foundation of our employment and economic strategies. Our task is to remove the disincentive to enterprise so that individuals can exploit their potential and skills for their good and for the benefit of the economy as a whole.

Some of the steps that we have taken are an important part of that task and directly encourage people into self-employment. The enterprise allowance scheme helps unemployed people to start their own businesses, by giving them an allowance of £40 a week to help to overcome the disincentive of loss of benefit. More than 130,000 people have taken advantage of the scheme, about 7,000 of them in the north-east. That shows an encouraging success rate of businesses that are supported by the scheme. The latest evidence shows that 61 per cent. of those receiving allowance for a full year were still trading three years after start-up. That makes it the most successful start-up scheme in the world. I know that that sounds dramatic, but we recently made a comparison with the continent. There is no comparable start-up scheme on the continent or in the United States.

From 1 April, 80,000 places will be available nationally, and about 4,200 will be available in the north-east. I am sure that my hon. Friend will welcome that. For the first time, the Manpower Services Commission is engaging in national and regional marketing to increase awareness of the scheme and to encourage employees to consider self-employment as an option. That is an important point, because in the past we have not marketed the scheme. We have not needed to market the scheme, because people have become aware of it principally through personal contact. We have not paid for a single advertisement to push the scheme, so we do not know what its potential is. But in view of the successful take-up of the scheme so far, I believe that much potential remains untapped.

Training is vital to allow more self-employed people to establish themselves successfully and to expand. My hon. Friend will welcome the fact that we have asked the Manpower Services Commission to refocus its adult training strategy still more sharply on the needs of the self-employed. Next year the MSC plans to spend about £20 million more in those areas. In 1986-87 more than 100,000 places are available on courses in the programme that we have called "Training for Enterprise". There will be 25,000 places on one-day business workshops to give people considering self-employment a thorough explanation of what is involved and to encourage them to take up further training. Eighteen thousand places will be available on a five to 10-day self-employment course designed for those wishing to start up a one-person business. These courses provide up to six months' further counselling and other help. In addition, other public sector bodies and the private sector also help to provide the training necessary to help the self-employed improve their management and business skills.

My hon. Friend referred to the unemployed. Encouraging them is one important way of encouraging people to consider self-employment as an alternative. We share the view that the key to changing attitudes is to persuade young people of the benefits and satisfaction of working for themselves.

That brings me to the youth training scheme. The YTS is principally seen as only a training scheme, but we are changing our minds about this. We believe that within the youth training scheme enterprise exists. We have an opportunity, through that scheme, to develop the enterprise culture among YTS trainees. We see that efforts can be made to develop and strengthen that potential.

I have had the opportunity of seeing this in visiting one particular programme which I would draw to the attention of my hon. Friend. It is known as the Genesis programme. The Genesis programme, which is an approved management agency, has identified no fewer than 44 different products and services, of which 12 have been established on the market and are earning revenue. It must be remembered that this is a YTS scheme. In Wales, 16 YTS trainees are involved in a project likely to create some 12 to 20 permanent new jobs for ex-trainees; and in Scotland an independent fashion knitwear business has been set up and looks like creating about six full and part-time jobs.

This may seem like small beer, but the truth is that in the past two years we had never thought that we had within such a training scheme the potential to develop self-employment. Now we think that this opportunity exists, particularly at the present time with the extension of the YTS programme from one year to two. The MSC is already planning to design an enterprise module for the two-year YTS scheme to set up an advice centre of YTS managing agents on self-employment enterprise. That is a very recent innovation.

Nevertheless, we can start at an even younger age. I believe that my hon. Friend is absolutely right. If we are

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to change attitudes dramatically, we need to start in schools. We need to concentrate on youngsters between the ages of 14 and 18. That is why the Department of Trade and Industry, the Department of Education and Science and my Department are involved in promoting a knowledge of industry among schoolchildren. This is one of the principal aims of Industry Year 1986. It is essential for companies and schools to form closer links. We would like to see all scholchildren able to understand simple business plans and to read balance sheets in a simplified form. That is quite an aim. We also wish to set a target of at least one mini-enterprise in every secondary school by the end of this year. I am very encouraged by the lead that is being taken in this regard by the Department of Trade and Industry. I am sure that that target is attainable.

Apart from the measures that I have already mentioned, I stress that the self-employed have to be ready to make themselves aware of their own limitations, a point on which my hon. Friend touched. What they want is ready and inexpensive access to information, to advice and to counselling, so that they can discuss business plans and problems. In this regard, the small firms service plays a very significant role. It offers free advice and information to all who request it. Each small firms centre advertises in its region the range of services available and where they can be obtained, so that self-employment will be not only an option but obviously a preference in many cases.

My hon. Friend is well aware of the importance of local enterprise agencies. He has a particularly good example of one in his constituency which was responsible for organising the industrial exhibition to which I referred earlier. We now have some 321 enterprise agencies throughout the nation, and that is a significant success. Although the figures which hit my desk in the Department of the Employment show that one in three small firms go to the wall over a three-year period, in those areas where enterprise agencies are established, offering a hand-holding service, the failure rate is one in 12 over the same period. So the proof of the pudding is in the eating.

Some of the enterprise agencies help with finance, premises, equipment and training. To recognise their importance we have just announced a new scheme for 1986-87 costing £2·5 million, where we are prepared to match the private sector contribution to those enterprise agencies on a pound-for-pound basis up to a limit of about £20,000.

My hon. Friend referred to the definition of self-employment. In the White Paper to which he referred, "Lifting the Burden", we showed our determination to clarify the criteria for determining whether someone is self-employed. My hon. Friend said that he wants to see self-employment as a right, not a privilege. I find it difficult to accept that it is currently a privilege. It is a freedom for those entering contracts to agree whatever contractual arrangements they consider suitable to their circumstances.

Whether someone is an employee or a self-employed person depends on all the circumstances surrounding the employment relationship. But action has been taken on the White Paper recommendations. The legal considerations have been simply explained in a new leaflet entitled "Tax-Employed or Self-Employed" published by the Inland Revenue, which I warmly welcome.

Changes have been implemented to ensure that the DHSS and the Inland Revenue work in closer liaison than perhaps they have in the past in determining employment status, including more training to help the staff appreciate the difficulties that individuals have in understanding what their status is. Those steps will help to ensure clear and consistent decisions about employment status.

Tax matters, as my hon. Friend will appreciate, are the concern of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. He would not expect me to comment in greater detail in a debate taking place only about three days before the Budget. But I share the view that we need to legitimise the enterprise which is not taking place outside the tax system, to which my hon. Friend specifically referred.

I can see some difficulties in the idea which has been put forward by many an amnesty, including questions of scope, duration, and how to achieve fairness to those honest taxpayers who have been disadvantaged through unfair competition from those evading taxes. But I shall draw the specific points that my hon. Friend made to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor.

I was interested in the suggestion that the Government should look more closely at the burdens on the self-employed. The "Burdens on Business" survey, which formed the background to the White Paper "Lifting the Burden", published in May, included proprietorships and partnerships in its sample, and almost 40 per cent. of those interviewed employed 10 people or fewer.

The majority of those constraints identified in the White Paper affect the self-employed as well as small and larger enterprises. The self-employed will therefore benefit from the action that the Government have taken, or are taking, to lift the burdens.

I have identified one difficulty in the three years that I have been responsible as the sponsoring Minister for small firms, and that is that there may well be a difficulty in discriminating in favour of the self-employed because it might discourage some entrepreneurs from developing their business. That must be taken into account. There is no way in which the Government would encourage small businesses to remain small. That cannot be a part of our policy and I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington would not wish us to go down that route.

We have had an interesting debate. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising these important issues. I recognise the concern felt by him, and I recognise also the fact that the voice of the self-employed may not always be as loud as other voices. Having met the National Federation of Self-Employed and Small Businesses on about 50 occasions in the past three years, I can tell my hon. Friend that I sometimes doubt whether it is quiet. I can assure my hon. Friend that I take all that it says very seriously, and I think that most of its proposals are constructive.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising the debate. His concern to encourage further growth in the number of self-employed is a key objective of our employment strategy. It is part of the answer to encouraging the growth of employment by extending the adaptability and flexibility in the work force and by securing the base from which future small businesses will grow. The self-employed are central to the sort of society that the Government are seeking to create. It is a society based on freedom, enterprise and initiative. The Government's commitment to them is not a fleeting one or a passing

phase. It is a commitment shared by the whole of the Government and having heard his excellent contribution, it is clearly a commitment firmly held by my hon. Friend.

Law Centres

2.46 am

Mr. David Clelland (Tyne Bridge): I rise to put the case for the continuation and extension of the funding of law centres in this country. I have vested reasons for doing so because in my constituency I have two such centres which are not only active but are providing an essential and proven service to the people of Gateshead and Newcastle.

The Benwell law centre in Newcastle and the Gateshead law centre owe their existence to the financial support they have relied upon from the local authorities via the urban programme. However, that is coming to an end and their continued existence will depend on the willingness and ability of the two local authorities to bear the full weight of the costs of running the centres once the inner area partnership funding ceases. For Benwell that is imminent. The funding for the centre ceases on 31 March this year and to date the city council has not been able to give a detailed answer on future support. I am aware that the council is sympathetic and supports the continued functioning of the law centre. However, whether funding can be maintained at the same level as hitherto is a question which the authority has to consider, along with all the other priorities which are under scrutiny as a result of the attitude of the Government to local government finance, which has resulted in the rate capping of the city council.

Similarly, but not so urgently, the Gateshead law centre will lose urban programme funding support at the end of this year. Gateshead council is sympathetic and recognises the important role that the centre has played. The council is committed to support the centre from 1 April 1987, but the centre does not yet know where funding is to come from for the three months from December this year to April.

Much time and effort is taken up by these two centres in securing funding for their continued existence. That time would be much better spent providing the necessary help which they exist to provide. A similar problem exists in other parts of this country. Often it arises directly from the abolition of the metropolitan county councils and the totally inadequate arrangements that the Government have allowed for the continued support of these and similarly placed organisations. As a result of these and other pressures, several law centres may close in April, having exhausted all apparent means of continuing unless the Government intervene to help. Centres in Liverpool, Paddington and Hillingdon are under threat of closure. Others, particularly in London, are facing major cuts in services, if not closure, and in common with Benwell and Gateshead, many others face an uncertain future.

The Government's attitude was summed up in a letter to the chairperson of the Law Centres Federation in reply to her letter expressing concern at the position. Referring to Lord Elton, the letter from Lord Elton's private secretary stated:

"he and his colleagues have always made it clear that it is in the end the local authorities which must decide which voluntary organisations they will support. These grants are primarily for local services, and the decisions on priorities must be local ones. One of the objectives of abolition was to bring local government decisions down to what is at present the lower tier of local government, which is closer to local needs.

Lord Elton has asked me to say that he is very sorry that two of your centres are in danger of closing, but that he is unable to interfere with the decisions of the local authorities."

[Mr. David Clelland]

This position must be rectified. It is not sufficient for the Government to argue that the local authorities should find the money to continue funding. First, the provisions of section 48 of the Local Government Act 1985 will provide an answer only where metropolitan or London authorities jointly agree to funding. That will not happen and is not happening where some authorities see the service as being confined to a district. Secondly, the Government's own regressive policies towards local authorities have led to a situation where many councils have been squeezed beyond the squeaking of the pips. Thirdly, law centres often represent clients who have a grievance against the local authority, which would suggest that their independence from direct local authority control would be preferable. That would not necessarily obtain for long if they were 100 per cent. financed by the councils. Yet the refusal of Ministers to extend urban aid grant or to offer any alternative means of support will result in either that or closure. The Government must not stand idly by and watch these vital public services close. The case for their existence is made and the Government should accept it and provide the necessary finance.

Lest the Government have somehow missed what has been going on, I remind the House of the valuable service provided by the law centres. There are 57 law centres in the United Kingdom, serving deprived inner areas. They provide a free advice service by trained legal and specialist workers. Their opening hours often suit working people in particular. Some operate a 24-hour emergency service. They are complementary to general legal services and are supported by the Law Society. They run advice sessions out of office hours, sometimes outside the centre itself. The Gateshead centre, for example, runs sessions from the borough council's mobile community bus. Because many of their clients are on low incomes and much of the case work does not qualify for legal aid, few private solicitors can deal with it. Matters with which private solicitors can deal are often referred to them by the law centres. One typical centre estimates 40 such referrals each week.

I have mentioned the support for law centres of the Law Society, and I should add weight to that by drawing attention to the comments of the Royal Commission on legal services, which in its 1979 report said:

"The impact of law centres has been out of all proportion to their size, to the number of lawyers who work in them, and to the amount of work it is possible for them to undertake. The volume of work they have attracted has shown how deep is the need they are attempting to meet."

Far from standing by and allowing a vital service to die, the Government should be taking urgent steps to secure the future and plan the expansion of law centres. The Gateshead centre alone, with the equivalent of five full-time workers, received more than 6,000 inquiries and handled 500 cases last year. The demand—the need—especially in our inner cities, far exceeds the ability of the current level of service to provide. Only one in 10 people have access to a law centre. To reduce the service would be madness and completely contrary to all sensible opinion and everything that has been and is being said about inner-city problems. Even this Government cannot deny that the case for the continuance and expansion of an independent law centre network is irrefutable.

The position was adequately summed up during the recent conference of all major advice networks in the United Kingdom. In a joint declaration they spelt out the needs of the nation in the following terms:

"We need a coherent national strategy for the funding and development of advice and law centres. Central Government should ensure that existing services are preserved and that there is an expansion to meet the need. This may be attained through a mix of central and local government funding, but responsibility for achieving it must rest with Central Government.

A national policy must aim to provide a network of advice and legal services that are comprehensive, competent and well publicised, accessible to people in need, independent enough to act in the best interests of their users, sufficiently diverse to meet a wide range of needs, planned and delivered with the involvement of local people and accountable to the local community, supported by adequate back-up facilities — information, training and specialist expertise, able to provide effective feedback to central and local government, nationalised industries and other public and private bodies, so that they may act to remedy malpractice, inefficiency or unfair treatment of individuals and groups.

These centres have huge support from individuals, and communities using them, because they provide services that are genuinely needed. Thousands of volunteers throughout the country are involved in the staffing and management of advice and law centres.

The case for advice and law centres is not in dispute. We are all united in defence of existing services and in the need to ensure that policy-makers and funders at national and local level take their responsibilities seriously. Working together we can maintain and develop the much needed network of advice and law centres."

The Government are fond of promoting themselves as the guardians of law and order, but there is more to law and order than arming the police force with plastic bullets and riot gear. There is also the problem of access to the law, and proper representation. Justice cannot be the sole prerogative of the rich and mighty. If the ordinary man or woman in the street believes that justice can only be obtained if it can be paid for, the Government have no right to parade their concern for justice and equality under the law.

By supporting law centres, the Government can demonstrate more concern for fair treatment by that one act than by all the empty rhetoric that often accompanies discussion of law and order from the Government Benches. I hope that the Government will have the good sense to accept the great weight of argument in favour of law centres and make provision for adequate and continuing funding.

2.57 am

Mr. Stuart Holland (Vauxhall): I am glad to have the opportunity, even at three o'clock in the morning, to address the issue of law centres and their funding, as in my view it is of crucial importance, not least to inner city areas like Vauxhall which I represent and to Lambeth.

The law centre projects have been on time-expired funding in the context of the inner city partnership arrangements which, in the early 1970s, were part of the consensual politics of the country. In other words, the Conservative Government in the early 1970s supported the inner city partnership schemes and recognised that there were special needs in areas of stress in the inner city which needed special financing if they were adequately to begin to remedy the needs of those in the inner city. Such needs are dealt with and represented by law centres. Some of those needs are dramatic while others seem relatively mundane, but they are not mundane to my constituents.

Inner cities have special problems in education, not least as the problems are frequently compounded by the lack of a stable home environment which may reflect the under employment, insecure employment or unemployment of the parent or parents concerned. The borough of Lambeth, for example, has the highest proportion of single-parent families in the country. Schools must try to cope with under-achievement. With chronically high unemployment—the rate ranges from one third to two thirds and in individual wards may reach 100 per cent. of school leavers—it is not surprising that staff are under considerable pressure in the classroom.

I wish to deal with the role of law centres in education issues, and to pay tribute to teachers in inner-city schools, especially those in my constituency, who are doing the best that they can in extremely difficult circumstances, to deal with problems in the classroom, not least as their level of pay is falling behind previous or comparable levels. The following example was dealt with by a law centre and it is unlikely that it would have been dealt with in another way.

The child was suspended from school and the parents wanted to appeal against expulsion. The child was suspended because the school said that he needed special education and claimed that the parents refused to co-operate. A law centre in my constituency obtained a report from an independent child psychologist which showed that there was nothing wrong with the child. The law centre had sight of an Inner London Education Authority psychologist's report which said that the child needed extra help with reading and no more. The school was using the report of a hospital psychologist, who was not making progress with the parents, and so, in the view of the law centre, was not making progress with the child. The school said that the child was disruptive, and many children are undoubtedly disruptive in school. There was a substantive issue of judgment on the merits of the case for suspension.

The law centre remedied the position by discovering that the hospital psychologist had mistakenly given information about the child's brother. Irrespective of the merits or demerits of the case, there had been wrongful identification. The law centre could help the parents, whereas a solicitor would not normally be able to take such a case, and the parents would have had difficulty in obtaining legal aid.

That is a major matter to the individual and family concerned. Many of my constituents, especially those without employment and receiving social security benefits, could not necessarily obtain legal aid in seeking to represent their children's interests. Although apparently mundane, it is important for those concerned.

In other cases, as mentioned by the hon. Member for Tyne Bridge (Mr. Clelland), if the funding of law centres was to be passed to local authorities there could be—prima facie—a conflict of interest between the local authority's obligations and its obligations to individuals who wished to bring a case against the council.

Often these cases appear mundane, such as complaints about housing conditions. But, again, they are serious for those concerned. There may be a case of eviction. As the Member for an inner city constituency, I frequently face individuals coming to my weekly advice surgery with notice of eviction from the council. It may have arrived on the Friday and may mean they have to be in the court on the Monday. Such individuals do not necessarily know how to cope with their claim against eviction when such notices may be ill-founded.

The housing officers in my constituency have an extremely difficult job. There have been cuts in the housing investment programme, the rate support grant and, therefore, in central Government assistance. The housing problem which was evident when I became a Member in 1979 is now a housing crisis. This has been compounded by the abolition of the GLC. When I became a Member it was quite feasible to move several hundred or several thousand people a year on GLC nominations. That has now come to an end. We now have inter borough nominations which are a "no hope" application for a housing transfer.

There are people, sometimes as many as five, living in one bedroom accommodation. This accommodation is often chronically damp—many of the estates were built in the 1930s or 1940s. Later system-built estates—are not proofed against heat loss.

When the council cannot offer a remedy, some of my constituents resort to the non payment of rent. They hope that this will bring pressure to bear on the council. Others have been in difficulties because of the horrendous problems which have been caused with regard to housing benefit. Because of the pressure on social security offices due to rising unemployment, the Government wished to transfer housing benefit to local authorities. The local authorities protested that it would be difficult to cope, not least because of successive changes in Government legislation. Therefore, the delays in the payment of housing benefit are considerable. As a result, many families in my constituency, not least some of the single parent families, have been withholding rent because, rightly in my judgment, they have given priority of feeding or clothing their children and themselves.

In such cases, matters should and can be remedied by law centres. They are not the type of problems on which people in the inner city areas can automatically apply for legal aid nor the types of problems which solicitors would necessarily take up or in respect of which they would make an application for legal aid. It is because so many of those who are worst afflicted by these problems do not have the financial resources to go to a private solicitor that they cannot get adequate redress without a law centre.

The problems affect the state of mind of people in the inner cities. People come to my advice surgery who are desperate about their housing conditions, who are living in one room because all the other rooms are damp, or who are in over-crowded accommodation where the council is technically in breach of its legal obligations. For example, teenage children of different sexes are sleeping in the same rooms because of such conditions, and the council cannot remedy the problem because it no longer has access to GLC nomination elsewhere in London, and because of the cuts in housing investment. In such cases, law centres fulfil an important function in being able to represent the interests of those who lack the resources to raise their case.

A further important matter is immigration and immigration procedure. Again, any Member of Parliament in an inner city area is likely to be familiar with the claims made by individuals against deportation orders, and of the complexities in many, if not most, of the cases. Individual Members, I am sure, do the best that they can in seeking

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to represent the interests of their constituents to see that justice can be done, or, if that is over-ambitious, that effective representations are made to Ministers.

However, representations to Ministers are more effective if they are assisted by professional advice from those specialising in immigration affairs, in law centres. In my weekly advice work, I can easily have between 25 and 35 separate cases to deal with in one evening, which may involve 45 or 50 people being in my surgery. Without being a permanent advice worker ones self, there is no way in which one can do adequate credit to the needs and the demands of those who are bringing the case on education, housing or immigration, unless one has the assistance that is made possible not just by the citizens advice bureaux but by the law centres.

Immigration is especially important, given that the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants does the best that it can, but the United Kingdom Immigration Advisory Service, which also does its best, is not an independent body and does not have the relative autonomy in these cases that the law centres have. The means of redress for such grievances, are essential. Mundane though they might be in the cases of education or housing, such cases are more serious and dramatic in immigration.

When it comes to policing, the matter is all important, as are the complaints about policing made by my constituents in the Lambeth and Brixton areas. On previous occasions, I have paid credit to the enlightened policing at the commander level in my borough, and I have in mind especially the extent to which a fragile peace was kept on the streets between 1981-85. This in large part was due to the enlightened policing and openness of approach of the former police commander, Alex Marnoch. However, I cannot certainly say the same below senior level in the borough of Lambeth. On the street at the ordinary young police constable level there are forms of behaviour which, while in some cases no doubt impeccable and excellent, in other cases are clearly provocative and disturbing to my constituents.

I have it in mind, for example, to cite not just the direct experience of my constituents or my own indirect evaluation of the problem but the kind of report which was made by *The Economist* following the events which took place at the end of September last year where the journalist concerned directly reported racist behaviour by police, assault by police on individuals who, in the judgment of the journalist, had committed no offence and then, in the police station itself, offensive behaviour again used by police even in the charge room.

If these cases cannot be adequately remedied, they lead to a build-up of pressure and social discontent. Again, I am not saying that in each individual case the integrity of police officers should be impugned. The problem is that, when the standards which we should expect of policing fall, when it is not simply the perception of individuals that they are being discriminated against but in particular of black people in my constituency that they may be discriminated against, then the problem potentially gives rise to considerable social discontent. The difference is then expressed when the threshold is lowered and when disorders occur, as they occurred in 1981 and again following the shooting of Mrs. Cherry Groce in my constituency of Vauxhall, Lambeth.

If one is young, whether one is black or white, and one has been picked up without due cause and put in the back of a van and kneed in the groin or maltreated on that occasion, the next time one sees a police officer on the ground with other people around, one will not be likely to move towards the scene to assist the officer to recover. Unfortunately, it is more likely that worse consequences may follow for the police themselves.

It is in these kind of cases following events in September of last year that the role played by the Brixton law centre was extremely important in enabling people who felt that they had grievances following the disorders — whether they were grievances with regard to the police or other grievances with regard to individuals—to come forward and state their case, and for an evaluation to be made of the evidence in the cases arising from those disorders.

As the Member of Parliament for a constituency called Vauxhall but which, indeed, includes a large part of central Brixton, I found it extremely useful that the law centre, in a very sober and serious-minded way, convened meetings of private solicitors, and other interested parties and was able to take an overview of cases. For instance, following those disorders, people who on some occasions had been picked up off the street in snatch and grab seizures were being taken to police stations with no adequate information being given. Tnen they appeared in court. Nobody knew in which court they would appear and nobody was necessarily in a position to represent them. I put it to senior police in Lambeth at the time that this was a potentially dangerout situation—I stress dangerous—inasmuch as if innocent people were being charged but were not adequately represented in the courts this gave rise to secondary grievance which itself, if a further incident occurred that was comparable to that of the shooting of Mrs. Cherry Groce, could trigger a further chain of events.

Again I pay credit to the senior police, because they grasped that and they were willing to co-operate with the law centre as a reputable, estabished body that could adequately represent the interests of those being charged. The system did not work perfectly by any means. But in principle it meant that the police were co-operating by indicating to the law centre, and to the duty service that was staffed by the law centre, who had been charged, in which court they would appear, and at what time, and also be seeking to ensure that they were represented.

I do not want to suggest that disorder or disturbances in inner cities are provoked simply by policing, although in the case of Mrs. Cherry Groce—and in 1981—the underlying cause was policing. As soon as a disorder has started it is clear that serious offences are committed by individuals against other members of the public and that the due process of the law should obtain, that charges should be brought and that sentences should be passed. However, the cases that I have just cited include many that do not come within that category. Failure to provide due process and means of legal redress for those who cannot afford access to private solicitors becomes a matter of importance to inner city peace.

The Government appear several times over to have changed their policy on the funding of law centres. In a letter to Lord Elwyn-Jones dated 19 November 1984 the Lord Chancellor said:

"The Government acknowledge the part to be played by law centres in the provision of legal services where this suits local circumstances. I appreciate that law centres are now seen as playing an important part in the provision of advisory services."

There was also a letter from the Lord Chancellor's Department to Simon Hillyard of the Law Society dated 20 November 1984 which said that after the abolition of the Greater London Council Government policy would be to provide traditional support for London boroughs to help individual local authorities to take on support for purely local organisations or projects.

In its 34th annual report, published in January 1985, the Legal Aid Advisory Committee made two significant recommendations in paragraph 441. The first was that the law centres should be treated as an essential part of the national network of legal services. The second recommendation was that the first priority should be to ensure the survival of existing law centres without waiting for changes in local government and urban programme policies to see what support borough councils and district councils could provide.

I shall be very interested in the Government's response on the funding of law centres. At present both individuals and local councils are caught in a "Catch 22" type dilemma. I raised this matter in a debate on 26 February 1985, but there has been no adequate long-term response by the Government. Tonight, I began by saying that law centres come within the category of funding of time expired projects. The needs of the inner cities are not time expired. The needs of the inner cities—the desperate unemployment and the chronic housing situation—have increased rather than decreased. The cases which are being brought and the grievances which are to be remedied have increased rather than decreased. Yet if a borough such as Lambeth were to take on a major share of the funding of law centres, with rate capping and ceilings on rate expenditure, it would have to choose between law centre provision, social services provision or provision, for example, for the 4,000 Cantonese refugees from Vietnam, who are in my constituency and whom I am glad to seek to help, but who are here as a result of Government policy and Government invitation. The local council would be in the invidious position of having to choose between cutting alternative projects for those in need. The catch 22 position is that if Lambeth were to support law centres, it would risk breaking the law itself by exceeding the rate capping limit.

I stress that if law centres do not continue to be funded by central Government, no Minister and no hon. Member should be surprised if people take the law into their own hands. This is an urgent and important matter on which we expect a significant response from the Government.

3.26 am

Mr. Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne, East): May I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Tyne Bridge (Mr. Clelland) for having sought the debate? I am grateful to him for two reasons. First, he has raised a matter which is of considerable importance to the Labour party and which we take very seriously. My second reason for being grateful to him when he speaks of the work of the Benwell law centre and of the law centre in Gateshead is that he is speaking for the community in Tyneside. As his neighbour there, I appreciate the points which he made on behalf of the community that we both represent.

Before being elected to the House, I was a councillor for the Walker ward and an official of the General, Municipal, Boilermakers and Allied Trades Union. As a full-time trade union official, I used to deal with the advice services that the union offered. In both that capacity and as a councillor I know that the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall (Mr. Holland) are equally true for the community on Tyneside. Even as a Member of Parliament I often feel that I cannot give to all the cases that come to my surgery the in-depth attention which they deserve. If an hon. Member goes into a case as a professional adviser, he finds that he is neglecting other duties. As both my hon. Friends have emphasised, there is a need for independent advice based on something other than the more formal provision of legal services.

The debate touches on two strategic issues — the principle as to whether law centres are a good thing, and who should take responsibility for funding law centres and more general advice services. My hon. Friend the Member for Tyne Bridge rightly quoted the 1979 report of the Royal Commission on legal services. In regard to the principle of the existence of law centres he could equally have quoted the 35th report of the Law Society, which said on page 57:

"The Society has continued to express concern to the Government about the severe effects on law centres and Citizens Advice Bureaux which may well result from the legislation abolishing the Greater London Council and the metropolitan county authorities. Law centres and advice agencies are also in an uncertain financial position as a result of other restrictions on local authority expenditure and changes in policy on the use of the Urban Programme. Urban Programme policy is now unhelpful to law centres and advice agencies. Bids for this form of funding have all been rejected by central government despite many being given high priority by their sponsoring local authorities."

That was the Law Society being supportive of law centres. Equally my hon. Friend the Member of Tyne Bridge could have quoted the Lord Chancellor's advisory committee on legal aid. The Lord Chancellor's own advisory committee is supportive of law centres. In other words, there is no lack of support for these centres, either in the legal profession or in the bodies most closely concerned with giving advice to those who are in charge of our legal services.

Even the Government seem to accept that law centres are, in principle, worth while. Earlier this week, at a meeting of the Advice Services Alliance, the hon. Member for Bury, North (Mr. Burt) said:

"Society would break down if it were not for the work of advice centres."

I regret that I came in part way through his remarks on that occasion. I may have missed his explanation of why the Government were being niggardly over the funding of law centres, which he said were essential to preserving the fabric of society.

The Labour party takes the view that the Lord Chancellor should take a lead in this matter. The whole issue of funding goes further than law centres and the nation's network of advice centres, citizens advice bureaux and so on. The overall provision of legal services faces a financial crisis greater than at any time in recent history.

The Solicitor-General will recall our recent debates on the funding of the new Crown prosecution service. I hope that we shall soon debate the cuts in legal aid provision. He will be aware of the litigation that is now taking place, with the Lord Chancellor being sued by members of the

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Bar because they regard their funding as inadequate and consider that their representations on the subject were not adequately considered.

It is against that background that we are discussing, in proportionate terms, the small work of the law centres. It is not simply a question of the contribution that they make to the provision of legal services. We must bear in mind the work that they undertake. They do not cover the type of work that family solicitors do. Their work is different and they touch areas of the community that, by and large, solicitors do not reach. My hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall cited examples from his constituency. Similar cases could be given from any inner city.

The Lord Chancellor continues to say that he will not take responsibility for the further funding of law centres. Indeed, he claims that he has no statutory power to do so. That is a red herring because the last Labour Lord Chancellor found it possible to take on the funding of time-expired law centre projects in inner cities. The present Government continue to fund those projects but refuse to take on any new law centres.

My hon. Friends and I gave the Government an opportunity, during the passage of the Administration of Justice Act, to give the Lord Chancellor the powers he needed to provide the necessary funding. It was clear from the Government's arguments on that occasion that not only did the Lord Chancellor not have the necessary powers to fund law centres, but that he did not wish to have such powers. The argument is that these are matters for local provision, not that there will be any extra local funding for it—funding must be from existing resources. All credit is due to Newcastle city council for taking on the Benwell law centre in spite of being rate-capped and having to find the money from stretched resources. That demonstrates the commitment that the local representatives give the law centre's work. It is wholly reprehensible that the Government do not share that commitment.

My hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall was right to stress independence. An organisation that is to provide advice should be independent of the local authority, as many of the issues that it will deal with concern the local authority. My experience is that the local authority as landlord is often involved. We can test the sincerity of the Government's argument about local responsibility in the case of a new law centre for Huddersfield. I understand that the Department of the Environment is considering whether it should be provided with urban aid as a new project. Kirklees council, which has submitted the bid, has made it a priority. That is the local view. I hope that, at least for the experimental period, the Department will feel able to let such a bid go through. If it does not, that will show what a sham and a hypocrisy is the Government's claim that these matters should be determined locally. The Government will be saying that the Lord Chancellor should not provide central funding and that although there is local support for a scheme, it should not go ahead.

Law centres serve the very inner-city communities that are bearing the brunt of the recession. Law centres do not touch on the generality of solicitors' work but provide a service that would not be provided otherwise, except by volunteers and diligent councillors and Members of Parliament who have limited provisions for staff, most of whom are underpaid or volunteers. Their work touches on that done by other advice agencies and the trade union movement. Their resources are stretched and they spend much of their time worrying about funding and whether they will continue. Against that sorry background, we are asserting, on behalf of the Parliamentary Labour party, the case for law centres and the case for Government funding.

I should like to conclude by mentioning something that always irritates me when we have these debates at 3.30 am. When I attended the meeting to which I referred earlier, a representative of the Conservative party was present, as was a representative of the Liberal party in the form of its environment spokesman, and, quite separately, there was a representative of the Social Democratic party. They claim to be two separate parties. It has emerged that they have two, three or perhaps four policies. Always, when there is a public platform their righteous views—often their self-righteous views—will be expressed.

But whenever I am here making out a case in the early hours of the morning, as I have a duty to do on behalf of the Opposition, not a spokesman of the alliance is present. In Committee stage on Bills it is left to the Government and the Opposition to conduct debates until the early hours of the morning. Alliance Members do not show their faces. Even in the morning Committee debates they turn up, make their speeches and go away again. Then they have the nerve to suggest that they are something new in politics. They are not; they are something very old in politics—skivers. They do not turn up when they ought to.

The Solicitor-General and I are used to looking at each other across the Despatch Box in the early hours of the morning because of the workings of the Consolidation Bill procedure. I appreciate that the Solicitor-General has come here to tell us the Government's views on these matters. My only fear is that he will say that he has come here as the agent of the Lord Chancellor. I am afraid that the Lord Chancellor, as we already know, has little sympathy for the case that we have made out tonight.

3.43 am

The Solicitor-General (Sir Patrick Mayhew): I, too, join in expressing my appreciation of the value of the service rendered by the hon. Member for Tyne Bridge (Mr. Clelland) in giving us this opportunity to discuss the standing, future and funding of law centres.

I share a certain amount of sympathy, too, for what has been said about the so-called alliance parties by the Opposition Front Bench spokesman, the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown), who is the hon. Gentleman's parliamentary neighbour in the north-east. I can contribute an illustration of the propensity to which the hon. Gentleman has just referred from a Committee in which I took part recently. A representative of the SDP-Liberal alliance declared his opinion that the amendment under discussion had not been made out in argument, whereupon he voted for it. Engagingly, he declared himself to be in two minds and rather split, a difficulty which he was frank enough to describe as not unfamiliar to him and his colleagues.

I listened with care to what the hon. Member for Tyne Bridge said about the two law centres in his constituency. I have particulars of the funding that each of them has received. Benwell law centre has received a grant of £65,000, which expires in 1986. The Gateshead law centre received a grant of £59,000. As the hon. Gentleman said, the arrangements for that funding expire in 1987. I was very glad to hear that Newcastle city council has taken

over the funding of the Benwell centre. I say that because I take the view that law centres are, to use the words of the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East very largely a good thing, for the reasons expressed tonight, especially those put forward by the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Mr. Holland), in whose constituency I lived before he took responsibility for it.

I well understand some of the problems that come the way of law centres in the hon. Gentleman's constituency. In the main, law centres deal valuably with those problems. That is my position, and I believe that it is the attitude of the entire Government.

The Government must take into account the second of the issues which the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East identified: who should be responsible for the funding? There is no conflict between the views that I have just expressed and the view that has been taken consistently by the Government and their predecessors that, with the exception of seven law centres which the previous Lord Chancellor made a commitment to fund, law centres should be funded from local sources. The most obvious source is the local authority. It is the most obvious, but it is not the only one available. In a recent debate in another place, a persuasive case was made for the practicability and desirability of law centres looking elsewhere in their communities — perhaps to local businesses—for their funding.

My noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor, for whom I must appear as agent or spokesman, has consistently taken that view. It may be helpful if I explained a little about it. The Government's policy, which has been made abundantly clear, is that the appropriate source of funds is a local one.

It is interesting that the first law centre was established only in 1970. About 59 of them have been established piecemeal in response to perceived local needs, and they have obtained their funds from a variety of public and charitable sources. It is right that several reports from the Royal Commission on Legal Services and the Lord Chancellor's Advisory Committee on Legal Aid have recommended that law centres should become an integral part of the provision by central Government of legal services to the public, that there should be a considerable expansion in their number, and that they should receive central Government support through the Lord Chancellor's Department.

The Government do not dispute the usefulness of law centres in some areas, as shown in those reports, and most recently in the report of the Archbishop of Canterbury's commission on urban priority areas. However, the Government do not accept that law centres are agencies for which central Government should assume direct and general responsibility. In the White Paper, "The Government Response to the Report of the Royal Commission on Legal Services", the Government said:

> "The needs of the public for legal assistance are most appropriately met by lawyers acting in private practice supplemented, where this suits local circumstances, by law centres."

The White Paper also said that the Government did not believe that a sufficient case had been made for direct ministerial responsibility for the availability of legal services in any area.

I note the point made by the hon. Member for Vauxhall in his illustration of the difficult school case. He said that, in such a case, someone could not go to a solicitor and expect a similar investigation. I understand that point. But there is a wide range of local advisory services, including the citizens advice bureaux, which the Royal Commission saw as the front-line provider of such services. If I remember correctly—and I believe that I am right—there still exists in Lambeth the Stockwell "good neighbour" scheme. I would be surprised if there were not others of a similar character in other districts of the hon. Member's constituency, which attract people of good will and expertise, and which would be able to help in the kind of case that he mentioned, without a law centre having to be available.

Mr. Stuart Holland: I am grateful to the hon. and learned Member. He may or may not be aware that the Stockwell and Clapham law centre, for example, has been living from hand to mouth since this time last year because of uncertainty over its funding. I am grateful to him for taking seriously the point which I have raised about inner-city stress. What I would like him to address himself to is how centres can be funded in the context of rate capping. Or, granted the financial pressures on councils, who will provide the safety valve by means of which people can see that they have redress for their grievances through an intermediate procedure, rather than going to the courts. We need more professionalism than simply comes from a "good neighbour" scheme, however well intentioned.

The Solicitor-General: I quite see that local authorities have to operate within the same margins of financial restraint as affect a great many other bodies, including Government Departments, these days. It comes down to a matter of priority. Newcastle city council has found it possible, notwithstanding the other claims made upon it, to take on the funding of the Benwell law centre. I do not doubt that that city council considers itself hard pressed, as many others do, yet it has been able to take on that funding of £65,000. I would not wish to put it on the basis of "where there's a will there's a way", but this illustrates that it is possible.

It is very difficult to gainsay this answer to the hon. Gentleman, that it is a matter of priorities. I agree that where one has had a grant upon which one has come to rely, and where that grant is either taken away or curtailed, one will experience a great deal of anxiety and uncertainty. I sympathise with those who are running law centres and who are in that position. Equally, I am not surprised that local authorities may have been holding out until the last minute, in the hope that representations such as those made this evening would bear fruit and that local authorities would not have to follow the example of Newcastle city council because the money would be made available by Government. I am afraid that I cannot hold out the prospect that the money will be so provided.

I should like also to say a word about the local authorities in this context, because the point has been made that one cannot really expect the local authorities to take on the funding of a law centre which may be financing cases by clients against the council itself. I know that there have been one or two instances of difficulty in that regard. It is regrettable. I regard them as being in the minority. The point is that many law centres are supported by local authorities, acting individually or under the urban programme, and these local authorities implicitly accept that a law centre has a duty to act in a client's best interests, whoever the other party may be. It is, I think,

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generally agreed that it would be very unreasonable for a local authority to refuse support for, or to withdraw support from, a law centre because it was, for instance, representing a council house tenant in dispute with the council as housing authority. It would be a rare case in which a local authority withdrew or withheld support on that ground.

I do not think that the claims of law centres for funding can be taken in isolation from other demands on the necessarily limited resources available to the public sector. It is for each individual authority to reach its own decision as to how best it applies the funds that it has available to it. But in the context of the abolition of the metropolitan councils and the GLC on 1 April, it should be borne in mind that local authorities in those areas will, after 1 April, be freed from paying precepts to their respective upper tier authorities. Those subject to rate limitation could apply for a variation of those limitations. In considering such applications the Secretary of State must have regard statutorily to the extent of the authority's commitment to the voluntary sector. That is a significant feature.

I want to return to the point made by the hon. Member for Vauxall about the pressures that exist in an area where there is perceived to be antagonism and, to take his example, discrimination on the part of certain police officers against sectors of the community. I note the tribute that the hon. Gentleman paid to senior police officers in his constituency, but he says that there have been too many instances at lower levels of discrimination and unlawful behaviour on the part of the police.

Under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 there exists a new and independent Police Complaints Authority. Under the same Act there is now provision, established by the Lord Chancellor, for a 24-hour duty solicitor scheme, whereby access to a solicitor is available on legal aid for somebody who is in a police station, having been arrested. That goes to mitigate the consequences of that which the hon. Gentleman has been describing. It is quite a significant improvement and one for which the Lord Chancellor, who has come in for a fair amount of stick tonight, can take the credit.

Mr. Stuart Holland: I am not sure whether it is part of the hon. and learned Gentleman's constituency experience, but it is certainly part of mine, that if an individual wishes to bring a complaint, for example, through the police complaints procedure, and that individual is not so well schooled as the hon. and learned Gentleman and I might be so fortunate to be, it is extremely useful for a law centre to be able to assist in the formulation of that submission to the Police Complaints Authority. Those factors should no be underestimated, certainly when taken in conjunction with the limited effectiveness of the previous police complaints procedure and the as yet—in my view and I think that of several other hon. Members—not wholly proven track record of the new procedure.

The Solicitor-General: I am sure that it is useful, but it is not indispensable by any means. There is now a sophisticated system which means that once a complaint has been made, however unschooled it may be, it really cannot be stopped. The complaint is registered and it has to be investigated under the supervision of the Police Complaints Authority. In the course of investigation, whatever may be lacking in detail and clarity in the original complaint will be supplemented and made good. It is said that there is an unproven track record. Have a heart. The thing has been going for only a short time. But it is an independent body and it is respectably staffed.

Let me say a little more about the extension to legal aid and advice that the Lord Chancellor has produced. They are clear indications of the importance which the Government attach to legal aid. Expenditure on legal aid has more than doubled in real terms since 1979. The Government have extended the scope of the legal aid and advice scheme in the past few years, for example, by the introduction of formal arrangements for the duty solicitor scheme in magistrates' courts, the 24-hour duty solicitor scheme which I have already mentioned for suspects held in custody, the provision of payments to solicitors and counsel on account of legal aid bills, extension of the assistance by way of representation scheme to proceedings in the mental health review tribunals and an increase in the capital allowance for applicants for ABWOR to £3,000. I think that those are signiicant improvements which demonstrate the Government's commitment to legal aid.

As I have said, legal aid, and law centres in particular, cannot expect to be exempted from the constraints of financial stringency which affect us all at the moment. Therefore, I should like to end as I began by expressing my understanding of the anxieties that are felt by those who run legal aid centres, but I should like to revert to the point that just as legal aid centres originated because of the perceived local need for help, so the best sources of funds remain in their own localities. I believe that because those who provide the money tend to wish to have some control over the operation of whatever is being funded it is better that those local centres, responding to local needs, should look to the local authorities and to other local sources for the funds that are needed for the work that they do.

I realise that it would be nice at 4 o'clock in the morning if I could end with something that those who have initiated the debate would like to hear. I hope that I have at least given a genuine indication of my sympathy for the work of the law centres, but I am afraid that I cannot hold out any prospect of the Government acceding to the request that they should take over a statutory responsibility for funding.

Transport (West Yorkshire)

4.2 am

Mr. Gary Waller (Keighley): My hon. Friend the Minister of State may not be as glad as I am to be here at 4 o'clock in the morning. Nevertheless, we much appreciate the contribution he makes in the office that he fills. I am also pleased that the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) is here. He demonstrates every day, in Committee and when he contributes to transport debates, that it is possible to adopt an aggressive yet light-hearted tone across the Dispatch Boxes. We welcome the fact that he has stayed up until this late hour to join in this important debate about transport in west Yorkshire.

I think that it is fair to say that, among the factors which encourage the development of industry and commerce in particular areas, there is good evidence that transport links figure very near the top. I want to deal, in particular, with the western part of the county of west Yorkshire, which not only suffers from higher than average unemployment but has relatively poor road and rail communications. In the eastern part of west Yorkshire, Leeds and Wakefield have first-class rail links to London by the east coast main line and also first-class road links by the M1 motorway to the south of the country. However, places such as Bradford, Halifax and Huddersfield come some way behind.

Leeds has attracted many new jobs in commerce and the services sector, but Bradford and its environs are still trying to recover from the shake-out in textile jobs which has taken place under successive Governments over many years and has reached a plateau only during the past 12 months or so. My constituency is defying the doom and gloom merchants and many firms are now more optimistic, although it remains to be seen whether that will turn into real jobs. Keighley is particularly poorly served by transport. Whether those jobs will come depends a great deal on the realisation of our transport needs.

Among the most important developments is the electrification of the east coast main line. Its completion to Doncaster and Leeds is eagerly awaited by the many people who use the train regularly, including me, and by tose who suffer from the delays caused by the many failures of the current diesel units. The fact that British Rail received substantial compensation from the manufacturer is little confort to those who are inconvenienced. The Government made the right decision in giving the go-ahead for this important and significant scheme. The increased reliability which the new Electra locomotives will bring is eagerly awaited also.

We are pleased that my hon. Friend the Minister will visit Bradford soon. Many people in Bradford are naturally unhappy about the link between the city and the rest of the inter-city network, especially the route between Bradford and Leeds. I understand that the existing dated rolling stock which is operated by the passenger transport executive is being replaced by the new Pacer train. That development is badly needed.

Many people in Bradford regard electrification of the route between Leeds and Bradford as essential to Bradford's regeneration. I must admit that, unlike some hon. Members, I do not believe that this argument necessarily stands up to rigorous examination. Decisions made by the great railway builders of the last century inevitably cause the journey time from Wakefield to Bradford to be long, especially if the train has to stop at Leeds on the way. British Rail claims that a stop at Leeds between Wakefield and Bradford has been forced on it by commercial considerations. It has already ceased to run trains via the Wortley curve directly to Bradford.

The time factor has in the past deterred passengers from travelling through to Bradford by train even when no change of train was required during off-peak periods. This factor will continue to apply whether or not electrification comes. At the end of the day, whether a service is viable depends not on electrification but on whether sufficient passengers use it. I know that there is criticism of British Rail for making the service so unattractive that passengers are driven away, but I do not think that it is all the fault of British Rail that the number of passengers using the inter-city service during off-peak periods declined to such a low level that services were discontinued.

There has never been any suggestion that, if electrification were continued through from Leeds to Bradford, British Rail would again start running through trains during off-peak periods. It is hard to see what advantage electrification can bring to make the service more attractive. On that basis, it is reasonable to assume that the electrified inter-city services would continue through to Bradford only during peak periods. British Rail has already said that it intends to continue inter-city services to Bradford during peak periods following electrification of the east coast main line, with a change of traction at Leeds during the time currently allowed for the stop there.

Therefore, the only advantage that I can see that electrification would provide is a kind of guarantee that British Rail would be more likely—it is certainly not a cast-iron guarantee — to fulfil its pledge to continue inter-city sevices to Bradford than it would if a change of traction were necessary.

I believe that better ways can be found of spending the several millions of pounds — various figures, ranging from £5 million to £10 million, have been cited—that such a guarantee would cost. The question of the Wortley curve is separate and not directly related to electrification. It is connected with the question whether it is commercially viable to run trains through to Bradford which do not call at Leeds. It looks as if the courts will have to decide whether British Rail was justified in closing that stretch of line to passengers without submitting the issue to a Transport Users Consultative Committee inquiry and final decision by the Secretary of State.

We live in an age of convenience, but I do not understand how electrification can make things more convenient unless one were willing not only to spend the £4 million, £5 million or £10 million needed to electrify the link, but also to maintain a continuing subsidy each year for uneconomic trains.

Some Bradfordians have admitted that electrification would not make economic sense but would have a psychological effect. British Rail is required to achieve a 5 per cent. return on its inter-city services by 1988. I am not sure where a subsidy would come from. Even if Bradford council was initially willing for the ratepayers to meet the cost, it could hardly give a guarantee to continue doing that indefinitely. No doubt one would come to a different conclusion if it seemed that electrification could bring any genuine benefits to Bradford. I find it difficult to argue that there should be any exception from the

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requirement that the inter-city service should be ineligible for public service obligation grant from April 1988, bearing in mind that this additional investment would incur additional costs if BR were to try to justify it by running through trains outside peak periods.

I should like to make some relatively brief comments about local rail lines as these are not the responsibility of BR or of my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Department of Transport but of the local PTE. The reason for that is not because they are unimportant; indeed, the contrary is the case.

Many commuters, shoppers, school pupils and tourists depend on the local rail lines between the major conurbations of Leeds and Bradford and the towns of Shipley, Bingley, Keighley and Skipton in Airedale and the smaller communities on the way to Ilkley in Wharfedale. In recent months there have been many complaints about the quality of the service. I would like to pay a tribute to the Wharfedale rail users group whose professionalism has impressed the professionals and whose suggestions have resulted in the improved scheduling of trains. The Ilkley line is popular with travellers but its viability is not enhanced by the way that section 20 agreements between the PTE and BR require the whole of the track costs to be borne by the former because the line is not part of the BR network.

The details of section 20 agreements are being re-examined and I hope that some benefits will result. In the meantime, I believe that the PTE should operate its fare structure on a more commercial basis. The local railway provides a fast alternative to the congested roads for which many people would willingly pay a realistic fare if that helped to retain the service. People need the service to be reliable and seats to be available. Lately, both timing and the number of coaches available have fallen well below acceptable levels. I hope that things will improve in future.

I have some good news for my hon. Friend the Minister of State about the likely effects of the Transport Bill for which he was responsible. I do not know whether my hon. Friend has seen a letter from County Councillor John Tweddle, who is the Conservative spokesman on transport on the county council. In the letter Mr. Tweddle refers to

"The latest information on the charges which the Transport Act 1985 is bringing about to bus services in West Yorkshire."

He states:

"The west Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive have just informed Councillors that commercial network mileage has been increased from 55 per cent. previously assessed to 75 per cent. of the current mileage. This improvement is to be achieved as a result of better service planning, faster journey times and improved staff productivity following the new cooperation from the Trade Unions. National Bus Company Subsidiaries operating in west Yorkshire, have not yet told of the extent of the commercial network that they intend to register".

Nevertheless, the sort of improvement in the commercial network mileage, together with the cost savings on the rest of the network due to tendering, is obviously going to save passengers and ratepayers a substantial amount in the future.

Mr. Tweddle concludes his letter by writing:

"The claim of the white paper and in debate now looks set to be achieved scorning the mis-information and scare-mongering of opponents to the Transport Bill."

That is encouraging news indeed.

Mr. Peter Snape (West Bromwich, East) Did the hon. Gentleman say that the spokesman of the Conservative group was County Councillor Tweddle, or was that the content of the letter from which he quoted?

Mr. Waller: County Councillor Tweddle is a man for whom I have the highest regard. I always found what he has to say about transport, in which he is a specialist, of extremely high quality. The hon. Gentleman will probably see more of Mr. Tweddle in future. He has already been a parliamentary candidate, and is undoubtedly destined for even higher things than the outgoing metropolitan county council.

One of the more obvious benefits of the abolition of the metropolitan county councils was the opportunity it gave the districts to take responsibility for highways. There is a good case for some services still to be provided on a countywide basis, for example research, and work on major strategic traffic management schemes. Nevertheless, I am surprised that some district councils in west Yorkshire are effectively throwing away the opportunities that they were handed by reorganisation by continuing to join together on a countywide basis to operate highway functions voluntarily.

I am glad that Bradford has opted out of that retrograde scheme, and I believe that it will benefit in future by so doing. If the old county borough was capable of running its highways, the much larger metropolitan district with a population as large as some counties should certainly be able to do so effectively.

One of the most important trunk road schemes in the offing is the Kirkhamgate-Dishforth scheme. The need for a strategic link between the M1 and M62 south of Leeds, and north Yorkshire and the north-east remains. Much national and local traffic must use a variety of roads which are unsuited to the flows that they must carry. There was a good case for a route to the west of Leeds which would have benefited Bradford and provided an alternative to the dangerous route north from those cities to Harrogate and Ripon. But we did not get the cake with the icing, and because the inspector did not recommend the construction of the entirely new section south and east of Leeds either, we have got only half of the alternative rather plain cake.

Now new alternatives are to be examined, and that process should be carried out quickly. The problem exists today and we cannot wait many more years for it to be properly resolved, even if the necessary improvements on the A1 are to go ahead.

I welcome the fact that active consideration is being given to the construction of an eight or nine mile link between the M1 near Wakefield, possibly between junctions 39 and 40, and the M62 at junction 25 near Brighouse. I have been pressing for that scheme for many years. Two or three years ago I was told by officials in the Department that it was a non-starter, but I am pleased that it is now considered that it may pay its way.

The scheme would bring considerable benefits to the western districts of west Yorkshire. It would provide a faster, more convenient route between the M1 and Huddersfield, Halifax and Bradford, would cut several miles off the journey between the M1 and the M62 to the west, and would relieve the A638 through Heckmondwike and Cleckheaton — towns which I had the honour to represent before the last general election but which I no

longer represent. The traffic in those towns was considered sufficiently bad to merit the construction of relief roads which have now been deleted.

This new route would also relieve the A644 through Mirfield and traffic would be able to use an alternative to the unsuitable, and in parts narrow, A637. It would enable the largest proportion of traffic linking between the M62 and M606 at the Chain Bar roundabout to do so without having to negotiate that roundabout—it is about half a mile around that large circuit. The Calder Valley link would have environmental, safety and economic benefits which would justify its early approval and construction. I hope the results of the analysis will prove favourable.

For my constituents the Airedale route is of great significance. It is a vital route for the future prosperity of the Aire valley towns, especially Keighley. When the route is complete it will mean that there will be a fast link between Keighley and the motorway network. At present in peak times it can easily take an hour to cover 15 miles. It is possible to get from south Bradford to Manchester more quickly than it is possible to reach the north-western parts of the district. That route, which has been on the stocks not just for years but decades, is essential.

The final obstacles to the construction of the Kildwick to Beechcliffe section—the most westerly part of the route — have now been cleared and I hope that construction will start this summer. There has been a recent announcement about the Victoria Park-Keighley-Crossflats section. That will mean the loss of about 13 per cent. of the Victoria Park at Keighley, but I do not think, as some fear, that the annual gala and show at Keighley, which are important events for the town, will be threatened too much.

The Crossflatts-to-Cottingley Bar section extending to the east of Bingley will go ahead eventually. There is a question about what will happen between Cottingley Bar and the Shipley eastern bypass. This will link with the Bradford central spine road and the motorway system. I have serious doubts about the consultative process which was carried out some time ago. I do not think that adequate opportunity was given for the people living outside the immediate area to express their views as there would have been under a statutory inquiry. I carried out a survey of Keighley firms which clearly showed that the overwhelming majority regarded the route as important and thought that it was essential that there should be a new route skirting Saltaire and Shipley. Those questioned did not think that any alternative would prevent traffic jams.

An alternative to the new route would probably rely on traffic management and perhaps on one or two short new sections, but all this would only create an almighty snarl-up which would strangle Saltaire—an outcome which those who wish to protect Saltaire fear. The anticipated traffic figures which I have been given by the Department of Transport do not add up. Even an incomplete Airedale route would draw traffic away from routes such as the A629-A644 through Denholme and Queensbury and the B6144 across the moors. I feel that there could be a botch-up and I am waiting anxiously for the announcement, due this summer, of the outcome of inquiries into alternatives. I note that I am supported in my view by Bradford council and the West Yorkshire metropolitan council. It is a sensitive matter.

Among the villages which have waited long—I will not say patiently—for a bypass, Addingham, on the borders of my constituency, features prominently. At long last, the detailed route has been announced. I believe it has the support of the overwhelming majority of the village residents who wish to see the bypass constructed as soon as possible.

Obviously, the objectors have every right to have their say, but I hope that their number will be few and that the statutory procedures will be carried through as speedily as possible. The road winds through the village in an attractive way that is suited more to the horse and cart than to today's juggernaut. The completion of the bypass, which will be partly hidden in a cutting will bring blessed relief to the villagers, who often have to jump for their lives, and have been kept awake at night by the rumble of heavy traffic.

The Leeds-Bradford airport has a catchment area twice the size of that for Newcastle or the east midlands, but has only about half the throughput of those two airports. It has great potential. For instance, it could carry a great deal of postal business, some of which used to be diverted through Speke airport at Liverpool. Last year, the operational income of Leeds-Bradford airport increased by 24 per cent., mainly as a result of increased business. There was a 10 per cent. increase in air freight, and a 14 per cent. increase in passenger trade. However, it has had to turn away much business in the past two years because of the ban on take-offs and landings after 10 pm. The question whether there should be take-offs and landings after that time is a sensitive issue, and I do not want to come down on one side or the other, but it is fair to investigate the matter, bearing in mind that most of the present generation of quiet aircraft were not in existence when the public inquiry took place in 1979.

I hope that I shall be forgiven for reverting briefly to the subject of rail. This is not a part of the British Rail or PTE network, but the Keighley and Worth Valley Railway. I take a particular pride in that scheme, as did my predecessor as Member for Keighley, Mr. Bob Cryer. The railway is run in a very professional way, although it depends on volunteers and fare-paying passengers, and the subscriptions of members of the preservation society among whom I am proud to be counted. The figures that have just reached me show that in 1985, 148,500 miles were covered by locomotives on the railway, a large proportion of them under steam. Not only do people come from far and wide to work on the railway, or travel on it as tourists, but some use it as a commuter service from Oxenhope and the famous village of Howarth down into Keighley and on into Bradford and Leeds. The railway is more expensive to run than an ordinary railway because it is a steam railway. Over £40,000 per annum has to be spent on coal alone.

I am glad that in the past couple of days, a pie-in-the-sky scheme to build a tramway and transport museum on the other side of Bradford seems to have run into the buffers. It was an over-ambitious scheme on which the West Yorkshire metropolitan council has already spent some money. It was never a realistic scheme, and my view is that it would have confronted head-on the voluntary efforts of people on the Keighley and Worth Valley Railway. I had appealed for somebody to say no to the scheme, which would have eaten up a great deal of ratepayers' money, when they are already suffering from increased rates.

I have taken my hon. Friend the Minister and the many other hon. Members in the House at this time on a tour of the transport facilities in at least part of the county of west

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Yorkshire. I hope that I have shown that transport is vital to the future of the county. During the next few years, it will be even more vital for the system to improve.

4.28 am

Mr. Peter Snape (West Bromwich, East): I would be stretching credulity to its limits if I said that the House was grateful to the hon. Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller) for raising these matters at this time in the morning, but it does at least give us the opportunity to debate the transport infrastructure of west Yorkshire, for which, regardless of the lateness of the hour, we should be grateful.

I found much of what the hon. Member said fairly unexceptionable, except that, like a loyal parliamentary private secretary, it contained not a shred of criticism of Her Majesty's Government or their policies.

Mr. Waller: I am afraid that my horse was shot from under me when my right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell) was struck down in mid-flight.

Mr. Snape: It was a regrettable episode, and I am sorry that the striking down in mid-flight of the right hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell) had such an enormous impact on his stable lad as well.

I thought the speech was more loyal than accurate, and it did not address itself to financial problems which the west Yorkshire conurbation will face, particularly after the abolition of the county council.

It is fascinating to hear some Tory Back Benchers talk about transport. The hon. Member for Keighley said that he would have difficulty in advocating subsidy for uneconomic trains. He said that he would not attempt to justify any grant to British Rail's inter city services after 1988-89, although he welcomed the east coast mainline electrification. A few minutes later, he demanded the expenditure of literally millions of pounds of public money on roads in the county wherein lies his own constituency. He wants a link between the M1 and the M62, and a link between the M62 and the M602, if I have the numbers right. This is millionss upon million of public money for the road network. Despite what Councillor Tweddle said about the future of buses in west Yorkshire once deregulation gets under way, presumably those of his constituents who do not have motor cars will spend their leisure hours watching all the bulldozers creating the new motorways, or better — or perhaps worse from their point of view—watching all those lovely lorries nose to tail on those two motorways.

Mr. Waller: If the hon. Gentleman recollects, he will remember that I suggested that there would be an economic return on the motorways or new roads that were built whether they are analysed by means of the Department's COBA system or any other system.

Mr. Snape: There is no doubt that, left to itself, the Department of Transport could find an economic return for a road through the Sahara desert. The day the Department of Transport under any Government and under any Minister evaluates road schemes in exactly the same way that it does rail schemes, or vice versa, I will start believing in some of the statistics which emanate from that Department. The justification for building roads can be, and is, churned out year after year under successive Governments. It is only railways that are not supposed to be subsidised or, if they are, the subsidy has to be so transparent that people like the hon. Gentleman can complain about it provided, of course, that the subsidy will not go to railway lines in and around his constituency.

The real meat of the debate, which the hon. Gentleman failed to reach, is what will happen to public transport in particular in west Yorkshire over the next few years.

Mr. Waller: It will be better.

Mr. Snape: The hon. Gentleman says that it will be better. He did not offer a shred of evidence to say that that is true.

I will try to put some evidence before the hon. Gentleman and the Minister to indicate that the reverse is true. On 12 February this year the Department of Transport issued a press release. It set the expenditure limits and the maximum precepts for all the passenger transport authorities, including the hon. Gentleman's, west Yorkshire. The limit was set on development at 26·51p. The preliminary expenditure limit for west Yorkshire had originally been set at £57·8 million and was redetermined to £61·3 million, giving that precept level of 26·51p. In the opinion of west Yorkshire county council, although I do not know what Councillor Tweddle thought about it, the approximate precept necessary to meet the PTA's own expenditure proposals, according to the Government's press release, was 34p. There is a considerable difference between the two of around 6 per cent. The hon. Member for Keighley blithely ignored those financial realities, so anxious was he to prove how wonderful a Minister is his hon. Friend the Minister of State, Department of Transport. Therefore, I shall be interested to hear from the Minister of State how west Yorkshire is to meet all the commitments that the hon. Member for Keighley just skated over, given the fact that its expenditure limit has been set at that level.

The press release then quoted what the Secretary of State for Transport had said:

> "This Order at last puts a stopper on the amounts which metropolitan ratepayers have in the past had to fork out year after year to subsidise wasteful public transport policies."

I do not know whether the hon. Member for Keighley thinks that the west Yorkshire passenger transport authority has been guilty of supporting wasteful public transport policies or whether he agrees with me that that is just the kind of ideological claptrap that his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport has been expounding for far too many years.

The kind of nonsense that the Department of Transport indulges in nowadays was amply illustrated in a picture that appeared only a few days ago in a newspaper. The newly appointed Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport was no doubt set up by his civil servants to pose under Barton bridge on the other side of the Pennines. There is a £20 million scheme to widen that bridge from two lanes to three. There is no shortage of cash for that scheme, despite the fact that the Minister will tell us how hard pushed the Government are in meeting all their economic commitments. However, when it comes to public transport in the constituency of the hon. Member for Keighley, I am afraid that cash is so tight that, again in the words of the Secretary of State for Transport, the wasteful public transport policies of the west Yorkshire public transport authority cannot be paid for.

The impact of those restrictions on the precept limit for west Yorkshire are grim. In fact, they are, grimly

enormous. The hon. Member for Keighley said that discussions are taking place on certain section 20 services. That is ne way of putting it. He might have said that Mr. Bill Cottham, the west Yorkshire passenger transport authority's director-general, has intimated total withdrawal of section 20 support for no fewer than six railway services in west Yorkshire. They are Huddersfield to Denby Dale; Huddersfield to Wakefield; Leeds, Castelford, Knottingly and Goole; Leeds to Ilkley, Bradford to Ilkley and—this is a route in which the hon. Member for Keighley might be interested—Bradford to Keighley.

It is strange——

Mr. Waller *rose——*

Mr. Snape: I shall give way in a moment. It is strange that in his paeans of praise for what the Government are up to the hon. Gentleman did not mention that fact. He said that discussions were taking place about the withdrawal of section 20 support.

Mr. Waller: The hon. Gentleman has got it wrong. There is no question of section 20 support being withdrawn from half the routes to which he referred. I understand that Mr. Cottham is bailing out of trains altogether and that he is going to run the bus company, now that the system has changed, following the passage of the Transport Act 1985.

Mr. Snape: I understand that West Yorkshire is bailing out of trains and intends to run buses in future, for reasons that I shall come to. No less than half of West Yorkshire's local railway passenger services are either up for closure or are suffering drastic cuts in service quality.

Over the past few years West Yorkshire has been positive towards its rail services. Passenger numbers on the services that I have mentioned and on others supported by the PTE have grown in contrast to an overall decline in the number of people using the buses. Many rail services have gained passengers following the opening of two new stations and the county has bought some new diesel trains. All these policies are now being put into reverse. Because of the Government's expenditure savings, the county council estimates, on my information that up to half the existing network and one third of train miles at present operated by the PTE could be reduced or withdrawn completely.

Mr. Waller: Could.

Mr. Snape: Yes, "could", according to the director-general. I do not want to insult the hon. Gentleman, but if I were told one story about the future of rail services in the county by the director-general of the PTE and a different story by the hon. Member for Keighley, even at the risk of upsetting the hon. Gentleman at 4.39 in the morning, I would put my trust in the professional rather than in, I shall not say the bumbling amateur, but, on his performance this morning, the grovelling amateur, the hon. Member for Keighley. He will have to accept that there are severe funding problems for the section 20 services in the county. Those problems are likely to lead to a switch from rail travel to bus support.

I always like to be fair about these matters. The Minister will be the first to concede that BR is far from blameless on the future of West Yorkshire's railway services. Again, Government targets on inter-city profitability have, according to BR, forced it to transfer inter-city services from the former Midland line, Leeds and York to Sheffield, even though that line has been extensively modernised. The Midland route's long term costs must now, according to BR, go to freight and regional passenger trains, most of which are assigned to the West Yorkshire PTE. West Yorkshire, understandably given its financial constraints, refuses to pick up the bill. So again there are financial problems for the recently modernised former Midland railway line.

Closure hearings have already taken place for the southern section from Normanton and Wakefield to South Yorkshire. New advance closure notices under section 54 cover the section from Normanton and Castleford to Leeds. They would lead to the closure of two commuter stations, Altofts and Woodlesford. That would mean the diversion of local Leeds-Sheffield trains and the circuitous and uncompetitive rerouteing of the Leeds-Knottingley-Goole service.

Another line which the hon. Gentleman did not mention in his somewhat carefree tour round West Yorkshire's railways is the Settle-Carlisle line, about which a series of public inquiries is to be held in the near future. BR's closure proposal would withdraw services from one of the most spectacular and scenic railway lines in Britain. I do not expect the Minister to comment on that, but the withdrawal of that service will have a knock-on cost effect on the West Yorkshire section of the line around the constituency of the hon. Member for Keighley. Surely that would aggravate the concern about the cost of lines from Leeds and Bradford to Keighley and Ilkley. It is already leading to drastic local service economies, with the retention of Leeds trains but a reduction in the Bradford services to a peak only service to Keighley. Those are the real financial problems for West Yorkshire, all of which the hon. Member for Keighley glossed over.

The chairman of the north-eastern transport users consultative committee, Mr. James Towler, recently said that his prime objective

"is to see that the existing network, existing stations and, as far as possible, the existing services are maintained".

The TUCC has supported objectors' proposals for improved rail links. But fine words and TUCC reports might well, on past form, be ignored by the Secretary of State.

The Minister of State, Department of Transport (Mr. David Mitchell): Oh.

Mr. Snape: I do not know why the Minister is saying, "Oh." It is worse than I have indicated. When a railway line in the Tunbridge Wells area was recently put up for closure, the TUCC said that considerable hardship would result to those using it. That did not bother the Secretary of State. He promptly decided to close the line, anyway.

Mr. Mitchell *rose——*

Mr. Snape: Before I give way to the hon. Gentleman, I urge him to reflect on his own actions regarding railway lines. In other words, if he proposes to rise to defend the Secretary of State, he should first defend himself because, when replying to a similar debate a fortnight ago, he told me that he had not declined to give permission for a line to be electrified. He said exactly the opposite to that, however, in a written reply to me about the Manchester-Blackpool line, a topic to which I shall be returning on Monday. Does he still wish to rush in to defend his right hon. Friend?

Mr. Mitchell: I would not want the hon. Gentleman to mislead himself or the House into believing that my right hon. Friend had not taken full account of what was said by the TUCC in the case of the Tunbridge Wells-Erith line closure to which he referred. My right hon. Friend went so far as to secure the agreement of British Rail to provide a bus service from Groombridge—a town which might otherwise have suffered — direct to Tunbridge Wells. It would be wrong to give the impression that that town had been left isolated.

Mr. Snape: I did not say that the town had been left isolated. I said that the service had been withdrawn despite the recommendation of the TUCC and the hardship that would inevitably be caused to users of the line. Bus services do not normally last long when rail services are withdrawn, as the Minister knows. That has been the experience of the last 20 years.

The position in west Yorkshire is as I have described it, rather than the sunny, optimistic picture painted by the hon. Member for Keighley. We hope that despite the Government's interference with the right of locally elected representatives to opt for the transport system they want, BR will be able to keep things going at least until the next general election. But the future looks bleak indeed, even if the hon. Member for Keighley will not admit it.

Councillor Tweddle must be the only person to believe that bus deregulation will mean an increase in services. Not even the Minister, who at least tries to sound like an optimist, has claimed that. With bus deregulation and metropolitan county abolition — bearing in mind that about 26 per cent. of all BR's east coast main line passengers begin their journeys on feeder rail services— the Government's pulling of the financial rug from the west Yorkshire and Tyne and Wear passenger executives will undermine the financial prospectus for inter city routes and local passenger trains.

The situation is bleak indeed and I fear that the price of the Government's neglect—indeed, positive hatred— of local passenger services and transport initiatives in west Yorkshire may deprive the House of the privilege of the presence of the hon. Member for Keighley after the next general election. That will give him time to reflect that if he had protested a little louder and been a little less loyal to his party, west Yorkshire might have had better public transport services and he might still have had a seat in this House.

4.49 am

The Minister of State, Department of Transport (Mr. David Mitchell): My hon. Friend the Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller) has spoken robustly on behalf of his constituents, as he always does. I am not sure that he would wish me to congratulate him on his good fortune, as it is 4.49 am

We have had an interesting and important debate. My hon. Friend mentioned the quality of Bradford's rail links and the rest of the rail network. I am aware of his and other hon. Members' anxiety about rail services to Bradford, especially the inter-city service. The hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) secured an Adjournment debate on rail services to Bradford last November, since when there has been correspondence.

I have accepted an invitation to visit Bradford next Wednesday, 19 March. My hon. Friend the Member for Keighley, like the hon. Member for Bradford, West has been anxious for me to pay that visit, and my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, North (Mr. Lawler) will be present. I can assure all three that I shall travel to Bradford by inter-city service, changing at Leeds and that the programme arranged for my visit will give me an opportunity to meet BR's passengers, and representatives from several interest groups, including the chamber of commerce, the university, the transport users' consultative committee and Age Concern, and to discuss issues of concern with the city council and Members of Parliament.

I have no doubt that the visit will be interesting and useful, but I must emphasise, as did my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State in reply to the Adjournment debate last November, that the quality and level of services on routes and their timetabling are entirely matters for the BR Board. Ministers have no powers to interfere. The Government have set a framework of objectives for the board. We have emphasised that rail services should be reliable, attractive and punctual at acceptable fares and charges. It is for the board to manage the network in the framework of those objectives. For the inter-city sector, we have set the board a commercial target. We have asked the chairman to ensure that it achieves a 5 per cent. return on assets by 1988-89 and said that, from 1 April 1988, the sector will not be eligible for public service obligation grant. That approach is consistent with the firm policy of successive Governments that there is no justification for subsidising inter-urban transport whether it is provided by rail, road or air.

Mr. Snape: Can I draw attention, in my tentative fashion, to the fact that the Department has subsidised road haulage for donkeys' years and shows every sign of continuing to do so, not least because, when their own figures show that the heaviest lorries do not meet their true track cost, the Government move the goalposts in an attempt to prove that they do?

Mr. Mitchell: Perhaps we could debate expenditure on roads and the contribution made by road users some other time. The hon. Gentleman jolly well ought to know that road users contribute considerably more than is spent on the road system. BR's inter-city sector is already under a strong challenge from airline and coach operators, and it is beginning to respond well.

My hon. Friend referred to the board's proposals in respect of the Wortley curve. I understand that an application for a judicial review of the board's decision not to implement the statutory closure proceedings for that stretch of line has been granted, so hon. Members will understand that it would not be appropriate for me to comment. The hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) was worried about the future of the Wharfedale and Airedale lines. Both of them are supported by the passenger transport executive through section 20 agreements. I shall return to the hon. Gentleman's point later.

As hon. Members will be aware, decisions on the level of financial support for local rail services in west Yorkshire are a matter for the passenger transport authority and its PTE. That is as it should be. PTAs and their executives are in the best position to judge the value of local rail services within the overall provision of public transport in their areas. The fact that the decisions rest with local bodies means that no one in Government can ever

give an absolute assurance of support for a particular service. However, if the PTE were to withdraw its support for the service, British Rail could not withdraw passenger services from the line unless and until the proposal had been considered in the statutory procedure and the Secretary of State had decided to give consent to the proposal. The procedure allows objections to be made and fully considered before the Secretary of State comes to a conclusion.

Mr. Snape *rose——*

Mr. Mitchell: I intend to return to some of the points that the hon. Gentleman has made and seeks to make, when I have dealt with other aspects of railways raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley.

Mr. Snape: I am grateful to the Minister, but he should not allow himself to read out such dishonest claptrap. Will he tell the House how it is possible for local people to make local decisions when his boss, the Secretary of State, issues press releases saying that he will stop what he calls wasteful public expenditure on public transport? To do that, he is deliberately restricting the money available, so preventing those local people from making local decisions.

Mr. Mitchell: Clearly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I should not have given way to the hon. Gentleman. I had every intention of dealing with the rubbish that the hon. Gentleman spoke from the Dispatch Box. If he will allow me to take my speech in its proper sequence, he will find that I have great pleasure in rubbishing what he had to say when he addressed the House earlier.

Hon. Members have expressed disappointment with the fact that the British Rail Board does not propose to electrify the link between Bradford and the east coast main line. I understand that BR considered the case for electrifying the line between Bradford and Leeds in 1982, but found that it could justify spending only some £2 million to £3 million against an estimated cost for the scheme of £10 million.

It has been suggested that appraisals of possible electrification schemes, such as that between Leeds and Bradford, should not be determined solely on a commercial basis. We believe firmly, however, that BR's inter-city sector, where the responsibility for the Leeds to Bradford electrification scheme should fall, should operate and invest efficiently. In making investment proposals for the inter-city sector, BR must demonstrate a commercial rate of return.

West Yorkshire passengers, including Bradford ones, should benefit from the east coast main line electrification scheme, which will be completed to Leeds in 1989. I understand that, with the electrification scheme, BR has no plans to withdraw through services to Bradford. I am happy to give my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley that assurance. The services will be provided with the very latest rolling stock. The locomotive will be changed at Leeds.

The electrification of the east coast main line has a value of more than £3 million, which is the largest BR investment scheme for more than 25 years. BR was able to put forward a good financial case for the scheme, and we were glad to give it our approval. It is an example of our commitment to a modern and efficient railway system and it should bring significant benefits to the people of Yorkshire.

My hon. Friend the Member for Keighley also referred to the private steam conserved line—the Keighley and Worth Valley Line. I join him in paying tribute to the enterprising people who run preserved railways in different parts of the country. I have had the opportunity of visiting several of them. I was most impressed by the enthusiasm, skill and professionalism of those running such railway lines. I am a member of the North Yorkshire Moors Railway Preservation Society, and I have been involved with the Watercress Line. I join my hon. Friend in warmly congratulating those who are involved with the preserved lines.

My hon. Friend mentioned trunk road schemes in and around his constituency. We expect to start three important schemes in west Yorkshire in 1986. My hon. Friend will be pleased to know that starts are planned on two sections of the Airedale route in his constituency—Kildwick to Beechcliffe and Victoria Park to Crossflatts. Those schemes are part of the improved trunk road for Aire valley. We also plan to start work on a much-needed bypass of Wetherby on the A1 following a decision in December on the Kirkhamgate to Dishforth proposals.

I acknowlege that the Airedale route is of prime importance. The new road links to the Aire valley are of considerable importance. My hon. Friend is disappointed with the decision, confirmed last year, to terminate the route at Cottingley Bar near Bingley, but the announcement made it clear that a new road through the Saltaire-Shipley corridor would be unacceptable to local people. Alternative routes were examined carefully, but would cause considerable environmental damage. Therefore, we see the need to concentrate on new sections that we can build plus improvements to the existing road east of Cottingley Bar. As my hon. Friend knows, we are already consulting on the form of junction arrangement at Cottingley Bar. The chosen design will be included in proposals for the Crossflatts to Cottingley Bar section. Publication of the proposals is planned for later this year.

We also plan to hold public consultation about improvements to the existing road east of Cottingley Bar and the Shipley eastern bypass, which will link the improvements being planned by the local authority in Bradford. My hon. Friend said that he was worried about some aspects of this. I shall draw his concern to the attention of my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State who has prime responsibility for roads.

Another important scheme in my hon. Friend's constituency is the Addingham bypass. I am pleased to note the interested local response to the exhibition of proposals. Many people share the view that has been expressed that work on this should be started quickly, but we must consider objections before reaching a conclusion about a public inquiry. A few miles to the west, but just in west Yorkshire, a bypass of Draughton is planned. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State will make an announcement on it in the spring.

On the A65, a bypass is planned for Burley in Wharfedale. We shall publish proposals for this during the summer. Many people are lookig forward to relief from trunk road traffic. Improvements are planned on the A1 between Scotch Corner and the Bramham crossroads, at A64 junction north-east of Leeds. In west Yorkshire, in addition to the Wetherby bypass, we shall be publishing fresh proposals later this year for the section from

[Mr. Mitchell]

Bramham to Wetherby. I recognise the concern about conditions on the A1 south of Bramham crossroads, and we are considering it carefully.

The decision announced in the House on 6 December by my hon. Friend the former Minister of State to press ahead with A1 improvements was welcomed generally. But we also decided, following the inspector's recommendation, not to make orders for an M1 to A1 link to the east of Leeds. Therefore, a study will be carried out into the problems of through traffic in the communities in and to the east of Leeds. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State with responsibility for roads and traffic is considering the terms of reference for the study and he expects to make an announcement soon. He will also decide who will carry out the study. We fully acknowledge the need to come to a conclusion as quickly as possible about the next steps to be taken, but it is important to make a full assessment of the situation before reaching a conclusion.

Perhaps I could just assure my hon. Friend on a number of other aspects concerning trunk road schemes and studies in west Yorkshore, because other schemes are being prepared. A bypass of Drighlington is planned, and we published orders in January this year. This will provide relief to the village from heavy vehicles using the A650 to reach the M62. If a public inquiry is needed, it should be held towards the end of this year. We are also planning to provide a climbing lane on the M62 between junctions 24 and 25. The uphill gradient of this five kilometre section results in queues of slow-moving heavy goods vehicles. Our consulting engineers are now carrying out preliminary design work. We hope to start work late in 1987 or early in 1988.

My hon. Friend is now considering who should carry out two further studies in west Yorkshire. The first is on a possible link from the M1 south of Wakefield to the M62, providing an improved route for traffic from south Yorkshire to the west. The other is a study of the Wharfedale route to the A1 south. This is an important route from Leeds to the north-west. A number of bypasses have already been provided or are in the programme, but we need to decide how much more should be done.

There are also a number of smaller improvements about which I shall write to my hon. Friend.

My hon. Friend also raised certain matters concerning the Leeds/Bradford airport. Perhaps I can tell him that the White Paper "Airports Policy", published in June 1985, outlined the Government's commitment to maximise the potential of regional and local airports so that passengers with origins and destinations in the regions can use their local airports. Thriving regional airports also provide direct and indirect employment in the area, and benefit local industry by providing useful air services for business men and local air freight services. My hon. Friend particularly referred to the opportunities which he saw in connection with a postal service for the Leeds/Bradford airport.

The White Paper, "Airline Competition Policy", also made clear the Government's wish to see the new international services developed from regional airports. The Government are also active within the EEC in seeking to liberalise inter-regional air services.

The Government have also authorised unprecedented levels of capital expenditure for development. Leeds/Bradford has benefited from this. In the past four years, substantial capital expenditure allocations, totalling no less than £18 million, have been made, mainly for runway extension and its associated work, terminal extension and improvements, and so on. Phase two of the terminal extension is due to be completed this year, and approval for construction of phases three and four will be given when it is justified by the traffic growth and subject to the availability of PESC resources.

The Government's policy is to encourage the development of regional airports wherever this is justified by demand and return on capital. I hope that what I have said will give my hon. Friend some reassurance about the importance that we attach to regional airports, of which he has been supportive.

I turn now to the remarks of the hon. Gentleman the Member for West Bromwich, East. His usual woolly intervention, if I may say so, included an extraordinary attack on the Department of Transport for its assessment of the need for roads, and snide remarks about justifying a road even through the Sahara. I hope that those towns and villages awaiting bypasses will not fail to note the anti-road attitude of the hon. Gentleman, who represents the Labour party on the Front Bench in these matters. The hon. Gentleman referred to buses, and made what I thought were some rather cheap remarks, making play with the name of County Councillor Tweddle, who has well served the people whom he represents in his part of Yorkshire.

I am not in a position to comment in depth on the particular bus services registered as commercial because at his point we do no know precisely the extent to which the gross numbers break down compared with the existing situation. But it may interest the House to know that no fewer than 15,000 routes had been registered by 28 February as part of the commercial network nationwide.

Mr. Snape: That is a lot.

Mr. Mitchell: The hon. Gentleman is right. That is about three quarters of the existing system, which is much higher than his hon. Friends suggested when they spent last summer trying to oppose our legislation to improve the buses. They claimed at the time that the legislation would lead to no bus services being registered, and now there are 15,000 examples of how wrong they were. Alternatively, they said that there would be great congestion because so many buses were being registered and so many services run in our city centres.

The hon. Gentleman asked how west Yorkshire will meet the level of service within the precept limit that has been set. That is a matter for the PTE in fulfilling the policies of the west Yorkshire PTA. The extent to which they will be able to achieve that will be not insignificantly affected by the efficiency and improvement that comes about in the existing bus services in that area, which everybody knows have substantial room for improvement.

The hon. Gentleman suggested that the PTA may give a low priority to section 20 support for British Rail services. That is a matter of local priorities. It is a matter for the local authority, not the Government. If locally elected representatives responsible to local people choose to give a low priority to the section 20 arranged rail services, they must be answerable for that. Certainly there

will be those who will have a good many questions to ask should they seek to regard the provision of rail services in their area as a matter of such low priority that they propose to terminate them.

I understand that the PTA is proposing to cut bus services by 10 per cent. in order to avoid the small increase in the real level of bus fares. Again, that is a matter for it to justify. I might find it extraordinary that, while the level of bus fares is substantially below that in many other parts of the country, the PTA pursues a policy of keeping bus fares at an artificially low level, having to cut the network or even raise question marks about rail service rather than increasing the price of tickets.

However, that is not a matter for me to decide. It is a matter for local people to decide through their representatives and to justify to their electorate.

Mr. Waller: Is my hon. Friend aware that the Labour-run PTA has kept fares at the same level for seven years, quite inefficiently, and that even when more money became available it used it to reduce fares in the peak periods and to make special offers to people to attract them on to buses that were already full? The same thing applies to trains. At a public meeting that I attended to discuss the train service on the Wharfedale line, it was clear that people were willing to pay more in order to keep their trains but that they were being prevented from doing so by the PTA which, instead, thought about cutting the service.

Mr. Mitchell: I do not think that there could be a more succinct summary of the extraordinary lack of reasonable priorities than has been expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley in winding up this debate.

Women Doctors (Obstetrics and Gynaecology)

5.15 am

Mr. Brian Sedgemore (Hackney, South and Shoreditch): It is always a pleasure to speak in this House, and never more so than at 5.15 in the morning. This debate is about the dangers to patient care caused by the way in which the medical establishment has treated Wendy Savage and Pauline Bousquet. It is Pauline Bousquet who asked me to raise this issue, because she is desperately concerned about obstetrics and gynaecological care in Hackney.

I believe that there are five main strands to the current argument, and it is important to disentangle them. First, there is the conflict between those who say that mothers should have a real say in the method of childbirth and those who argue that it is for the doctors, the experts, to decide. Secondly, there is the argument about natural childbirth versus high-tech childbirth. I believe that that argument is misleading, because there is no doubt that both Wendy Savage and Pauline Bousquet have used high-tech methods when such methods have been needed. Thirdly, there is the right of people in the medical profession to dissent from establishment views, whatever those views may be, at any particular time. Fourthly, there is the issue of the right of women doctors to participate as equals in the National Health Service and to question the chauvinism and old-fashioned attitudes of the male establishment towards its female colleagues. Finally, there is the issue of personal ambition, spite and pique, which tends to give the lie to the image created about the medical profession by "Emergency Ward 10" and similar soap operas.

I think it is disturbing that Wendy Savage and Pauline Bousquet are both women, both in trouble, both in the east end and both work in old established hospitals. We must ask ourselves whether that is just a coincidence, or whether it is a symptom of a much wider problem in the National Health Service. Wendy Savage is a senior lecturer at the London hospital. She, in effect, has been put on trial in relation to her clinical judgment in a way in which none of her male colleagues could ever have expected or would be expected to be put on trial. She has faced five weeks of hell, and she now has several months of waiting to find out whether she will get her job back. She has been the subject of the most terrible gossip and rumour, which shames the medical profession. Her trial has been manifestly unfair and manifestly unnecessary, and it is appalling that the Health Service has been made to do without her services over this recent period and dreadful that the local community, which supports her, has lost the use of her services, simply because she has radical views which she boldly states and honestly puts into practice.

The main case that I want to talk about concerns Pauline Bousquet. She is a consultant obstetrician and gynaecologist who used to work at the Mothers' hospital in Hackney. In 1975, rumours began to circulate about her ability to do her job properly. I regret to say that they were caused by her colleagues who did not like the way in which she was treating her patients. One of the things they did not like was the fact that she had long consultations with her patients. Mr. Hudson, who has recently been reappointed as a consultant at St. Bartholomew's hospital,

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behaved unprofessionally and introduced bad blood into the medical system. He was largely responsible for the rumours that began to circulate at the Mothers' hospital.

In 1978 Pauline Bousquet ceased to be invited to certain meetings at the hospital. She was worried about the haste which had been introduced into childbirth at that hospital. She was concerned about the use of drugs and epidurals to speed up labour, which she thought precipated in certain cases the need for caesarean operations.

In 1978 Mr. Hudson left the Mothers' hospital, but before leaving he wrote a letter complaining about Miss Bousquet's conduct. Miss Bousquet says that that letter was a load of "manifest nonsense." The medical establishment began to take some of the complaints seriously. In 1979 Dr. Murphy, the area medical officer, wrote to Miss Bousquet calling into question her professional ability. He had received complaints from Mr. Crocker, who is now a consultant at Norwich, and Mr. Glyn Evans, who is a consultant at the Mothers' hospital. The complaint about Miss Pauline Bousquet was 22 pages long and involved eight cases.

I regret to say that it looks as though, from the evidence that Miss Pauline Bousquet has given me — she has shown me all the documents, except for the names of the patients on them — that Mr. Crocker and Mr. Glyn Evans made statements in their complaints which were untrue and could not be substantiated by the medical notes. Of course, it is the medical notes that provide the main evidence in these cases. It is deeply regrettable that those two highly professional people made the same errors which could not be justified by the medical notes. That suggests that malice was involved and that it was not just a mistake. They could not have made the same errors unless one person copied from the other. They were not making the proper independent professional assessment that one would expect in such cases.

I am concerned at the fact that there may be, in the NHS, consultants who are prepared to operate in that way with respect to their colleagues. That is not the way in which professionals in any service should operate. There should be an investigation into the conduct of those two people. I ask the Under-Secretary of State to encourage the district health authority to set up such an investigation.

Pauline Bousquet asked two professors to go through the eight cases raised against her. They have done so and have concluded that her conduct could not be faulted and that the care she gave to all her patients was good.

The district health authority, especially Dr. Grant, has said that it does not question Pauline Bousquet's professional or clinical conduct. Whereas Dr. Murphy, the area medical officer at the time, was prepared to hold an inquiry into Miss Bousquet's conduct until she proved that it would be nonsense to have such an inquiry, he was not prepared to hold an inquiry into the conduct of some of her colleagues when attention was turned to their professional ability. That is worrying for the people of Hackney.

As I understand it from professional people concerned with obstetrics in Hackney, in three of the cases serious question marks were raised over the treatment received by the mothers. Those were the cases undertaken by Miss Husband and by Mr. Crocker, whom I have mentioned. However, perhaps even more important is that subsequently question marks were raised over the care given in another 11 cases, and those cases date from 1975 to 1983. The quotations that I have concerning those cases are: "babies were seriously at risk", "some appalling things were happening", and "in one case a baby died". I believe that there ought to be an inquiry into the 11 cases, and I ask the Minister to help in that. We want reassurance in Hackney for mothers in the way that they are cared for when they are pregnant.

In July 1980 Miss Bousquet gave up her emergency rota at the Mothers' hospital. She was not quite clear what was involved in giving up that emergency rota, because almost immediately a number of the consultants refused to deal with her cases and she lost them all. One result of that was that by September 1980 a rather appalling situation had arisen in Hackney.

I have a copy of the minutes of the Hackney health council at that time, and they say this in connection with the Mothers' hospital:

> "Thus only 50 per cent. of the patients were under consultant care, the remaining patients being under the care of registrars and this was very unsatisfactory."

I should like the Minister to give us an assurance that that situation will not arise again in Hackney. It is disgraceful that only 50 per cent. of the patients were then under consultant care.

To sum up my position on obstetrics, as opposed to gynaecology, I make the following requests. First, I should like an inquiry into the conduct and motivation of Mr. Hudson, Mr. Crocker and Mr. Glyn Evans. Their conduct should be examined, because it would appear that they have badly blackened the character of Miss Pauline Bousquet, and that is tragic. Secondly, I believe that there should be a clinical inquiry into the behaviour of Miss Husband and Mr. Crocker and those consultants who were concerned with the 11 cases to which I have referred. Thirdly, I ask the Minister to give us an assurance that there will not be a recurrence of the situation where 50 per cent.—or indeed any—of the mothers in Hackney find themselves without consultant care when they are expecting.

Although there is an inquiry going on at present into Miss Pauline Bousquet's case, that in no way concerns obstetrics, which is the issue about which I have been talking so far. That inquiry concerns gynaecology. Therefore, we need the inquiry for which I have called.

I should now like to discuss briefly gynaecology and the case of Miss Pauline Bousquet. Over the past few years Miss Bousquet has had most of her gynaecology work taken from her. She lost her out-patients at St. Leonard's hospital when that hospital was closed down, she subsequently lost her two clinical sessions at St. Bartholomew's hospital, and since 1984 she has not been allowed to operate at St. Bartholomew's.

There is now a curious situation, whereby this highly skilled and able consultant is employed to carry on nine gynaecology sessions a week, but in fact carries out only two of those sessions. It is absurd that the Health Service can waste talent in that fashion. It is even more absurd when one realises that Miss Bousquet has the support of the British Medical Association, local doctors, local people and the community health council.

Miss Bousquet has had strong backing from the British Medical Association, which believes that the district health authority has behaved badly towards her and breached the conditions of her contract. Mr. Peter Forster, the industrial relations officer of the BMA, wrote to Dr. Grant saying:

"As a consultant, it is essential for Miss Bousquet to maintain a close contact with her specialty and to remain abreast of all current developments which occur within her specialty, as well as the obvious need for her to practice her requisite skills. Therefore, it is, I would argue, incumbent upon the employing authority to provide her with an adequate level of work."

In other words, if the NHS gives her a contract of employment, it is no good Dr. Grant appearing on television, as he did the other night, and saying that Miss Bousquet gets paid. She does not want money for nothing. She wants to do her job. She is a highly skilled gynaecologist and should be allowed to work.

The medical establishment at Barts, as part of this long 10-year attack which has destroyed Miss Bousquet's reputation, is undoubtedly about to make this lady doctor redundant. It is all very well for Dr. Grant, whom I know and respect, to say that it is rationalising the services. It is putting this consultant out of work. The district health authority is behaving unjustly to an individual.

There is a smell of an obstetric cover-up in Hackney. The Minister should ensure that it does not take place, so that mothers can have their babies, knowing that they will receive the best treatment. Finally, patients have been denied some of the skilled and vital care that they need. It is time that the district health authority, helped by the Minister, acted on the matter.

5.31 am

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore) for tabling this important debate, which raises a matter of concern to his constituents in east London, and congratulate him on having the debate selected sufficiently early for us to spend some time on it. He has dealt mainly with the case of Miss Bousquet, and I should like to talk about the background to the case of Mrs. Wendy Savage.

An inquiry has just finished and we are awaiting its decision. Both cases are about gynaecology and obstetrics, and how women wish to have babies. Should women be told, mainly by men doctors, how they should have babies, or should they be allowed more freedom? Mrs. Savage says that there is no good evidence to show that having a baby at home is more dangerous than having it in a hospital. She says that many facilities are inadequate, and that we as a nation do not use the skills of midwives sufficiently. Nevertheless, her claims and practice appear to have passed unrecognised by her colleagues, and she has been suspended and has had to go through a traumatic inquiry which will cost a large sum.

I do not have the advantage of my hon. Friend of representing the area and being conversant with the details of the cases. My opinion comes solely from reading what the responsible press has written. The legal costs were estimated at about £50,000 in November. By the end of the inquiry the press estimates that the legal costs may be £150,000.

Does the Minister think that such inquiries should be allowed to take place in the future? Mrs. Savage will be saddled with enormous legal costs, approaching £150,000, because of an inquiry into medical practice and principle. There should be a procedure for carrying out this type of inquiry without the burden of cost falling upon one person. The month-long inquiry has now finished.

The challenge was the suggestion that there was entrenched conservatism—I hasten to add with a small c — within the medical profession and that that was responsible for the poor service that many woman received in east London. Mrs. Savage criticised certain middle-aged obstetricians whose senior registrars had to cover for them because they were busy in Harley street.

The Tower Hamlets health authority cannot escape criticism for this ponderous procedure. The health authority was threatened with legal action during the inquiry by Mrs. Denise Lewis. Mrs. Lewis was one of the patients whose treatment under Mrs. Savage was used by the authority as evidence of professional incompetence. Mrs. Lewis told the authority that she had no complaints about her treatment.

It transpired that three of the five women whose cases were being used as evidence against Mrs. Savage offered to give evidence on behalf of Mrs. Savage. The cases are being considered by the inquiry and we shall be anxious to learn the outcome. One may speculate about the cases but it appears that there is division on only one case.

Other problems appear to exist in east London. In February it was reported in the newspapers that the head of obstetrics at the London hospital wished to get rid of his senior lecturer, Mrs. Wendy Savage, as soon as she was appointed head of the department. This was Professor Jurgis Grudzinskas. This has been denied by the professor, but nevertheless, there must be bad blood between the various consultants who serve in that area. This cannot be good for the constituents of my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch. I hope that the Minister will endeavour to find a solution.

A team which does not work in harmony, which is more concerned with arguments against a colleague and concerned to win those arguments and appear before tribunals and courts, cannot be caring for my hon. Friend's constituents. They are not receiving the service that they expect from the National Health Service.

The inquiry heard evidence from both sides but the majority of the evidence was in defence of Mrs. Savage. She was highly commended for her handling of complicated births. Dr. John McGarry, senior consultant obstetrician at the north Devon hospital commended her. Half way through the inquiry it became clear that Mrs. Savage lost fewer babies at or just after delivery than other consultants at the London hospital. In 1984-85 her overall perinatal mortality rate was 11·3 per thousand deliveries against 13·7 for the other consultants. This is significant. I am not saying that one should therefore disregard everything else, because one has to look at the individual cases used in the tribunal to make sure that there was no gross negligence in any particular case, because if there was, action has to be taken. However, it is significant that she lost fewer babies than other consultants.

The problems were compounded by the fact that the health authority used individual case notes, and there was concern that individuals could be identified by the details given to the tribunal. This may be slightly by the way of the issue that my hon. Friend has raised, but everybody will be concerned about this, and the General Medical Council also protested about the identification of patients at the inquiry. The matter was patched up, and eventually the inquiry started again. However, there are no guidelines or rules about how individual, confidential case notes can be disclosed to public inquiries.

I am sure that if my hon. Friend had been given certain case notes, with the names removed, he would not try to discover who the people in the notes were and correlate the cases with them. However, I would not put that past certain members of society, and certain members of the

[Dr. John Marek]

press. Indeed, it could be said that the press has a duty to find out names, but it also has a duty to be responsible. It is important to make sure that confidentiality is preserved so that the press, and anybody else, no matter what their motives are, are unable to find out names relating to case notes, and the medical history of any individual person. Is the Minister satisfied that this cannot be done? If he is not, will he look into the matter, and, if necessary, issue guidance to health authorities as to how they should go about releasing confidential files, albeit without names on them?

The tribunal also heard about Mrs Savage's impossibly over-extended workload, which, it was claimed, interfered with the quality of care that she could give to cases. Professor John Dennis, the expert called in by the Tower Hamlets health authority, said that a redistribution of the workload at the London hospital "might be needed". I take it that that is a professional understatement of the case, if a man of his eminence says that, something needs to be done.

I do not want to enter into a debate about whether the NHS is properly funded—I am sure that we could debate that for many hours. However, I hope that we can agree that the demands on the NHS are always there, and new ones are always being made. The service will always be pressed because of the possibilities presented by medical advance, and it is disgraceful that Miss Bousquet, against whom no charges have been made, is not being employed to anything like full capacity. There is something wrong with the way that the Health Service is being managed in east London.

Mrs. Savage has also said that women were terrified of rumours of "knife happy" doctors. This might have been played up by the press, but that is the fear, because it is known that it is easier for doctors to perform a caesarean than to go through the problems of counselling and the more detailed and individual care that is required for natural birth. It is easy to see how such rumours can spread. In that part of London it appears to me that the consultants say, "Let's have a caesarian if there is any doubt about the birth. Whether one should take that attitude or the attitude of Mrs. Savage and Miss Bousquet is a matter of serious concern and for serious debate. It is a medical matter, and not one which should have been debated in a tribunal with a person's professional livelihood at stake. I should like to see that debate taking place in other journals such as *The Lancet*, and to be debated in conferences before any generally accepted decision comes out of it.

I move on now to the end of the inquiry, and I quote from *The Guardian* of 28 February 1986:

"A maternity unit at a leading London teaching hospital takes so long to arrange emergency deliveries by caesarian section that it should be closed, the inquiry into the conduct of Mrs. Wendy Savage was told yesterday."

It continued:

"Doctors should be able to operate on urgent cases in 10 minutes but at the London Hospital's Mile End branch, where Mrs. Savage is a consultant obstetrician, there could be an hour's delay, the inquiry heard".

If one is to have a caesarian operation, one should be ready and have that operation in five, 10, 15 minutes, and not have to wait for an hour while an anaesthetist comes from down the road. If what is reported is true, the Minister cannot be happy about the operation of the National Health Service in that hospital. I hope that his Department will look at that and, if necessary, make the health authority there remedy matters.

It is clear that, if the department cannot arrange for a caesarian to be done at about 10 minutes notice, the unit should not be in business but should be closed. I do not want to see that department closed. If there is to be a unit there, it must have the proper facilities, and that means that caesarian operations ought to be available in 10 minutes if necessary.

The inquiry finished. Various professors supported Mrs. Savage. There was not very much evidence given against her, except perhaps on the one case of Mrs. A. U. Eventually it was said that Mrs. Wendy Savage's colleagues at the London hospital may have colluded to get rid of her.

This is a very difficult point. It is one to which the remarks made by my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch lend substance. I am of the opinion that there is a case here for the Minister to inquire into. The Minister ought to investigate what is going on in the Health Service in east London. Are there men consultants in the service who are conspiring together because they see Mrs. Savage and Miss Bousquet as irritants, as women, as people and as professionals who have a different view from theirs of how they should engage in and carry on their profession? I think the country would like to know the answer. I would like to know the answer. Is there such a plot, such a caucusing in the tea or coffee room by these men gynaecologists, because they want a nice, quiet, easy life when they do not have to think too hard about how babies should be delivered, and in what different ways they should be delivered? This may exist also in other parts of the country, but has not yet come to the surface. It is important because there is an issue of medical principle as to how we ought to run our hospitals and how much choice women should be given in having their babies delivered.

I hope that the Minister will look at these questions.

I do not intend to add anything to what my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch said about Miss Bousquet, apart from the fact that the British Medical Association rightly support her case and that general practitioners in the area very much support her case. It is a tragedy that her talents are not being used to the full. I hope that the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security will look into this case and not wait until the tribunal has completed its inquiry and issued its judgment. The judgment will be issued in two parts. It will deliver judgment on individual cases of malpractice or negligence that have been brought before it. It will find either that there has been negligence or that there have been faults or that there has not been negligence or fault. The tribunal will also deal, I hope, with the general principle of how women should be treated in hospital. That is my main concern.

The Under-Secretary of State ought to consider that matter and find out what has been the role of the consultants and the health authority, and why it embarked upon this very expensive tribunal. I hope that he will publish the results of his inquiries to reassure the public that the National Health Service is acting upon principles that can be defended in public.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State ought to issue guidance about the whole problem to all health authorities, but that is a different question. We shall have

to await the outcome of the inquiries that I hope he will undertake. If something has gone wrong in east London he needs to issue guidance. I hope that he will do so and look forward to what he has to say.

5.53 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security (Mr. Ray Whitney): There will be some relief among my Treasury colleagues and in the City that the hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore) has turned his distinctive attention, at least for the moment, from their areas of concern to those of the Department of Health and Social Security, although I am not so sure that the DHSS will share their relief. It is sad, however, that the hon. Member has brought to the consideration of this question the same technique of using the privileges of this House to make personal attacks on individuals—this time individuals in the National Health Service.

I do not intend to comment on the individual case of Pauline Bousquet. An inquiry is in progress, which goes back quite a long time. I do not intend to comment on the Wendy Savage case, either. The House knows that no decision has yet been announced, and it would therefore be improper for me to comment on that case.

I was surprised that the hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek), who spoke from the Opposition Front Bench, felt able to comment in quite so much detail and in such a manner about that case, given the stage that that inquiry has reached. I was not quite so surprised that the hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch felt that he was able to comment upon it.

Dr. Marek: I have not commented upon any private information that I may have. My comments were confined to what has appeared in the press. This inquiry is not sub judice. It is a tribunal of inquiry. I am sure that the tribunal is capable of dispassionately considering the case without being influenced by what either I or the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State will say in this debate.

Mr. Whitney: I am sure that there is no risk of the tribunal being influenced by what I shall say. I consider that it would be improper to make comments of any nature. But when the hon. Member for Wrexham reads what he has said in *Hansard* I think he will be surprised by how far he went in his comments.

The hon. Member for Wrexham raised the general question of this type of inquiry. It arises from procedures under what is known as HM(61)112. Action is required in serious cases which could result in dismissal. This may therefore involve setting up an independent fact finding panel of inquiry, chaired by a lawyer. The task of such a panel is to establish the facts concerned and to report to the employing authority. The panel may also, if asked to do so by the authority, make recommendations about disciplinary action to be taken against the particular doctor. That procedure has been in place for some time and hitherto has operated, as I understand it, to general satisfaction as a procedure.

The inquiry about Mrs. Savage was held in public, which is an unprecedented step for such an inquiry, and, not surprisingly perhaps, it attracted a great deal of media interest. Therefore, some issues have arisen, including the confidentiality of documents, to which the hon. Member for Wrexham referred. In the aftermath of that inquiry we shall have to take account of the implications for the future, should such eventualities arise again.

Rather than dwell further on the two cases that were raised I should like to pick up one or two general points which arose in the contributions from the hon. Gentlemen. As for natural child birth, we believe and expect that all obstetricians should take account of the preferences of women whose delivery is under their care, as far as their professional judgment allows them to go. That is a policy which we support. As the hon. Member for Wrexham said, it is a serious matter and a medical matter. I do not believe that the sex of the doctor should be important. It would be wrong to assume that only female doctors are capable of showing the sensitivity that is required.

Dr. Marek: What the Minister has just said is interesting. Would he care to comment upon whether women doctors should be available for those women who wish to be looked after only by women doctors?

Mr. Whitney: Yes, I am happy to come to that. Wherever possible we hope that that will be the case. Naturally the question of availability arises. I shall detain the House briefly so that I may set out the position as it is developing. I hope that the hon. Gentlemen will recognise that it is developing in the direction which they want because there is an increasing number of women in the medical profession and in particular in the disciplines of obstetrics and gynaecology.

We recognise the preference of many women patients, especially those from particular cultures or traditions, to be treated by women doctors. It is Government policy—and we have made this clear both to health authorities and to general practitioners — that, wherever possible, arrangements should be made for patients to be seen by a female doctor when this is requested. For example, the chief medical officer wrote only last January to general practitioners and to health authorities pointing out that many women, particularly Asian women, have deep moral or religious objections to internal examination by a male doctor. The chief medical officer asked general practitioners to respect these sensitivities and, wherever possible, to refer such women to a female consultant and to stress that the patient should be seen by the consultant herself. That answers a point made by the hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch.

If health authorities and family practitioner committees are to be able to offer this choice, there must be a sufficient number of women doctors in all specialties. This is where the Department has particular responsibilities. It has been policy for many years that entry to medical school should be on the basis of ability alone, irrespective of sex. As a result, the proportion of women in the medical school intake has increased from 24 per cent. to 46 per cent. last autumn. Of course, it will take some years for that to feed through to the National Health Service. In 1985 the proportion of women among medical graduates was 41 per cent. The proportion in the most junior hospital grades was 34 per cent. The proportion in the career grades, in hospital and in general practice, was only 17 per cent. But in all grades the trend is, clearly, towards an increase both in the proportion and absolute number of women doctors.

In obstetrics and gynaecology, the focus of this debate, the trends are particularly encouraging. At present, only 12 per cent. of consultants in the specialty are women. But

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looking at doctors in training — consultants in the pipeline, as it were—I note that 20 per cent. of senior registrars and over 40 per cent. of registrars, excluding those overseas graduates who are unlikely to make their careers in this country, are women.

Looking even further ahead, obstetrics and gynaecology appears to be one of the most popular specialties among women medical graduates. Recent research commissioned by the Department shows that nearly half of those graduates expressing a firm preference for the specialty were women.

Moreover, we should remember that not all obstetric and gynaecological care is provided by the hospital service. General practitioners and community health doctors deal with many minor gynaecological problems and provide family planning services. GPs also take part in shared care schemes and some take complete care of women throughout their pregnancy and delivery.

I am happy to report that the number of women entering general practice is also on the increase; the proportion rose from 13 per cent. of the total in 1975 to 19 per cent. in 1985. Women also provide over 60 per cent. of the staff in the community health services. All in all, women doctors already provide a very substantial proportion of obstetric and gynaecological care in this country, and will provide even more in the future. The situation is not nearly as bad as the hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch suggested in his characteristically alarmist speech.

Mr. Sedgemore: The Minister has give no reassurance about the treatment of women in Hackney in terms of obstetrics and gynaecology. He must have known, because of the number of occasions on which I have raised the matter, that it concerned Hackney. He has tried to hide behind the fact that, according to him, an inquiry is taking place. There is not an inquiry going on into obstetrics in Hackney. The inquiry is simply about the number of gynaecological sessions Miss Bousquet does. Why will he not answer the debate?

Mr. Whitney: I have made a clear statement. I will not answer individual cases, for the reasons I gave. The situation in the Health Service as a whole is healthy, as I have demonstrated. The hon. Gentleman knows well that if he has any further comments or complaints about an element of a particular health authority, he is always at liberty to approach that authority.

The red herrings that the hon. Gentleman has sought to raise tonight are unjustified. The situation of women patients and doctors, in the important disciplines of obstetrics and gynaecology, are secure and guaranteed. There is no cause for the degree of concern that the hon. Gentleman has sought to create.

British Leyland

6.3 am

Mr. Roger King (Birmingham, Northfield): Many of the headlines in recent weeks have been about the problems facing the British Leyland operation in Britain and the allied factories and businesses which predominate throughout the country. My purpose tonight is to raise points that are worthy of close consideration because they affect the future prospects of that group of companies.

I wish, first, to examine the BL board, the body which has been charged with overseeing the development of a British-owned motor industry which fell on hard times because of many and varied problems in the late 1950s, through the 1960s and into the 1970s. Those problems stemmed from poor management control, hasty reorganisation, poor industrial relations and a failure to invest in the right product line. Above all, although its products were technically reasonable, they left a lot to be desired in terms of quality. The constant problem of underinvestment left us prey to the world car industry, especially the Japanese, and the western European industry developed its industry during the same time with the aid of investment and new factories after the war.

The BL board has tended to remain somewhat distant from the day-to-day operations of its subsidiaries. It has allowed sector managers to get on with what they know best—running a business. We understand that there is to be a change in organisation. It was recently announced that Mr. Graham Day of British Shipbuilders will take over what may be left of BL in the middle of this year. Those of us who have been privileged to meet some of the BL executives, especially Mr. Ray Horrocks, question the wisdom of changing the leadership of the board at such a difficult time. Mr. Horrocks has been primarily responsible for the development of the car side of the business. Under his directorship, Jaguar has been successfully privatised and Austin Rover has been developed from chronic financial difficulty, poor product range and awful industrial relations to acceptable financial efficiency, exemplary productivity and a very good product range.

In 1980 the car side turned in a £250 million loss. In the first six months of 1985 a small profit of some £600,000 was registered. It is too early to get information for the whole year, but it seems that the company has done a great deal better than hitherto. The present problem is a growing lack of confidence in development of the business. Rumours about a tie-up with Ford or any other company has had a dramatic effect on the company's status in the market. The car business relies on customer confidence throughout the world. Although Austin Rover has only 4 per cent. of the European market, it is able to break even, whereas Renault, with two and a half times Austin Rover's market share, turns in a loss of about £1 billion a year.

The market has been improved step by step by improving customer confidence in the company's ability to supply the right vehicles of the right quality when they are wanted. That market has been created step by step as a result of improving customer confidence in the business by supplying the right sort of vehicles, at the right quality when they are wanted by the customer. The relationship between manufacturer and customer has been built up

painstakingly over the years, gaining the sort of confidence necessary to develop the market for that range of car products.

It does not take much to reduce that confidence, with a noticeable effect on the market. Commentators would not dispute the fact that since the beginning of talks about a possible Austin Rover group sell-off to Ford, or to any other company, its market share in this country dropped by about 2 per cent. in the first two months of this year. The winter months are critical for the business, and sales are hard to get. The compounded problem of lack of confidence in the business has a knock-on effect. The problems do not stem simply from reaction in the home or indeed the European market. There have been problems further overseas.

Mr. John Smith (Monklands, East): Why does the hon. Gentleman not come straight out with it and say that the major problem facing the Austin Rover group is the Government's policy to encourage discussions with Ford? Why does he not have the courage to criticise the Government for what they are doing to Austin Rover?

Mr. King: I do not know whether I am grateful for that intervention. I suggest that the hon. Gentleman waits for a few moments, and I shall have some constructive comments to make on that issue.

The problems of Austin Rover in moving into profitability stem from its lack of across-the-range models. It is strong in the small and medium-car sector, but not in the big executive cars, which in car parlance mean big profits.

The forthcoming development with Honda of Japan of the Rover 800 series should go a long way to improve the market position and profitability of the business, nowhere more so than in the United States. There are great hopes for a high level of product acceptability. Customer acceptance at car clinics has been almost uniquely high in relation to the product on offer. It is clear that the Americans, based primarily on their knowledge of Jaguar and their growing acceptance of that company's products, are ready to buy a British executive-type car and willing to pay a premium price for it.

The structure set up there by the president of Austin Rover America, Mr. Raymond Ketchledge, is such that sales of many cars should be obtained shortly. I understand that the cars that will be available for the United States will be only 50 per cent. of what the American president of the company said he could sell and would want. The primary concern of manufacturers is to ensure that all the cars that go to the United States, although not the number required, are fit for sale in that market, and of the high quality which that market rightly demands. I am certain that the factories can produce them.

All this solid, good work will improve the fortunes of the company. There is no doubt that American dealers are increasingly concerned, after rejecting Ford or General Motors dealerships, or any sort of dealership, because they do not want that particular product, that they might be dealing with a company partly owned by Ford or some other multinational, which they would find highly unacceptable. Some of the new dealers in America are hesitant to sign on the dotted line and draw up an agreement with Austin Rover until they are satisfied beyond all shadow of doubt that they are dealing with Austin Rover and not a derivative of a multinational.

Unfortunately, the rumours continue. Although we understand that no talks are envisaged with Ford, this week's *Autocar* has a headline in its business section, "Ford ready to reopen Austin Rover negotiations." Bob Lutz, the chairman of Ford Europe, said that his company was still interested in owning the company and was keen to continue negotiations. Mr. Lutz is clever, because he has decided that all he must do is to say that he is interested in purchasing part or all of Austin Rover and he can suddenly knock 2 per cent. off its home market share. He can shake customer confidence in Europe and the rest of the world as a result. It is hardly coincidental that Ford seems to be doing a little better in the market after its recent outbursts about being interested in getting its hands on Austin Rover.

We must have a clear understanding of the ownership of the business and whether it will be sold to or merged with another company. For the sake of the market place, sales and jobs, such rumours must not be allowed to continue. In the midlands we look with growing horror at the hesitancy and lack of confidence of the company. We hope that, at least in the medium term, the company will be allowed to develop as it is now, seeking to collaborate with overseas manufacturers, as it is doing with Honda, Volkswagen and Peugeot, to continue producing products which are increasingly accepted, not just in the United Kingdom, but in Europe and the rest of the world.

Production at the Austin Rover plants is increasing. In 1985 about 476,000 cars and car-van derivatives were produced. Although most commentators would say that that is below the level at which the company would generate enough income finance investment, it is getting close to that level. This year, two major events should help the company to achieve production of about 550,000 units. I have already mentioned the introduction of the Rover 800 series. The other event is the joint venture with Honda to produce the Honda Ballade car on the same assembly lines at Longbridge in my constituency as the Rover 200 series. The production figures for that model are modest, but an additional 10,000 cars a year would be extremely useful, bearing in mind the fact that one need only produce them, put Honda badges on the front and let Honda sell them in the European market. Gradually, production will exceed the all-important barrier of 500,000. I hope that it will continue to increase and improve the viability of the business.

Harold Musgrove and his team have worked extremely hard. Indeed, when the story of Austin Rover is written, it will include accounts of sacrifices by employees. I have heard that employees' marriages have gone adrift as a result of the work that people have done to turn the business round. When that account is written, it will be considered a success story. Of course the Government invested a large sum in the business, but it is equally true that they receive a great deal in return through income tax paid by the workers at Austin Rover and components suppliers and through company taxation.

A primary tenet of Conservative thinking is that one must speculate to accumulate. The time is rapidly approaching when Austin Rover will be able to accumulate the income necessary to provide for new models, and for the new investment which is essential for its continued well being. Again, this would not necessarily be done by Austin Rover on its own, because that is not the way in which a car company of the standing and size of Austin Rover would develop today. It would be done in

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conjunction with other operators and manufacturers throughout the world, buying the best of the bits from elsewhere, producing them perhaps under licence here in its own factories, collaborating with other manufacturers in the market place, sharing its manufacturing facilities, but selling its cars through individual sales outlets. This is what Austin Rover will do with its Rover 800 in Australia, where it will be produced on Honda's assembly lines, and the Honda Ballade and the Legend, Honda's version of the 800 series, will be produced on United Kingdom assembly lines for distribution throughout Europe.

This is the way forward. It is an extremely sensible way. It is one that the company should be left to pursue on its own, so that it can develop its own future, not just in the market place, but with its own work force as well, members of which look with envy on the opportunities given to their Jaguar brethren who invested in their own business and have seen their investment grow quite staggeringly over the past four years. From those to whom I have spoken, I am certain that they would relish the opportunity in two or three years' time to take part in the ownership of the business, working together as owners and part-shareholders towards its continuing prosperity.

Mr. Ray Horrocks told one of our Back-Bench organisations the other night that he considered this a distinct possibility, that the business could be viable, working in conjuction with others, for privatisation, so as to allow the employees a share of the business. Again the question must be posed: will the market continue to have confidence in the development of that business; confidence, alas, which has been badly shaken over the past few weeks? For that the company is already paying a very heavy price. Only a firm commitment by the Government that they will continue to allow the business to develop on its own, using the management that it possesses to make the right and appropriate decisions for the various markets of the world, will allow that confidence to be restored totally so that the company can recover the market share that it has unfortunately lost in the past few weeks.

The bid by General Motors for another portion of the business—the Leyland Truck, Land Rover and Freight Rover organisation—has equally dominated the media recently. Bedford, General Motors' truck subsidiary, is as British as British can be, having been here for some 45 years or so, producing trucks. The British Army rides in its trucks now, just as Montgomery rode to El Alamein, so there is no question but that that company is a British business. Unfortunately, although General Motors has invested large sums of money in this country, these days one has to invest very large sums of money indeed to maintain a market share. General Motors' investment in Europe has largely come to be concentrated in countries like Spain and Germany, where more cars are produced than are produced in this country.

Although General Motors has, therefore, invested money in this country, it has not been enough to stem the rising tide of imports from other General Motors factories. One looks still with concern at the low British content of those Vauxhall cars that are made in this country. It is a job to justify 50 per cent. United Kingdom content in those products, even if one takes into account such things as heating and light and power in the factories that are producing them. The result of this investment policy is that Bedford has been unable to invest in a new, modern range of trucks and its market share in this country—where once upon a time it was the dominant truck manufacturer—has dwindled to no more than about 11 per cent. One can compare this with Leyland Truck, which has had an enormous amount invested in it and which last month reached 16·4 per cent. of the United Kingdom market.

Leyland Truck faces problems. It would be no good ignoring the fact that the truck market is oversaturated within western Europe, with some 40 per cent. over-capacity. Some rationalisation would be sensible, and to everyone's advantage. General Motors' approaches to Leyland Truck are sensible and make a great deal of commercial sense. The management of Leyland Truck, and possibly even the work force, but certainly the dealers who handle the vehicles, would welcome a relationship so that the two combined organisations could well command about 25 per cent. of the United Kingdom market, which would turn that business, concentrating as it would, presumably, on the Leyland Truck factory in Lancashire, into one that was rather profitable, and certainly would act as a great stepping stone to re-establishing the British truck industry in European and world markets.

It has been said by many people that General Motors is interested in Land Rover and Freight Rover because if it were to purchase Leyland Truck it would find itself in some difficulty about what to do with its vacated Dunstable assembly lines, which would obviously come to pass, because rationalisation is the name of the game and production capacity would probably have to come out from there.

It is not necessary to expand Land Rover output at Dunstable or to move the Freight Rover van factory from Washwood Heath to Dunstable to make up any shortfall. General Motors could start assembling some of the 50,000 Vauxhall Novas that are brought in from Spain every year, or, indeed, improve its United Kingdom production levels of Cavalier and Senator cars which currently come from its Belgian and German factories. There is plenty of opportunity for that company to step up its investment in car production. I suggest that it turns its attentions to finding work for the vacant factory space in Dunstable, if Bedford trucks are to be made in Leyland in Lancashire. The company should look closely at expanding car output there.

In negotiations with people such as Bob Price, the head of General Motors, one is aware of an affable and knowledgeable person who I feel sure is open to firm suggestions from the Government as to how this matter can be resolved to the satisfaction of all. If the Government were to talk meaningfully with Mr. Price and his colleagues, a satisfactory outcome for the present purchase of parts of BL could be arrived at.

I do not go along with the view that General Motors has much to offer Land Rover or Freight Rover. A massive amount of investment has been made by the BL board over the past 10 years in Land Rover production at the Solihull plant. Brand new factory space was built in the late 1970s and as a result of the closure of eight or nine satellite factories and the bringing together under one area at the Lode lane factory in Solihull, Land Rover production is now completely in house on one site and ready to exploit that advantage with better productivity and lower manufacturing costs.

Perhaps it is a bit early at this stage to reach any conclusion as to how Land Rover will develop until it has had a chance to produce vehicles for two or three years on its total site complex and we can see the sort of financial progress that the business is making. Certainly there are grounds for great optimism, after a year or so of setbacks, when the company faced real problems in overseas markets, particularly in Africa, where it was battling with the strong problems of a petro currency in Britain, which affected all exporters. That is now not quite such a disadvantage because of the falling price of oil, which has once again put manufacturing back to the forefront of our exporting achievements.

The opportunities for Land Rover, and for most of our motor industry now to get to grips with the export market, are unparalleled. The concern that we express is that we should now let those companies develop, given the challenge and the opportunities that they have, before we decide whether we want to sell them to some overseas buyer from America or anywhere else, or whether we should sell them to the employees. That would be the most sensible policy to pursue. I do not doubt that the privatisation of Land Rover, along the lines of Jaguar, could be a realistic proposal within the next two years or so, given the potential of that product and its potential in America.

Many people criticised the company for not having exploited its American potential before, but the history of Land Rover is such that it hoped it could exploit the American market. During the 1970s, British Leyland's main concern was to encourage car production for export, principally to the United States market, to tackle the problems of Jaguar. In those days the Triumph sports car, the MGB sports car and so on were exported to America and all the resources were used up on those product lines to ensure those cars reached the American market and there was nothing left for the fairly small number of Range Rovers which had been earmarked for that market. Therefore, by default Land Rover was never able to exploit that market.

One of the results of Land Rover's semi-independence to operate within the British Leyland organisation is that it has been working hard to get the Range Rover accepted in the American market. It is not just a matter of offering a vehicle to that market; it has to reach and maintain the federal emission standards, the standards of construction and so on, all of which take a considerable time to achieve.

Most people would suggest that the best way to go forward is by the use of specialised dealerships which are being set up in America. The Range Rover is a particularly expensive and exclusive vehicle, with a specialist attraction. Whether it will ever find a sensible position in the market and be sold alongside Cadillacs or Chevrolets is open to a wide degree of discussion. However, taking the advice of Porsche, which was not slow to exploit the American market, the correct way to exploit the market is to seek out specialist dealers—a handful in American terms, some 40 to 60 dealers—to major on the product concerned in a big way. That is what Jaguar is doing at the moment. Having the right investment, the right marketing factor and the right sales expertise is the way to exploit the American market. It should not be done by saturation coverage, which a tie-up with a multinational may or may not provide. Range Rovers are an exclusive British product and need to be marketed in that way. That is the way that Porsche, Mercedes, BMW, Jaguar and Rolls-Royce are seeking to exploit the American market. I think that that is the way that Land Rover ought to develop, given the opportunity so to do.

I shall deal with the problems of Freight Rover. We hear a great deal about the problems of inner city factories and the problems of holding and maintaining work within the inner city area. The Government have invested considerable sums of money, and continue to invest such money, to find work within the inner city areas not only for our young people, but for all sections of the community. An inner city factory is like a gem. It needs to be looked after and kept. It is a priceless asset. Freight Rover is such a factory in Birmingham, at Washwood Heath. It provides about 1,800 jobs for the community. Not all the workers emanate from the inner city area, but a considerable number of them do.

Freight Rover shares a factory with Austin Rover and produces the Sherpa range of light vans. It has achieved a significant place in the market, with growth of about 2·4 per cent. in a very competitive market over the past 12 months. It is a financially profitable organisation and its work force has maintained a level of productivity and dispute-free performance second to none. The workers have made particular sacrifices, as they recognise that Freight Rover is the only job they have and probably the only job they will keep, if at all possible, because of the dearth of opportunities elsewhere within the area. Therefore, we attach great importance to the maintenance of Freight Rover within the area. It is not just the provision o jobs, but the product itself. The years of development stand the test in the market place. It is a product which is wanted and which is finding growing acceptance, not just in the United Kingdom, but in the European markets.

It is not a push button, robotic factory. The vans produced are bespoke vans—built to the specifications of customers, such as the Post Office, British Telecom, the civil defence organisations and the Army. Those organisations buy a van with umpteen additions, with special brackets, special hinges, and all the rest.

I worked in the van factory with Morris Commercial before it moved to Freight Rover. A standard van used to be taken from the assembly line to a special building. Holes were drilled in the van to take special brackets and fitments and extra doors. The vehicle was then sold. The trouble is that every time a hole is drilled in a vehicle once it has left the assembly line, a rust point is made. That cannot be stopped.

The advantage of fitting the bits and pieces on the assembly line and rustproofing the whole van—Freight Rover pioneered a brand new rustproofing process, which has been copied by many other commercial vehicle producers—is that the vehicle will maintain a six or seven-year rustproof period. That is extremely desirable and acceptable to the customer and gives the company a niche in the market place which other more robotic-oriented manufacturers of vans cannot provide. Robots cannot be taught to fit a little bracket here or there—it must be done more or less by hand. That is not to say that the company is lacking in technology. It has what it describes as "islands of technology", where robots are used for the basic welding of sub-components, body sides, and so on. The labour content is somewhat higher than in comparable factories because of the product that the company seeks to provide.

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There is no doubt that if General Motors were to become involved in the business it would look carefully at Freight Rover. It has told me that it very much likes the prospect of having the opportunity of selling the 3½ tonne Sherpa van, which is only two and a half years old and would fill a gap in the market for its Bedford range. However, one cannot forsee the possibility of GM making those vehicles at Washwood Heath. It makes no sense to GM to share a corner of one of Austin Rover's factories, producing vehicles in conditions which are notideal. The factory space is cramped. One will not find any plush carpets, potted palms and twinkling fountains at Freight Rover. One will find a fairly compact factory in which every square metre of space is used. That is how it should be in a successful factory. The empty space of tiled floors is not a recipe for success. One looks to see how well organised and compact a factory is. Freight Rover is certainly that.

General Motors' ownership of Freight Rover must have grave consequences. General Motors has not been able to spell out its exact future for the business, saying only that the workers there may be deployed to Land Rover production at some stage. GM has not been able to assure us categorically that jobs at Freight Rover will be maintained.

What is the possibility of a management buy-out of Land Rover and Freight Rover? We have been assured that the merchant bank Schroder Venture, has come forward with the capital. It is confident that the business, according to market and sales consultants, can and will be a viable alternative. We have been assured that it can proceed on its own, funding its own resources with the possible introduction, within two years, of extra capital through partial employee participation and in the sale of shares to raise £50 million.

The bank is confident that the business can find the funding necessary to produce new models. There is a question mark over this because Freight Rover has new models which have been developed in the past three or four years. Even GM concedes that there is no immediate intention of providing new models. Of course all companies have to develop their existing product range and refine it ever further, and Land Rover is no exception. It is certain from the statements by Schroder Venture and the management buy-out team that they can find the resources to develop the new models. Freight Rover needs £80 million to develop a new van range for its introduction in 1990-91. That might be a large sum, but we must remember that it will be spread over a five-year period. That sum of £80 million will last in product terms for more than 20 years. Unlike the car business, where the vehicles must be updated every four or five years, a van will stay in production for something like a quarter of a century. Indeed, the existing Sherpa van is a derivative of a product that first saw the light of day in 1958 and, far from being unacceptable in the market place last year, the Sherpa had a higher market share than it has enjoyed in recent times.

The van market, therefore, does not change in quite the same way as the car market. The expenditure of £80 million for a product which will have a life of some 20-25 years is, I would submit, a sensible business arrangement and a sound investment.

One must express concern, if one carefully examines the consequences of a GM buy-out, for the future opportunities for Austin Rover dealers who depend on a freight van and Land Rover products to supplement their car sales. The loss of a van range and the badging of it as a General Motors-Bedford van, as it might possibly be called, is one which would be difficult for the dealers to accept. That would reduce their profitability and open up the market again to a Japanese derivative, which would come in to take up the gap in the market place left by the Sherpa van. We are not in the business of encouraging any further Japanese imports into this country when we have our own, acceptable United Kingdom-produced products.

The future for the business as it stands is extremely good. The prospects are better now than they have been. General Motors' involvement in Leyland Truck can only be commercially sound and is welcomed generally by all those involved in the business. I would submit that GM probably needs Leyland Truck as much as Leyland Truck needs the additional market and financial investment of GM. However, when one considers Freight Rover and Land Rover, it is hard to see on balance what benefits GM can bring to those organisations. It is true that they have the investment muscle but, alas, their history in this country is such that that investment muscle has not been used in the way that it ought to have been to create the jobs and products within this country.

Although GM has invested quite a substantial sum, an awful lot has not been done by that concern. That leads one to have grave doubts about its commitment to Land Rover and Freight Rover in the future. The management buy-out scheme is ready and able to take on the challenge and I believe that it should be backed. A work force in the west midlands of some 10,000 people is employed at Land Rover and Freight Rover. It has worked incredibly hard over the past three or four years to turn these businesses round. There is not one family in Birmingham that has not been touched by unemployment, rationalisation and change. Land Rover is the only major product range that the city has to manufacture and sell and we are rightly proud of it. When we look at our colleagues at Jaguar and see the results of their work, we consider that the work that we have put in as a city, an area and as a region in turning these businesses round means that we deserve the right to participate in their future as they develop.

This Government, above all others, have concentrated on the opportunities of creating a property-owning democracy by selling council houses and, good gracious, we have sold a lot in Birmingham, Solihull and elsewhere. We should extend that property owning democracy into a business-owning democracy. The thousands of workers at Land Rover and Freight Rover — and eventually at Austin Rover — should be given the opportunity of taking their place in the sun alongside their colleagues at Jaguar and so belonging to, and owning a part of, the company, working for its viability and its future. That is an opportunity that we should not pass by.

6.43 am

Mr. John Smith (Monklands, East): If the constituents of the hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. King) were to read his speech, they would be interested to see that he spent a great deal of time rehearsing some well-known facts about the motor vehicle industry but displayed very little genuine commitment and anger which faces his constituents and, in particular, those whose future is tied up in the motor vehicle industry.

The hon. Member began his speech by talking about the Austin Rover group and he said that there was a problem facing that group. He quoted Mr. Ray Horrocks about the rumours which were circulating about the group's future.

I have heard a few euphemisms in my time, but I have never heard such a gigantic one as that which describes the Government's proposals to have talks with Ford about the Austin Rover group as a rumour. It is nothing of the sort. The Government came to the House in response to a demand from the Labour Opposition, and when asked about the position, they told us that talks were going on. As a result of a campaign and debate initiated by the Labour party the Government decided in Cabinet to turn right round and abandon discussions with Ford to sell Austin Rover group.

If that is a rumour, it is rather a public rumour. The hon. Friend cannot bring himself to say that the Government were prepared to sell Austin Rover group to Ford. Was there a hint of indignation, a sentence of criticism or a word of fear about the effect of that on the hon. Gentleman's constituents in his speech? No. It was all disguised as a rumour. I am sure his constituents will understand that when it comes to a contest of loyalties between their interests and his commitment to the Government, the Government seem to win.

If there is a 2 per cent. drop in sales because of the uncertainty over the Austin Rover group, it is the Government's responsibility, because that uncertainty arises from their activities. The Minister, when replying to the debate which the Opposition initiated, said that the Government could not say, "Go away Ford." Fortunately for the United Kingdom, a few days later the Government said, "Go away Ford." It was no thanks to the hon. Member for Northfield that that was achieved.

Hon. Members who are worried about the future of BL want the Minister to tell us what is in the Government's mind. What is the timetable for the decisions? Is it correct that a decision is to be made before Easter? I was not at all clear from the hon. Gentleman's speech whether he favoured General Motors' involvement. He suggested that we should draw comfort from the fact that Mr. Bob Price is an affable man. That is a fairly irrelevant consideration when discussing the future of a British operation. I am not concerned whether a predator is affable, but whether he should be allowed to get his way. The hon. Gentleman skirted round the subject with excessive delicacy and a considerable shortage of commitment. I was left wondering what his position was. The best I could make of it was that he thought it was a good idea for General Motors to take over Leyland vehicles, but nothing else. Tht seems to be an unrealistic assessment of the position.

Perhaps the Minister can enlighten us. What is the state of play with the talks? When are they likely to be completed? We are constantly told that uncertainty is bad for industry, and I am sure that that is right. But no one has done more to cause uncertainty during the past few weeks than the Government. I should like it, if, for once, a member of the Government told us why the operation was embarked upon. Why have the Government put a "For sale" notice over BL's assets in the United Kingdom? Why are they offering for sale these vital parts of British manufacturing industry?

We know what their attitude to Austin Rover group was. The Government were willing to sell it but were stopped by the force of public opinion. Mr. Ray Horrocks had every reason to believe that he would become chairman of British Leyland, but he paid the penalty for crossing the Government and fighting the Ford proposals for he was denied the opportunity of becoming chairman.

I fiotice that the hon. Member for Northfield, although he referred occasionally in approving terms to Mr. Horrocks, did not have a word of criticism for the Government for denying Mr. Horrocks the chairmanship for which he thought he was destined. I am sure Mr. Horrocks will have occasion to reflect on fair weather friends.

The Government have to explain, much more clearly than they have done, why this exercise was carried out. The Government must have got the message that there is a wave of indignation at selling off an important part of our manufacturing sector. The Government do not look upon it as an investment. The hon. Member for Northfield considers Austin Rover a major future investment of the country. The Prime Minister is guilty of coming to the House and speaking about money invested in the British motor industry and British Leyland as if it were money that had somehow been flung away. It is money which is crucial to the future of the country. The country should stay with this investment until we get the benefits and profits that are flowing from it.

The hon. Member for Northfield initiated this debate to give the impression, especially among his constituents, that he was genuinely concerned about their interests. He has failed to carry that conviction, because he is not willing to put the interests of the Government behind those of his constituents. I have heard fewer examples, during my time in the House, of skirting around the problem than that exhibited by the hon. Member for Northfield. I hope that when the Ministery replies he is able to give us more illumination of the Government's intentions than we have had up to now.

6.52 am

The Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry (Mr. Peter Morrison): I shall attempt to reply to the questions put by the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith). I do not intend to contest many points. However, I think he was somewhat unfair to my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. King) when he said that he failed to carry conviction.

During the past six weeks I have been more than aware that my hon. Friend has continued to put his point of view forcibly and fairly. He has brought many delegations to see me and he has talked to me about the matter. He has written on behalf of his constituents and forwarded their letters to me. I do not think that my hon. Friend could have put his case more cogently and with greater feeling with regard to Freight Rover.

My hon. Friend began his speech by discussing the Austin Rover group. My hon. Friend and the House will be aware that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry announced last month that the preliminary discussions—they were only preliminary—with Ford had been terminated. They were terminated for the simple reason that they were at the preliminary stage and as the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East pointed out that was causing uncertainty and a lack of confidence in the market place. Therefore the Government, rightly, came to the conclusion that it was best to terminate the discussions.

[Mr. Peter Morrison]

I certainly agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Northfield that the management, Mr. Horrocks, Mr. Musgrove and many others, and indeed the work force of the Austin Rover group, have done a tremendous amount to bring the company to its present standing. Collaboration with Honda and others has helped the company attain that position.

I know that my hon. Friend feels strongly about Freight Rover. He pointed out that about 1,800 jobs are involved, and that it has been successful. However, he accepted that a new range would be needed and that must be taken into account. He paid tribute to the management and the work force, as I do. He would like to build on the strong foundations, and when the Government come to make up their mind as to which way the decision will go, with the recommendation of the board, the foundations will have to be built on. I hope that we can all agree that we are talking about the future viability and competitiveness of the company. We want to see a company that can compete with, and take on, the best of the international companies in the market place. If we succeed, we shall have secured the best outlook for the work force.

The worst thing that we could do is to do nothing, because that would let the market flow by. Therefore, we must build on the foundations, and in that we have a common objective, even if we do not have a common way of reaching that objective. My hon. Friend said that the General Motors' approach to Leyland Truck was the sensible course, and he pointed to the problems that truck companies in Europe are facing. He also said that he thought that Land Rover and Range Rover had enormous potential, and I agree. If the potential is realised, there will be more jobs not only for Land Rover and Range Rover but for the supplying companies.

I should stress that, much though I would like to give an informed reply to the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East, neither the board nor the Government have made any decisions. It is difficult to give the right hon. and learned Member a timetable, because he would rightly castigate and criticise me and the Government if we were not to look closely at all available options. I agree with him and my hon. Friend that uncertainty does no good for the business, both commercially and industrially. We wish to come to a firm conclusion as soon as we can. I regret that I cannot say precisely when, but I am sure that the right hon. and learned Member will understand why.

We also have to take into account, and the right hon. and learned Member and my hon Friend referred to this, not only the supplier companies but the dealers. That is an intermingled affair, on behalf of which I have received several letters. I agree that there is a genuine need to end uncertainty. I hope that my hon. Friend, and all those involved in the Austin Rover group, will understand that a fair decision was announced in the House in February, and there is a distinction between that and Leyland Vehicles. I hope that those who are involved in the group will understand that that is the case.

European Industrial Policy

6.59 am

Sir Anthony Meyer (Clwyd, North-West): The subject I want to raise is the need for greater industrial co-operation in Europe. By Europe, I do not specifically and solely mean the European community, and when I talk of industrial co-operation I am not solely referring to ordinary industry; I wish to include the defence industries.

It is a subject to which I propose to return on future occasions because I believe that, if we can inaugurate more far-reaching and more constructive co-operation between the European countries in this field, we can go some way towards tackling the unemployment problem, which must be a matter of concern to every one of us.

Across the European Community, unemployment in the 12 member states is more than 14 million. While much of this unemployment may appear to be structural and as a result of technological change, and some of it may appear to be the result of temporary economic conditions, the fact is that, during the period that this is happening in the European Community, in the United States there has been a startling success in the creation of fresh employment so that unemployment levels in the United States remain at an acceptable level; and in what are undoubtedly our most dangerous competitors, that is to say, the industrialised countries of the Pacific basin, unemployment is at a very low level.

The inference is clear, that Europe is not taking advantage of the assets it possesses in order to strengthen its industrial base and to reduce its unemployment. It is, of course, generally known that the European Community is a long way from being even the common market, which is the most basic of its aims, further still from being any kind of an economic unit which would enable the member states composing it to take full advantage of it as a means of securing employment.

One of the points I will be urging on the Government is that they should live up to their own professions in this matter and that they really should give overriding priority to the completion of the internal market by sweeping away the barriers to trade, and particularly to trade in invisibles, which still exist.

Generally when Members of Parliament say that they conjure up a vision of obstructive Italian frontier officials, French customs arrangements at Poitiers for the import of Japanese goods and German obstructionism in the market of insurance. But there is a very large beam in our own eyes in the habits and mentalities of HM Customs and Excise which regards itself in many respects as being almost above the law. Anyone who has attempted to import anything through any of our ports will not, I think, rush to the conclusion that our customs is much more attractive in these matters than those of other countries.

I do not think that Customs is coming under a great deal of pressure from the Government to be any more easy going in these matters. Of course, we bring forward the arguments about the needs to control drugs and to control rabies, and both are perfectly valid arguments. None the less, it is difficult to avoid the suspicion that these are being used in many cases as a pretext for slowing up the inflow of goods. What is sauce for the goose has to be sauce for the gander, and if we want our goods to flow freely into Europe we must allow European goods to flow

equally freely into us. The Channel Tunnel will be a step in the right direction, provided that other obstacles are not put in the way of the operation of this tunnel.

However, that is not my main point. Sweeping away obstacles to internal trade will undoubtedly assist in the development of a single market. A single market of 273 million customers must be a very powerful home base for any industry. But there is rather more to what I want to say than that. We have witnessed over a very long time span — in Britain's case probably since about 1870 — the gradual and seemingly inexorable loss of industrial supremacy.

In the 19th century the United Kingdom was the workshop of the world. Anybody abroad would buy almost anything that was made in Britain, precisely because it was made in Britain. That position has been eroded over the years. Two world wars have wrought their toll. We have gradually seen what were once undisputed British industrial supremacies disappear down the plug hole. Wht happened to the great British motor cycle industry which at one stage was almost the sole motor cycle industry in the world? Little by little we have seen such industries disappear.

We are at a particularly dramatic moment in this process of disappearance, with the future of British Leyland very much on our minds. I do not intend to say very much about British Leyland, because there has been a debate on that subject. However, when it became apparent that British Leyland would have great difficulty in surviving as a mass car producer because it is very much smaller that any of its competitors two possibilities opened up for it. One was that it should be taken over by General Motors. The other possibility — the one that is being very much trumpeted by my hon. Friends with constituencies in the Midlands and by the Opposition — was that there should be a purely British rescue operation. Neither of these possibilities meets the bill. I accept that the American takeover makes some kind of economic sense, but an American takeover would represent a very large step towards the abandonment of a true, native-based industry. The British solution would lead us back, I fear, to the time when British Leyland was a permament pensioner of the British state.

It is probably too late now for the third and, to my mind, the right alternative. Before we ever got to where we are, there ought to have been in existence the possibility of a partnership between British Leyland and one of the European manufacturers. It need not necessarily have been one of the EEC manufacturers. It could have been Volvo. That would have complemented BL's capacities in such a way as to produce a viable firm that would have been multi-centred and whose ownership would have been basically European. If British Leyland had joined up with one of the German or Italian manufacturers, it might have contained a very large American element. I am not arguing in favour of a policy that would try to shut out the Americans. However, I am arguing that we should seek to have a policy that includes, wherever appropriate, a very substantial European element.

The same set of arguments apply to Westland. My right hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) made a valiant and ultimately unsuccessful effort to mount a European rescue effort for Westland. Once again it was too late, not due to any culpability of Her Majesty's Government but largely because such "rescue" as loomed up over the horizon from Europe looked more like an attempt by the European manufacturers to snuff out Westland as a possible competitor. The faults are not on our side alone. But when we add them all together we get a failure both by Her Majesty's Government and by the Governments of the European countries to make any use of the Community as an institution to exert its influence as a powerful trading bloc to sustain its own industry.

The argument will present itself in another particularly acute form over the future of the European airbus family of aircraft. I am sorry that my hon. Friend the Member for the City of Chester (Mr. P. Morrison) is not answering the debate, because he has a particular interest in the project. The airbus has been a tremendous success technically. Of course, it is far too soon to prophesy whether the Government, or those who put their money into the project, will make a profit.

We have the siren voice of that once sensible publication, *The Economist*, urging strongly that the British aircraft industry should surrender without a fight to the Americans and that we should allow all major civil aircraft to be built in the United States, leaving it to Boeing and McDonnell-Douglas to fight it out between them. That is a craven act of folly when the possibility exists of maintaining a capacity in Europe to produce not just an aircraft but a whole family of aircraft capable of meeting the demands of the world market at almost every level. I earnestly pray that the Government will listen not to *The Economist* but to those Ministers, of whom I am sure my hon. Friend is one, who will urge the vital importance of maintaining a capacity for the construction of civil aircraft in Europe. Here at least is one industry in which we for the moment are not faced with knock-out competition from the Pacific basin and where we should be unwise in the extreme to surrender all our advantage.

That leads me to public procurement, which involves not only Governments but also governmental agencies. One sometimes has the impression that European airlines in all too many cases deliberately operate a "buy American" policy. If the airlines operated a European preference when they make purchases of civil aircraft, that might in itself suffice to sustain a European civil aircraft manufacturing capacity.

The record on public procurement is frighteningly dismal. In 1982, the last year for which figures are available, in all its public purchasing the United Kingdom spent no less than 98·3 per cent. of Government cash on equipment made within our own borders. That left 1·7 per cent. with which to encourage joint ventures overseas. Though a dismal record, it is better than the Germans, who left not 1·7 but 0·3 per cent. for joint ventures; or the French, who left the enormous total of 0·09 per cent., or the Italians, who left nil per cent. of public expenditure to be spent outside their own borders.

This reflects the enormous public political pressure in favour of a buy native policy, and one need sit in this House for only a few hours to hear it, and understandable it is. Obviously, every hon. Member will urge as strongly as possible the arguments in favour of spending public money in his constituency. I remember fighting hard for the retention, for example, of steel-making at Shotton. From a constituency point of view, that was an unanswerable case. Nevertheless, there was a national case which required that steel-making capacity should be

[Sir Anthony Meyer]

concentrated in those areas where there was a natural case for having steel-making, and Shotton was not one of them. I was, rightly, overruled in that instance.

Whey we talk about the car, helicopter or machine tool industries, two sets of arguments operate at a political level. There is a powerful economic argument which says, "Let us go for the most immediately profitable solution which will bring the best return to the shareholders and give the workers in the industry the best guarantee of maintaining their jobs." That argument often operates in favour of an American, Japanese or even an Arab takeover.

The other argument, deployed by Back Benchers on both sides of the House, says, "The best way to do it is to use public money to maintain a buy British policy, a subsidy, a purely British solution." There will always be those who will argue for a national solution for whatever industry comes into the public domain of discussion.

What never operates is pressure to say, "Let us look for a solution which takes advantage of our membership of the European Community" or, at a lower level, "which takes advantage of our proximity to Europe — be it Switzerland or Sweden — which will enable us to construct an alternative future for this industry or firm and which may, in the short run, not offer the same advantages to the shareholders."

It may not even offer the same security of employment to its workers, but it may offer long-term possibilities for industry and for the future of employment in Britain. That may not be available through a purely British solution entailing a permanent subsidy, or through an American solution involving a total takeover, with the risk that, when the chill winds blow, the Americans will close down their out-stations, as it were, and concentrate production at home — after all, they are subject to the same pressures—to safeguard jobs in their country.

There are no democratic pressures on the Government to exploit to the full our membership of the European Community to ensure the prosperity of British firms and safeguard British jobs. The pressures are all against such solutions. It is for the Government to see matters as a whole and to make the maximum use of our membership of the Community to achieve our objectives. There should be much faster progress of the consolidation of the internal market. A substantial step forward could be achieved by stabilising the exchange rate through the exchange rate mechanism of the European monetary system. All of these matters are major policy decisions which can be achieved only in concert with our European allies. I know how difficult that is until we have a much improved decision-making process in the EC, which means moving away from the veto, but I shall not go into that.

There should be a Minister responsible for co-ordinating procurement and industrial policies to ensure that, whenever a controversial decision comes up, full weight is given to the European alternative. Several Departments are involved in that. The Department of Trade and Industry is one and the Ministry of Defence is another. Perhaps I should have enlarged on what is happening in the arms industry. Each country, by drawing a narrow specification of its requirements, has made it virtually impossible to achieve European co-operation. The result is that, one after another, we are equipping ourselves with expensive weapons which are unsuitable for use by our allies. This is a NATO matter — the NATO group in Europe is not maximising the opportunities. The Department of Transport has a critical role to play, and the Treasury is also involved in matters such as I have mentioned.

If, in Cabinet, there was a Minister who could say, "Wait a minute. There may be a better but not so immediately attractive European alternative" we could achieve much more in the Community and in the European part of NATO to sustain jobs and preserve industries which otherwise face a pretty grim future.

7.23 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. John Butcher): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, North-West (Sir A. Meyer) for bringing this subject to the attention of the House. Many of my colleagues have observed his healthy fixation with this matter. He is motivated purely by a desire to help Europe produce a truly common market against which our industrial companies can make their marketing plans and, we hope, go on to achieve success on a world scale having taken advantage of that large and burgeoning market.

My hon. Friend has asked two key questions—does Europe face an industrial problem and, if so, what can Governments do to tackle it, acting together in the European Community? In other words, do we need a European industrial policy and, if so, what sort of policy should it be?

I entirely agree with my hon. Friend that there is a problem—a problem for Europe as a whole as well as for us in Britain. It is a problem of competitiveness: the global competitiveness of some sectors of European industry. It is manifest in the painful process of adjustment that has been necessary in our industrial structures, which is not yet complete. It is manifest equally in Europe's relative weakness compared to the United States and Japan. Success is crucial in the new technologies if we are to create the wealth and jobs that our societies need.

The symptoms are well known. The European Community's share of export markets in some fast-growing sectors has declined. Between 1973 and 1983, for example, the European Commission has estimated that the Community's share of export markets in electrical and electronic products declined by just under 2 per cent., while the United States and Japanese shares in the same sectors increased.

Import penetration in similar sectors has increased faster in the Community market than in the markets of its major competitors. In information technology and electronics, for example, it has been estimated that penetration rates between 1973 and 1982 rose from 10 per cent. to 17 per cent. in the EEC; from around 6 per cent. to around 10 per cent. in the United States; and from around 4 per cent. to around 5 per cent. in Japan. Europe has been less successful than either the United States or Japan in creating new jobs. Since 1972, an additional 19 million jobs have been created in the United States and 5 million in Japan. In Europe as a whole, with a much larger overall population, employment levels have remained virtually static.

What, then, can Governments usefully do to strengthen Europe's industrial capability? Two strategies are sometimes suggested which would clearly not help — indeed, they would make matters worse. One is a strategy

of generalised protection: Fortress Europe. The other is a strategy of generalised state subsidy and state intervention. Both would be costly to consumers and taxpayers. Both would be anti-competitive, distort the market and blunt the edge of the primary stimulus to commercial success. For these reasons, neither strategy would ultimately work.

As I see it, an effective European industrial policy must have three basic objectives. First, it must open up the internal Community market, making a reality of the single, integrated market envisaged in the treaty of Rome. It must improve the climate for enterprise in Europe, not least by tackling regulatory burdens on business. It must encourage closer market-led collaboration between European businesses, above all in advanced technology.

The first of those objectives is fundamental. The sheer size of their home markets and the economies of scale that they afford offer American and Japanese industry a major competitive advantage. The creation of a similarly integrated domestic market for European business is perhaps the most important single step we can take to strengthen Europe's industrial performance.

The goal is a genuine European market of 320 million customers, matching the 230 million customers in the domestic market of the United States and the 120 million in the domestic market of Japan. The European Community has been working towards this goal for nearly 30 years. It still eludes us. True, tariff barriers and quotas have been effectively eliminated in intra-Community trade. But the free movement of goods throughout the Community is still obstructed by "non-tariff" barriers, such as frontier formalities and differing national product standards.

Similarly, the growth of a free and competitive market for services, particularly in sectors such as financial services and transport, which provide essential service infrastructure for manufacturing, is blocked by a range of restrictions in many member states. The efficient functioning of the European market as a whole is distorted by the protective use of public purchasing and other public sector aids. There is a new determination in Europe to tackle these problems. Last June, the European Council at Milan endorsed the broad thrust of an important White Paper from the Commission that set out a detailed plan for action required to complete the internal Community market by 1992.

Mr. Speaker, it may be because of the early hour, but it is interesting to note that in the copy of my speech, the word "internal" looks disconcertingly like the word "infernal". It may be something to do with the typewriter.

The United Kingdom and the Netherlands, as the two countries occupying the Community presidency this year, have produced jointly the action programme targeting more than 100 issues for decision by the end of 1986. It will be a central aim of our presidency, in the second half of the year, to maintain maximum impetus behind that programme.

A second aim of European industrial policy should be to improve the framework within which industry operates. That is partly a matter of action at national level on a wide variety of fronts. We in Britain are increasingly aware of the need to promote more positive attitudes to industry and to wealth creation; to make our education system more responsive to industrial needs; and to cut the burden of regulation on business. They are priority concerns for many of our Community partners, too.

The third objective that I identified was to promote European business collaboration in advanced technology. In telecommunications, for example, about 15 European companies are competing for a share of the European market — as compared with the four or five giant American firms which dominate the United States market. The pattern is much the same in other growth sectors. Collaboration within an increasingly integrated European market is inevitable if a competitive European presence in those sectors is to survive.

Collaboration in reserch and development—spreading risks, spreading costs and exploiting the strength of pooled resources—is one major way forward. The Community has developed some important support schemes to encourage collaborative R and D at the so-called "pre-competitive" stage. The ESPRIT programme, for example, which is focused on information technology and complementing our Alvey programme, is starting to gather pace. We have the BRITE programme for industrial technology, and RACE for broad-band communications.

Such programmes reflect a welcome shift of emphasis in Community-funded research. They are directly relevant to industrial needs. They use Community money — public money — to stimulate spending by business. In discussions which are starting in Brussels on a new framework programme for Community R and D in the five years 1987-91 we are determined to encourage this trend towards market-oriented, cost-effective effort.

But action at Community level is not the end of the story. Industrial collaboration in Europe can often usefully extend beyond the 12 member states. The aim must be to develop specific products or services which will be competitive on world markets. Both those elements are central to the EUREKA initiative. EUREKA is giving major impetus to European collaboration in new technology. Eighteen European countries are involved. More than 20 collaborative projects are already at an advanced stage, and British firms are participating in six of them. They are actively pursuing proposals in many other areas. We are currently hosting and chairing the EUREKA discussions. It is fair to say that our thinking has made a major contribution to the shape of the initiative, following its successful launch by President Mitterrand last year.

EUREKA is not, and could not sensibly become, a new financing mechanism. Finance for EUREKA projects is a matter for the participating firms, with support where appropriate from their national Governments under national schemes. I should add in this connection that British firms participating in worthwhile EUREKA projects can qualify for assistance under our existing R and D support schemes.

EUREKA offers two important advantages to industry. First, it will wire British and other European firms into a Europe-wide network for the exchange of information on new collaborative proposals and opportunities. Secondly, and even more important, it will provide a framework in which business and Governments can identify, and put new momentum behind, concrete action in the Community and elsewhere, to open the European market for the benefit of the projects concerned. There could be action, for example, to generate new European technical standards or to liberalise public sector purchasing.

I have outlined what, as we see it, is a co-ordinated European industrial policy and what it can sensibly seek to achieve. I hope that my hon. Friend agrees that no

[Mr. John Butcher]

industrial policy vacuum in Europe is crying out to be filled. The reality, rather, is that the Community as a whole is already acting in the areas I have described to strengthen Europe's industrial base. Progress in those areas is essential for the health and competitiveness of industry in Britain and in other member states. We are throwing our full weight behind the initiatives in hand.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, North-West for bringing this matter to the attention of the House. I noted his endorsement of the need for what he called a Minister responsible for co-ordinating procurement and industrial policies generally, and his suggestion that full weight be given to the European alternative. No doubt those words, which are now on the record, will be noted in the appropriate quarter. In the interests of the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike), who, with great professionalism, has decided to launch his debate at 7.34 am, and those of my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security, the best thing that I can do now is to thank my hon. Friend once again and to wish you, Mr. Speaker, a very good morning.

Hospital and Ambulance Services

7.35 am

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley): I intend to change slightly the content of my speech because of the time of the morning; I wish to give the Minister an opportunity to reply to the debate. Although I had intended to refer in some detail to other parts, I shall restrict my comments to my own constituency and to my own area of the Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale district health authority; concentrating on the problems of hospital closures and reductions in the ambulance service caused by Health Service cuts in that area. This, of course, does not mean that I have failed to recognise that these problems affect the whole country, as all parts have been forced to cut services because of Government restrictions of the finance available for the Health Service.

In my own constituency it was recently announced that two hospitals are to close, Marsden hospital and Bank Hall hospital. It was originally envisaged that the role of both these hospitals would change because of developments taking place at Burnley general hospital. When the 10-year plan for the district health authority was introduced, I welcomed the developments that were taking place at Burnley general hospital and never for one moment imagined that the two hospitals which are due to close would keep their current format.

Having said that, however, until it can be shown that in the area that I represent and in the country as a whole we have eliminated the long lists of people waiting for medical and surgical treatment, and have provided all the necessary geriatric accommodation, I cannot support the closure of a single hospital, and I think that the step that we are taking is a retrograde one. This is especially so in an area like mine, based on the two traditional industries of coalmining, now completely gone, and textiles, both of which give rise to health problems for those working in them, particularly chest problems. Many have underestimated the effect of cotton dust in the air and of the artificially damp atmosphere that was created for the benefit of the cotton rather than that of the people working in the industry. So we have many people with chest problems, and a corresponding need for accommodation and facilities to deal with them. In addition, areas such as north-east Lancashire and Burnley, in particular, have a growing number of elderly people; we certainly need much more geriatric accommodation.

A big campaign is already being mounted by the borough council, the Labour party and the trades council, to fight to save the hospitals and to provide the Health Service facilities that we believe the people of our towns are entitled to. We shall be supporting the prospective candidates in Pendle, Sylvia Renilson, and in Rossendale, Janet Anderson, and the many people who are fighting to preserve the hospitals due for closure, and opposing the cut-backs in the hospital services in their areas. Indeed, the Pendle borough council, which has no overall political control—Labour controls the largest party but does not have overall control—is mounting a massive campaign with all-party support to save the Hartley hospital. When I am arguing for the two hospitals in Burnley—Marsden and Bank Hall—I am not arguing for them at the expense of either Pendle or Rossendale. I would not wish to see Marsden or Bank Hall saved at the cost of losing one in Pendle or Rossendale.

The Minister should look at the medical report of the district medical officer, Dr. Grime, which shows clearly that there is a great demand for more resources for the Health Service, rather than less, in north-east Lancashire in the Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale health authority.

The closures are clearly being made to save money—£1·5 million. But when I returned to my constituency yesterday, I was informed that at the meeting of the district health authority, held only the previous night, cuts of a further £1 million had been requested and further drastic action had to be considered.

It must be said that even moderate people on that committee—Mr. Ashworth, who is a registrar at the county court—were talking of allowing the Government to call in the commissioners to do the dirty work because enough was enough and further cuts could not be countenanced.

Even Muriel Jobling, the chairman of the district health authority, because she has tried to resist some of the proposals—and I do not know her political party—and has not toed the Government line, has had it suggested to her by the chairman of the regional health authority that she might say that she did not want to seek another term as chairman of the district health authority. She did not choose to do that and so she has been told that she is not being reappointed. Yet she has fought to try to preserve the Health Service for the community. The protest of people from all political parties and all parts of the Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale district health auhority has shown the amazed outrage at the decision that she should not be reappointed.

The second aspect of the debate is the restriction of ambulance services and the cutting of that service within Lancashire. That is causing people throughout Lancashire grave concern. Indeed the *Burnley Express and News* and in particular the *Lancashire Evening Telegraph* have run a big campaign attacking the new proposals and policy changes that were introduced on 6 January when a quota system was introduced to try to avoid an overspend.

A letter from the Lancashire family practitioner committee dated 4 February to the regional general manager of the North-Western regional health authority said that it had considered a report at its committee meeting on 29 January on the current situation in the Lancashire ambulance service. The letter went on to express the concern of general practitioners at the effects of the introduction on 6 January, without prior notice, of a quota system for outpatients as a result of an anticipated overspend of £250,000 in the current financial year by the Preston health authority, the managing body for ambulances for the seven Lancashire districts. Preston health authority has, on a number of occasions, sought additional resources from the regional health authority to offset the continued effects of repeated efficiency savings and cost improvement programmes. The Lancashire family practitioner committee registered its gravest concern at the present situation and rejected completely the interim solutions which had been introduced. It called on the regional health authority to provide further resources to cover the projected overspending until the results of the review of Lancashire ambulance services, which has been commissioned by the regional health authority, are available. Similar views have been expressed by Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale community health council. It wrote to Preston district health authority on 11 February and sent a copy to the hon. Members representing the three constituencies within its area. It expressed concern at the authority's failure to consult the community health council regarding what it viewed as a "substantial variation in service" and concern at the distress caused to patients by this action. The letter said:

"my members are amazed to have read a statement in the press from yourself and officers that as a consequence of reducing the workload in regard to transporting out-patients to hospital by some 35 per cent., some inconvenience will be caused to patients."

That view was being expressed to the chairman of the Preston district health authority.

The letter attaches a schedule of cases where seriously ill patients have failed to keep their out-patient appointments. It is a long list and it is being added to all the time. It gives an example of a 43-year-old lady who was thought by her general practitioner to have suffered a stroke. She was refusd an ambulance by control staff because the daily quota had been reached, despite the fact that she needed to attend the hospital x-ray department for a brain scan. It was eventually discovered that the lady had a brain tumour. I can give many examples, but time is short. It is a nonsense to run an ambulance service on a quota system which says that if the quota is used up during the first three days of the week no ambulances will be available on the next two days. As I have said, I have a long list and if the Minister wishes to look at it I will provide him with a copy.

The change has also resulted in wasting the time of professional Health Service personnel, particularly physiotherapists. It has increased the work load for hospital administrators, who are now continually having to change patients' appointments because the quota system means that patients cannot attend on the date or time for which the appointment was originally made. Disruption has been caused to the work of outpatient clinics. Ambulance men allege that the time and capacity of ambulances has been wasted because they do not always carry a full load and additional spaces have been available. There was a manpower shortage in 1984 and at that time transport was hired and hospital car volunteer drivers were used, mainly for day care cases, at a cost of £300,000.

Finally, because I want to allow time for the Minister to reply, I want to deal with the important aspect of people who have had their training blocked and are not being allowed to do emergency work or anything else, or complete their training in the ambulance service. That is a matter of great concern. As I understand it, the reason for that is to save money. Once people are fully trained they will have to be paid slightly more. I know that the National Union of Public Employees is taking legal advice on that and is fighting on behalf of its members and is trying to ensure that they are able to provide the services necessary for running outpatient and emergeny services.

It has to be said that emergency services have now been so cut to the bone that in times of major emergency, or two incidents happening at the same time during certain stages of the night, ambulances would not be able to provide the much-needed service to the people of North-east Lancashire. These issues, at this early hour of the morning, are crucial to the people of north-east Lancashire, Burnley and Lancashire as a whole. I believe that the cases I have illustrated are examples of what is going on, not only in my part of the country but throughout the length and breadth of this country because of the cuts being imposed by the Government.

7.49 am

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): I congratulate the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) on bringing to the attention of the House this important and serious aspect of deficiencies in the National Health Service faced by his constituents.

I hope that we do not hear the usual Government claptrap from the Under-Secretary of State about expenditure on the NHS increasing by 18, 20 or 22 per cent. The Government use a convenient starting date—1979, rather than a little later, which gives a different figure. They are selective about the way they use figures. They conveniently forget about demographic change. The population is aging.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security (Mr. Ray Whitney): What a lot of claptrap.

Dr. Marek: The Government forgot about that. It is a lot of claptrap. We are getting more older people. The Under-Secretary of State may laugh, but that is a serious reason why there should be real growth in the NHS. The Government compare growth in the NHS with the retail price index, but they do not compare it with a medical index. We all know that the costs of medical equipment have increased much more than the retail price index has increased.

The Government do not take into account medical advances which mean that much more complicated pieces of apparatus are available to cure diseases and treat ailments than were available just five years ago. Now that is run of the mill equipment. The Government simply say, "The NHS is looked after. There has been growth." If they took account of those factors, they could not make such statements.

We all know about the massive increase in unemployment. Unemployment affects health, and the nation is not as healthy as it was. This places increased demands on the Health Service. The Government do not take that factor into account. If all those points had been taken into account, the Government's statement about real growth in the NHS would be seen by everyone to be nothing but claptrap.

The front page of today's *Labour Weekly* states:

"MPs' hospital to close.

A central London hospital is to close down for a month in order to meet government health cuts.

The hospital — St. Thomas's — is directly opposite the House of Commons and is frequently used by MPs.

The West Lambeth District Health Authority, in order to cope with health cuts, faced a difficult choice.

A paper from the administration suggested giving over more beds to private health".

That is another sad aspect of what has been happening under the Government. They have been putting in their own people, trying to privatise the NHS. The article continues:

"the authority rejected the proposal. The chair then resigned" —*[Interruption.]*

I wish that the Under-Secretary of State and the Whip would stop twittering from a sedentary position. I shall take one more minute, and then the Under-Secretary of State can have seven. The article states:

"no treatment in August, except of emergency cases."

That means that about 1,000 people will not be given treatment, waiting lists will lengthen and hospital workers and doctors will try to find hospital beds in other parts of London.

What does that have to do with the efficiency about which the Government talk so often and for so long? What efficiency? What a way to run the National Health Service.

7.53 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security (Mr. Ray Whitney): With permission, I shall intervene for the third time in tonight's debate. The hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) implied that he was averse to claptrap, yet he gave us several minutes of claptrap, reinforcing the claptrap from the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) about the alleged cuts in the Health Service. It is therefore necessary to repeat that, in real terms, there has been a 21 per cent. increase in spending. There has been an increase in capital spending from £365 million in 1978-79 to £900 million next year. More details on that fact, and not claptrap, will be given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in tomorrow morning's debate—I suppose that technically it will be tomorrow—on the impact of the Griffiths' report.

I commend the hon. Member for Wrexham for staying in the Chamber and listening to me, and so improve his knowledge of the Health Service. He clearly needs to learn more about that.

The region represented by the hon. Member for Burnley is a significant RAWP gainer and has gained 11·7 per cent. in real terms since the Government came to office. There is an important story to tell about capital spending. The hon. Gentleman talked about hospitals. The north-west region has the largest capital programme in England, involving about 10 per cent. of total capital spending. There are new hospital developments throughout the region in a massive programme, in Preston, Salford, Bury, Wigan, Central Manchester, Blackpool, Wyre and Fylde; and in Blackburn, Hyndburn and the Ribble Valley. That is a picture of which we should all be proud—including the hon. Member for Burnley when he stops trying to make party political points.

I was glad to note that the hon. Member for Burnley welcomed the commissioning of the new Burnley general hospital, an impressive project which will benefit his constituents. The authority and the Health Service are proud of that hospital. It has, however, had implications for the other local hospitals to which the hon. Gentleman referred and in particular for the Hartley hospital. However, the local health authority has to make proper use of its resources, taking account of the demands on it. Should it come to a decision at the end of the day for a permanent closure—and I can make no comment on that — the decision would be subject to the usual processes of consultation, of which I am sure the hon. Gentleman is aware. If it is opposed by the community health council, for example, it would come to Ministers for a final decision. Only at that point would it be appropriate for my right hon. and hon. Friends to take a decision on the matter.

I must emphasise that redeployment of resources stems from the fact that the hon. Member for Burnley's constituents are to enjoy the services of the new development at Burnley general hospital. Instead of proposing that as a cut, he should take account of the development of services to which I have referred.

The ambulance service in Burnley, which is run on behalf of the Burnley health authority by the Preston health

authority, has been overspending its cash limits. The ambulance service is a growing demand service in that it faces growing demands and receives growing resources. That service must be run under some financial discipline.

The quota system to which the hon. Member for Burnley referred is for non-emergency services. I understand that arrangements are made that, whenever there is a case of urgent medical need, it has been met. There is no question that the routine arrangments of the non emergency services are set aside in cases of particular emergencies. Obviously, I cannot comment in more detail on the detailed cases to which the hon. Gentleman referred. I take note of his points and I have no doubt that the chairman of the district health authority will consult and take note and if necessary either I or the district health authority chairman will write to the hon. Gentleman.

The point I must emphasise and of which I expect the hon. Gentleman to take account is that these growing resources are available to the region and to the hon. Gentleman's health authority. It is pointless for the hon. Member for Wrexham to continue to use his favourite word "claptrap". The fact is that the resources are growing.

Taxpayer's resources spent on the constituents of the hon. Member for Burnley are growing in real terms. Many of those resources are devoted to the provision of appropriate sevices, which must be run under reasonable financial disciplines and limits. That has been put into action.

The emergency medical cover is not affected. If individual cases go wrong, we shall be prepared to take them up, and, as the hon. Gentleman knows, he has the right to take individual cases up directly with the health authority.

It being 8 o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question being put, pursuant to Standing Order. No. 113(2).

National Health Service (Pay)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Lennox-Boyd.]*

8 am

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): It is interesting that today we are having a number of debates on the National Health Service. That reflects the great public disquiet about its administration and the appallingly low levels of pay. I wish to draw attention to that issue.

First, I say with pride, not by way of apology, that I am sponsored by the National Union of Public Employees, and it is right and proper that that should be on the record. I was formerly a full-time official of that union, working in the NHS, and at one stage I was a member of an area health authority, so I have some experience of NHS matters.

There is grave disquiet within the NHS about the way in which staff are treated. During the past five years NHS workers have suffered from the threat of privatisation, which essentially means that many ancillary staff are being asked to offer their job on an annual or biennial basis to the lowest bidder, as a series of contract cleaning and catering companies line up to take the pickings from the NHS. That has resulted in job losses and a reduction in the real wage levels of many workers, and has created a climate of fear and intimidation. I hope that the Minister will try to understand what it is like to be a hospital cleaner, knowing that one's job is with a contract cleaning company, whose bid the following year may not be successful, and that a new contractor may pay even lower wages or not offer one a job. A series of hired hands are moved from one contract cleaning company to another.

Other groups and grades feel equally worried. It started with cleaners, moved to catering staff, and may move to building staff, the various maintenance and gardening grades and right up the scale. The NHS has a major function to play, and we could and should be proud of it. It is no way to treat employees every year to offer their jobs for sale to contractors. If it can be done for cleaners and catering grades, clearly it can be done for many other grades. A number of technical and professional grades already feel the cold wind of privatisation.

Late last year, as in the previous year, the Department of Health and Social Security produced a glossy book called:

"The Health Service in England".

It is designed to make us believe that the NHS is doing particularly well. Table 19 on page 43 deals with Health Service employed staff by main staff group for England, and shows that nursing and midwifery staff increased from 351,000 to 397,000—an increase of 13·2 per cent.—and lists other grades showing increases in staffing levels.

I am particularly interested in the treatment of ancillary staff. Their numbers have decreased from 172,200 to 152,200, which is an 11·6 per cent. reduction over six years. That reduction appears to be continuing. The ancillary grades are not only the lowest paid in the National Health Service but are suffering the largest number of job losses.

On page 46, appendix C shows Health Service expenditure on staffing, goods and services broken down into salaries and wages and supply and maintenance. Within the section on salaries and wages is shown the proportion of total wage expenditure that goes on nurses

[Mr. Jeremy Corbyn]

and midwives—44·5 per cent.—and on ancillary staff—15·3 per cent.—medical and dental 13·7 per cent. and so on. However at the end as a tiny footnote there is "Chairmen's remuneration 0·03 per cent." There are not many chairmen in the health authorities, but together they managed to collect £1·7 million in chairmen's remuneration. When one compares that with the average wages of an ancillary worker one begins to understand the issues I am concerned with. At one end of the scale in the National Health Service we have the doctors' remuneration at £21,000 a year. However, they are in dispute, as consultants get far more than that. There is also the absolute scandal and disgrace of the ludicrous merit award system, which operates for consultants. Essentially, consultants nominate each other for merit awards, it is done in secret, and the public pick up the bill without having any say in the levels of merits awards that are made to those people. I believe that the last figure quoted was something like £20 million being handed out to themselves in merit awards.

I am not saying that the doctors, consultants or surgeons do not do a valuable job. One could not run a health service without them. However, I am sure that most of those people would agree, that neither can one run a health service without cleaners, caterers and portering staff. It is a team approach that is adopted in the hospitals and I wish that the Government would understand that with regard to pay. My hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) spoke in the previous debate about job losses and cuts within the National Health Service. He mentioned the temporary closure of St. Thomas's hospital and the threat to Westminster hospital. Yesterday there was an announcement in a local paper of job losses at St. Nicholas's hospital in south-east London.

The closure of the Dreadnought seamen's hospital resulted in yesterday's strike of cross-channel operators because they are not prepared to see their hospital close. That is the degree of the frustration and anger that exists among the supporters of the National Health Service, never mind those who are within the Health Service.

I wish to put specific questions to the Government regarding pay. The pay for nurses and midwives has been in the public eye recently and is a matter of public conern. The cause of the concern is the pay gap between nurses and other grades and the way the award was funded. Health Service workers are not prepared to go on being told that they can agree a pay level—an agreed national level—through negotiations and then be told by the Government that the Government are not prepared to pay that award in its entirety, instead passing part of the cost of the award over to the local district health authority. That is specifically intended to create an atmosphere wherein, if the health workers accept lower wage rates, there will be more money spent on patient care. We know that this is not the case. It is a cynical manipulation of the way that negotiations should be conducted within the National Health Service.

I wish to quote from the evidence submitted by my union, the National Union of Public Employees, in its pay review body document 1986 for nurses, midwives, and health visitors.

"*There is still a large pay gap*. When we compare current pay levels with the levels established in 1974 by Halsbury and in 1980 by Clegg, and take into account movements in prices and earnings since those dates, we find that a large pay gap amounting to nearly 20% of current salaries exists. It is important to emphasise that the comparison with pay levels set by Halsbury and Clegg is not intended to be purely mechanical. Our point is that on each occasion when an independent review has taken place of nurses' pay in relation to the pay of comparable outside occupations, a substantial increase in nurses' pay has been recommended to bring it into line. We believe that this is strong evidence that a similar independent study carried out today, making similar comparisons, would establish that a substantial increase is needed across the board in order to restore fair pay for nurses. In short, a big gap remains, and a substantial across the board increase is needed to fill it."

Later in the evidence of the staff side to the nurses and midwives Whitley council, it says:

"The Review Body must now be aware of the grave concern and anger within the profession which was caused by the Government's decisions relating to the funding and staging of the 1985 award, although the tone of the Government's written evidence gave some indication of the cynical and intrasigent view it held with regard to funding the award of an independent Review Body. It will be recalled that having acknowledged that the paybill for nurses and PAMs in 1983-84 was some 36 per cent. of health authorities' 'total costs, the Government subsequently stated that pay costs in excess of those allowed for in the public expenditure programme would not be funded. The Government's written evidence concluded that 'the higher pay settlemens turn out to be, the less service development will be possible overall' (para C10). On its own admission this position represented a significant departure from previous years when the level of financial provision has been reviewed in the light of Review Body recommendations and the Government's decisions on them".

On nurses' pay and prices, it goes on to say:

"the current (April 1985) value of the Staff Nurses' pay remains significantly below its real 1975 value. By April, 1986, even with the second, delayed, stage of the 1985 award taken into account (February 1986), the increase in Staff Nurses' pay since 1975 will have been insufficient to accommodate the effect of inflation, let alone facilitate the rise in living standards which has been the experience of the majority of employees over the period."

That is the cry of health workers over the past 15 years or longer at the way that they have continually been left behind other grades, industries and professions.

It is not only the nurses and the ancillary grades that are concerned, but the doctors, who have seen over the years their 1981 review body decision reduced from 9 per cent. to 6 per cent. and in 1984 and 1985 the fourth and fifth rejections of pay review body recommendations. There is anger across the Health Service about pay levels.

Ancillary workers in the Health Service have suffered the largest cut and received the lowest pay, and are very much at the bottom of the pile in the hospital, but no hospital could operate without catering workers, cleaners and porters, all those who do the dirty, filthy unclean jobs that nobody else wants to do. They deserve a substantial increase in their basic levels of pay. There is no reason why people have to live on the poverty wages that they are getting.

I have before me the payslip of a woman in my constituency, Mrs. Gertie Turner, who is employed at the Whittington hospital at Archway. For 23 years and three months she has worked in the Health Service. Until 1977 she worked in the laundry as a press hand, until that department was closed, and since then, she has worked in the linen room. She has the important job of ensuring that the linen is distributed and is available for all the beds, as patients come and go. She has to ensure that the linen is there on time.

I am sure that every hon. Member will agree that such people are the backbone of the Health Service. Mrs. Turner's basic pay is £80·10. She gets a bonus of £17·06

and a London weighting of £13·50. Her weekly pay and allowances total £110·66. After stoppages, she takes home £67·34 for a full week's hard, responsible service. This is a disgraceful figure for somebody who has put in so much work for the Health Service in such a responsible way.

I turn to the claim that has been put forward on behalf of Gertie Turner and thousands of other people like her in the National Health Service. The 1986 trade union claim for ancillary staff council employees includes:

"1. A substantial flat-rate wage increase, as a major step towards the target of two thirds of national average earnings.

2. A revision of the grading structure on equal value principles.

3. A substantial increase in shift and related payments.

4. A reduction in the working week to 35 hours.

5. An increase in annual leave and a change in the calculation of leave from a retrospective to a current basis.

6. A change in the public holidays agreement to provide entitlement for part-time workers whose work on fixed days currently excludes them from most public holidays.

7. The right of access to arbitration."

When I talk about poverty levels of wages and poverty pay in the National Health Service, there is plenty of evidence to support what I am saying. The TUC definition of low pay, two thirds of average male earnings, is £109·06 in 1985 and £117·78 in the current year. The Low Pay Unit has slightly different figures of £115·20 and £124·41. The Council of Europe's decency threshold, 68 per cent. of the average of men and women, shows a figure of £116·28 and £125·58. The supplementary benefit levels for a family with two children would be £123·61. By all those criteria, people like Gertie Turner are well within the current poverty pay levels.

I quote next from the document which was put forward by all the trade unions on the ancillary staffs council, trade union side, at page 7:

"In April 1985 the difference between the average weekly earnings of male NHS ancillary workers and male manual workers throughout the economy was £40·10. The gap with average male earnings was nearly £70 per week. The equivalent earnings gap for women was £96·84. Ten years ago, the earnings gap with male manual workers was £4·90. Nearly 50 per cent. of male ancillary staff earn as little as the lowest 10 per cent. of all manual workers throughout the economy."

The booklet goes on to demonstrate that the problem is even more serious for women full-time ancillary staff. Despite equal pay legislation over the years, it is quite clear to me that women workers in the National Health Service get significantly less on average than their male counterparts.

When a comparison is made of the earnings of female and male full-time ancillary staff as a proportion of all male manual earnings between 1970 and 1985, it is found that there are certain high points. There was a high point in 1971 when women earned 55 per cent. of the male average and men earned just under 90 per cent. There were then the low points which led to the 1973 dispute. After that there was the award which took men to 90 per cent. and women to just under 70 per cent. of earnings. Then there was the low point which led to the 1979 industrial dispute. Following that there was the Clegg award that took women up to about 65 per cent. and men up to about 85 per cent.

The current position, from graphs provided not by trade union sources but by the Government's new earnings survey, is that at present NHS women workers are well below 60 per cent. of male manual earnings and men are just under 80 per cent. of that figure.

Frequently employees in the National Health Service have had their wages compared with those in local government. The gap now exists on every grade between workers in the local authorities who are not overpaid by any means. Under the local authority manual workers' agreement a cook would get £92·40 a week. A National Health Service ancillary cook on grade 6 would get £82·92 a week. At the other end of the scale, a local authority dining room assistant or kitchen assistant—that would be somebody working in the school meals service or in a municipal canteen—would get £83·20 a week. A NHS ancillary worker—canteen, grade 1, domestic—would get £72·53 a week.

Therefore, NHS workers are not happy. The Government must tell us what their policy is towards low paid workers in the NHS. And what is their policy on pay generally in the NHS? When the awards are agreed this year for all grades in the NHS, will the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State undertake that those pay awards will be paid for out of national funds and not by local health authorities being forced either to lay off staff, close hospitals, close wards temporarily, or to lock up wards to subsidise the Government's expenditure in other areas? Will the Government give an undertaking that no longer will health workers, who maintain the health of this nation and who work so hard, for so long and for so little, have to suffer the indignity of poverty wages? I find it ironic that so many Department of Health and Social Security employers are forced at the end of each week to go to another arm of the DHSS to register for the various benefits to which they are entitlted because of the poverty wages that they are given in the first place by their main employer, the DHSS.

8.21 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security (Mr. Ray Whitney): The hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) has left me with little time, so my points will have to be succinct. It is a pity that he was not here for the debate on competitive tendering. I would recommend him to read that debate and to note the points that were made not only by me but by his hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field). It was pointed out that, as a result of competitive tendering in the Barking health authority, the spending on cleaning services has been reduced from £367,000 to £211,000 each year, which means that the saving of £156,000 can be ploughed back into the National Health Service.

The Government's first concern must be to deliver the best possible service to patients. "Patients first" has long been a motto of the Conservative party and of this Government. The increase of 21 per cent. in resources in real terms since this Government came into office in 1979 has been devoted entirely to providing more and more services for patients. Of course the National Health Service must be a good employer. Indeed, it is a good employer and it will continue to be a good employer.

The hon. Member sticks to his origins as a full-time official of the National Union of Public Employees and has placed virtually all the emphasis upon the employees in the NHS. All of us pay them credit for the work they do and the loyalty they show, but we are committed to creating a service that provides the best care for patients. That is why £17 billion of taxpayers' money is devoted every year to that end.

[Mr. Ray Whitney]

We are also proud of the fact that there are 10,000 more doctors and 40,000 more nurses and that there has been a reduction in the number of ancillary workers. I make no apology for that. A widely held view is that, although vital functions are performed by all the other grades in the NHS, it is right that we should concentrate upon those who deliver patient care. It is not surprising that, since the NHS employs about 1 million people, there will be a spread of incomes. The hon. Member took a U-turn somewhere in his speech. At one point he was objecting to the fact that consultants were paid much more than ancillary workers for whom he seemed principally to be speaking. Later he went into his other mode of demanding more for medical staff, nurses and ancillaries. In many ways that is an objective, but any sensible Government must take all those decisions against the background of the need to make choices and to assess priorities.

In regard to nurses' pay, I participated in a television discussion on Monday with Mr. Trevor Clay of the Royal College of Nursing, where he described last year's settlement for nurses as reasonable. That was an important recognition by the leader of the RCN that we kept faith by giving a significant increase in real terms in pay in that sector, set against a significant increase also in the number of nurses.

The hon. Gentleman has put down an early-day motion. He insists on the need to seek an arbitrary figure of two thirds of the average income for all workers. It is difficult to see the logic of that in a service as large as the Health Service. With nearly 1 million employees there can be no suggestion that everyone should get two thirds of the average. The whole thing would become nonsense and we should soon be back into the realms of inflation.

The hon. Gentleman also mentioned with some disparagement the amount of money going to chairmen. Does he understand that basically the honorarium of a chairman is only about £10,000 a year? That is for being responsible for a multi-million pound enterprise, be it a district or regional health authority. By any terms that is good value for money. I pay tribute to the great sense of public spirit which motivates chairmen throughout health authorities.

The hon. Gentleman made great play of the problems of Mrs. Gertie Turner, whose gross wage is £110·66 per week and who takes home £67·34. How grateful I am to the hon. Gentleman for bringing to the House the case of Mrs. Turner. She has £43 of stoppages out of a weekly gross wage of £110. I invite the hon. Gentleman to reflect a little. That is precisely the point we are trying to deal with. The hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends wish to increase public spending by £24 billion or whatever is the costed figure of their proposals. What, then, would be the burden on Mrs. Turner? The stoppages would not be £43 or even £50; they would be £60 or £70. He should reflect on that every time he suggests yet more spending. If he considers that a 21 per cent. increase in the resources of the Health Service since 1979 is not enough, let him consider not us, not the Chancellor of the Exchequer but Mrs. Gertie Turner and just how much he would ask her to pay to maintain the Health Service and all the other things which he demands.

Pay in the Health Service is extremely important. Only yesterday the Whitley council met and negotiations are at an important stage. I do not wish to say more about it at the moment, but I am glad that meetings are continuing. We recognise that progress must be made. I pay tribute to the important contribution which ancillary workers make to the Health Service. There is no solution in simply writing cheques which quickly become worthless—for reasons which the hon. Gentleman, being a member of the Labour party, should recognise. That is precisely the road down which his Government took the country and down which we shall not go again. It was in his Government's time that the resources of the Health Service were cut in real terms——

The Question having been proposed after Ten o'clock on Thursday evening and the debate having been continued for half an hour, MR. SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at half-past Eight o'clock am on Friday 14 March 1986.

House of Commons

Friday 14 March 1986

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PETITIONS

Traffic (Dulwich)

9.35 am

Mr. Gerald Bowden (Dulwich): I beg leave, Mr. Speaker, to present a petition on behalf of my constituents who live in Therapia road, Marmora road and Scutari road, east Dulwich. Those are quite residential side streets which have recently been used by heavy vehicles, particularly buses. The number 63 bus has a turning point when it comes to the end of its route at Honor Oak and that has caused unwarranted wear and tear on the surface of those side roads, which have not been constructed to take such traffic, has caused vibrations to the surrounding buildings and has had a deleterious effect on the houses there. In particular, it has left parents in fear for their children who had previously been able to play freely on those quiet side streets.

My petitioners urge

"the Secretary of State for Transport to regulate these roads in such a way that heavy vehicles, particularly London Transport buses, do not use these roads as a means of passage."

I wholeheartedly support my petitioners.

To lie upon the Table.

Shops Bill

9.36 am

Sir Anthony Grant (Cambridgeshire, South-West): I beg to ask leave to present a petition on behalf of nearly 2,000 of my constituents in south-west Cambridgeshire with which I agree and in which they express opposition to

"the provision for unlimited Sunday Trading in the Shops Bill currently before Parliament, recognising that Sunday has special characteristics as a day of rest, recreation and worship for the benefit of our family and community life."

They pray that the House do

"maintain legal limitations on Sunday Trading to ensure that the special character of Sunday is protected.

And your Petitioners as in duty bound will ever pray, etc."

I have studied this petition, Mr. Speaker, and I can inform the House that it comes from all parts of my constituency, which consists of some 56 villages and parish councils, some of them more than 30 miles apart, and it comes also from a broad cross-section of the community.

To lie upon the Table.

National Health Service (Management)

9.37 am

Mr. Steve Norris (Oxford, East): I beg to move,

That this House regards the Report of the National Health Service Management Inquiry of 6th October 1983 as an invaluable guide to the efficient management of National Health Service resources; welcomes the implementation of the major recommendations of the Report and in particular the appointment of general managers at regional, district and unit level within the National Health Service; recognises that there may now be the opportunity further to improve upon what has already been achieved in the light of practical experience; further recalls that the key objective of management restructuring was identified in guidance sent to health authorities in 1984 as the improvement in standards in service to patients; and resolves to continue to examine the consequences of, and to encourage further, management innovation so as to ensure that the maximum possible amount of National Health Service resources is targeted as effectively, efficiently and sympathetically as possible on the direct care of patients.

It is a great pleasure, is it not—I ask myself that rhetorically because sometimes I wonder. Having appended one's name at the instigation of one's party's Whips to the ballot for motions, one finds that one has had the immense misfortune to be successful. It is a great pleasure, Mr. Speaker, to have the opportunity to raise a subject which is of considerable interest to me and has been since I made my maiden speech in the House on it —the National Health Service and, in particular, its management.

Management in the NHS has a particular meaning. We are talking, as I think is one of the common aphorisms about the NHS, of the largest employer in western Europe and, as I understand it, excluding the Red Army, the largest employer in Europe.

I am delighted to see that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services has found time from his extremely busy schedule to be here in the Chamber. I thank him for his attention to this important subject. I am also grateful to see my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary in his place.

As the House will know, I was until recently vice-chairman of West Berkshire district health authority. I pay warm tribute to my colleagues of all political persuasions and backgrounds who worked with me on that authority who performed splendidly and continue to do so. They have provided me with invaluable insight into the day-to-day management of the service. It is extremely important that the House should not lose sight of the way in which the great decisions that we make here actually interact on the ground.

My interest does not stem just from my own experience on a health authority. Although my constituency is traditionally known for car-making activities, Oxford is the home of a substantial number of first-class health care services. The Radcliffe infirmary, the John Radcliffe new site, the Churchill, the Nuffield orthopaedic and the Slade, Littlemore and Warneford hospitals are all very large Health Service providers in my constituency and that of the Minister for Housing, Urban Affairs and Construction, my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Mr. Patten), and I hope that this debate will be equally relevant to those institutions.

Before dealing with the new Health Service management arrangements, I should say a brief word about the old arrangements. In the debate on 4 May 1984, I referred to the danger of over-simplifying the whole

[Mr. Steve Norris]

question of consensus management and the Griffiths proposals as alternative ideologies. I suggested then that to give the impression that consensus management was all wrong would be extremely dangerous. Seeing how the decision-making process was carried out, one had to recognise that many decisions required the cogwheel approach and recognition of the interrelatinship between disciplines and skills which was the cornerstone of the old consensus arrangement. It would have been damaging indeed to decide that the baby should be thrown out with the bath water and that the idea of gaining support for decisions across technical boundaries was necessarily wrong.

Nevertheless, I think that it is generally recognised that consensus management was, sadly, too often a recipe for inertia, with a paralysing effect on the mobilisation of resources and, worse, at the point of delivery of services and sometimes on the quality of service provided. The Government's response to that inertia was the NHS management inquiry by Sir Roy Griffiths whose report the Government accepted in principle and implemented.

It may be for the convenience of later contributors to the debate if I set out the background to my remarks by quoting circular HC(84)13 in which the Government set out the rationale for what they sought to achieve from the management reorganisation. The circular states:

"The Government's overriding concern is to see that the National Health Service provides the best possible service to patients within the available resources. We are seeking to ensure that the expenditure devoted to the Service"—

£13 billion in England that year——

"does reach its target: improvement in the physical and mental health of the people and in the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of illness. We have, with health authorities, already established a programme to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the NHS".

The circular made the point that the management inquiry report endorsed the Government's view of the management's task when it said:

"It cannot be said too often that the National Health Service is about delivering services to people. It is not about organising systems for their own sake . . . the driving force behind our advice is the concern to secure the best motivation for staff. As a caring, quality service, the NHS has to balance the interests of the patient, the community, the taxpayer and the employees."

The management inquiry report went on to identify the importance of a clearly defined general management function drawing together responsibility for planning, implementation and control of performance as the key to ensuring and achieving the management drive necessary to ensure that the standard and range of care provided by the Health Service were the best possible within available resources.

Those are fine words and I believe that there is good reason to believe that we are on the way to seeing them implemented in practice.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): The hon. Gentleman used the phrase "in practice". Does he intend to dwell on the principle that the people who have to take the buck for management decisions about scarce resources at ward and unit hospital level are qualified and have sufficient experience, especially in the nursing profession, without which those resources cannot be used properly? I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would not expect final decisions about the administration of the House, and taken by the House of Commons Commission, to be taken out of the hands of people with experience as Members of Parliament.

Mr. Norris: I suspect that that point will arise on a number of occasions this morning and I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will wish to expand on it if he has the opportunity to participate in the debate. I well recognise the concern about the implementation of Griffiths in that respect, and I shall be saying something about that. I know that Members on both sides will also wish to enlarge on what is clearly an area of concern which is fundamental to the reorganisation. It is, indeed, a cardinal principle of the service that any reorganisation should not be at the expense of the level of competence at the point of professional delivery of service. I accept the hon. Gentleman's comments. I intend to deal with that point, as no doubt will other hon. Members. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State may also wish to comment on that aspect.

I wish to examine how effectively the aspirations to which I have referred have materialised. So far, certain successes have been identified but there are also certain problems. The sooner the successes are identified and built on and the sooner the problems are identified and eradicated, the better will be the service for patients. I must tell the House, and especially the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing), that my discussions about the success or otherwise of Griffiths with managers who are in no sense beholden to me for their answers has been extremely encouraging.

I have been surprised at the extent to which managers now in post have referred, to use their own words, to crisper management, quicker decisions, quicker local problem solving and individuals being given tasks and made responsible for carrying them out. Although group decisions — the good old consensus — still occur, especially in relation to items such as the district review, the impact of the annual budgeting exercise and priorities for services and new money where best practice exists decisions are still made after extensive consultation on both a one-to-one basis and a group basis.

We should never lose sight of the fact that there is now the opportunity for day-to-day decision making which does not involve the establishment of any great new principle and does not offend any great new norm in the service, and that those decisions are now made more quickly and more effectively. I submit that that is of the greatest benefit to the service as a whole, by which I mean the greatest possible benefit to patients.

I shall deal briefly with the concerns which have been expressed recently by the Royal College of Nursing, and by the British Medical Association and other professional bodies prior to the implementation of the Griffiths report. In all instances I treat their contributions to the debate with the utmost seriousness. The various contributions have been made with the highest standards of integrity and concern for patients. I recognise that in that sense their motives are impeccable. I hope that they will not be offended if my response is to suggest that the real picture may not be quite as they have suggested. I suggest that their views have not been wholly justified by word or in the event.

I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Minister for Health—I am grateful to him for his interest in what I

am about to say—will recall his letter of 20 November 1985 to all regional health authority chairmen, in which he stated:

"most district management structures provide for medical and nursing membership of the district management board or similar body. Were this is not the case, I believe that it is important that alternative arrangements command the confidence and commitment of all the medical and nursing interests locally."

My right hon. Friend said to health authorities, in my view rightly, that it would be wrong and misconveived of general managers at any level within the Health Service to imagine that the new notion of management accountability had overtaken all notions of the need for clinical input at the highest level. If that misconception ever existed in the minds of general managers on any scale, I believe that it has been dispelled by my right hon. Friend's intervention.

It is a misconception also to imagine that fewer units of management necessarily mean worse service or worse professional input. I understand the concern that has been expressed articulately to me by colleagues who are members of the Royal College of Nursing about the reduction in overall numbers of units in the Health Service. There is a clear danger of imposing a form of management which harks too much towards the "big is beautiful" concept, which we all, to our individual regret, came to realise was not entirely consonant with efficiency or the best quality of service. On the other hand, it would be somewhat misleading to imply that there are not occasions when the original unit structure that was set up following the last reorganisation cannot now, in the light of experience, be honed and refined to produce fewer chiefs and more Indians.

There was much with which I was not happy in the last reorganisation of the Health Service. For example, I warned that we were running the risk of removing one area of bureaucracy and replacing it with two equal local bureaucracies, with little benefit for patients at the end of the day. However, the health authority in the area that I represent was able almost to halve the number of nurse managers who previously had no hands-on contact with patients. That is something which nurses, as true professionals, welcomed. The reduction in the number of nurse managers did not result in fewer nurses being employed. Instead, more of them were able to be involved in hands-on experience, which has been of great benefit to the Health Service as a whole.

Some have expressed concern that the new arrangements will result in a diminution of professional standards and the voice of the professions. They are right to sound that warning, but my right hon. Friends the Minister for Health and the Secretary of State for Social Services, in their utterances and in the letters which they have written on the subject, have made it clear that the Department never seeks to substitute management as a concept over and above or instead of that of professional input at the highest level, and the maintenance of that high level, within the service. I have no doubt that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will concentrate on that when he contributes to the debate.

It would worry me if undue account were taken of, for example, the relegation of titles, whether DMO, DNS or DNO, from structures, and if it were thought that it showed that nursing or medical advice could not find its way into the new system. That would be nonsense. We are changing the way in which advice is given to those who have to make decisions, but the suggestion that it is not there—I am no apologist for my right hon. Friend and I would be the first to express my views if I felt that there were real dangers—does not reflect the true situation. I have not seen the dangers materialise to which some have referred.

To support what I say, and in preparation for this debate, I took the opportunity to have a word with Sir Raymond Hoffenberg, the distinguished president of the Royal College of Physicians. I asked him especially and specifically about the attitude of his members to the Griffiths report, they being much involved in its implementation from day to day. He said, not unnaturally, that if he were asked to express the feelings of his members, he would say that they would be of concern on a similar line to the concern which the BMA expressed before the implementation of the report, and similar to the concern which the Royal College of Nursing currently expresses.

Sir Raymond made it clear to me that he could speak only of anecdotal and unsupported evidence of problems at regional and district levels, where general management appointments have been made at ground level. That has been my experience as well. I read carefully the RCN campaign document, with which we have all been involved. The college was kind enough to talk to me about its concerns. I can find no evidence of reduced levels of professionalism or care in hospitals as a result of reducing the number of chiefs to the benefit of the Indians, but I recognise that theoretically the opportunity exists for that to happen unless adequate precautions are taken. It is one thing to argue that there has been a reduction in the level of professionalism or of care in hospitals and another to point to actual reductions.

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): There may have been cuts in administrative staff, but many of them have been in the clerical section. In many hospitals there is not a sufficient clerical staff to provide the service that consultants, doctors and nurses need in carrying out their jobs.

Mr. Norris: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point and I know his expertise in these matters, which I much respect. I think that he will agree with me that the difficulty in responding to his argument and the difficulty about his intervention is that it invites the consideration of specific examples. It leads to the question, "What was the arrangement for the delivery of epidemiological, medical, clinical and technical input and what are the new arrangements?" The new arrangements may be slimmer and involve fewer persons in the expression of technical advice. The advice may come from those whose titles we do not yet recognise as conventional, but that does not mean that the quality of the service has been lowered. The time to worry is when we see a difference in the provision of actual service, which must be our paramount concern. I recognise the sincerity with which the warnings have been delivered, but I do not find at this moment that they are justified.

But there is much still to be said about some of the technical disadvantages of the present arrangements. I mentioned one point in the debate in May because I felt that it was important, and I shall mention it again. I refer to the question of how we employ general managers. We use the concept of fixed term contracts. From my business

[Mr. Norris]

experience I know that I would employ someone on a fixed term contract only if I had a specific job for him to do. For example, if I wanted to build a power station, I might employ a site manager and give him a fixed term contract. When the job came to an end, he would go elsewhere. He would understand the situation, and it would not ruin his motivation but rather enhance it, as he would want to see the job done within the time allocated. But I would not use fixed-term contracts for continuing employment, if I was interested in ensuring that morale was maintained at the highest level and that I was getting everything I could out of the best people for the job.

Four areas in which problems have arisen were identified in a very helpful article by Robin Gourlay. He is the Wessex regional personnel officer, and in July 1985, in an article in the *Health and Social Service Journal*, he wrote:

"First, consider the recruitment problem. If you were to advertise a general manager job to managers outside the NHS, offering a fixed term contract of three or five years and a salary probably well below what they consider the job worth in comparison to their own organisation, you are unlikely to attract the best recruits. Why should they threaten their own potentially successful careers with ICI, Shell, IBM or whoever, for a lower financial reward than they could expect—or maybe are already getting? Anyway, the potential amputation of a career will deter the type of manager the NHS needs."

I heartily endorse that description of the disadvantage of the fixed term contract.

The sub-editors of the article rather brilliantly, for once, caught the spirit of what Robin Gourlay was trying to say in the following headline:

"Contract renewal could rest on personal affability."

The article then continued:

"Second, how can a general manager be evaluated and what truly objective basis can be used for saying whether he or she succeeded or failed? Without such a basis the question of contract renewal could rest on whether or not the authority chairman likes the general manager."

That observation may be banal, but it is all the more frighteningly true for it. We will find that at the end of three or five years the personal or political relationships between the general manager and the members of the authority may sometimes weigh more heavily than it should do.

Robin Gourlay then states:

"Third, the implications of Griffiths were expected to bring about changes in the NHS. Changes mean risk and cost — the risk of failure, and the cost of turbulence. Such failures and costs can count against the general manager and prejudice his reappointment as a disenchanted mafia builds up a wave of unpopularity around him. So be it, you may say —general managers are not there to court popularity. This is so, but if the potential of success is outweighed by the personal costs of failure, which general manager is going to take those risks currently demanded of the NHS?

Fourth, consider the image of the NHS as an employer and its ability to retain managers of potential. Most large organisations develop their own managers . . . They create many incentives (of both a financial and non financial kind) to keep their managers . . . It is through the practice of such consideration that companies compete to attract and retain their general managers. This is not pure altruism . . . These companies invest a great deal in their managers and their development and to lose such investment through careless personnel policies is like publicly burning your profits.

A failed general manager reflects a failed organisation. The failure of a general manager is just as much the failure of the organisation that has provided the job, as it is the lack of competence of the manager."

I suspect that we use the fixed-term contract because of our inability to define, within Whitley, the termination of contracts for professional reasons other than gross misconduct. We are in the bind that if we employ people on indefinite contracts, we have the greatest difficulty in confronting them with any shortfall in performance, becaue their performance is a controversial matter and because of the practical difficulty of implementing the employment protection regulations and so on. Thus, a substantial review of Whitley is needed. I urge my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to consider carefully the question of fixed term contracts to see what can be done to replace a mechanism that works against the interests of the service and the professionalism within it.

There is a matter of perhaps less strategic importance, but which is of great concern to individual managers. I refer to the differential pay scales between some insiders and outsiders and, perhaps worse, between insiders and insiders. One golden rule of management is that one should never pay two people different salaries for doing exactly the same job or pay someone more money for doing a lesser job than someone else. That is rule number one in any management's book. But there is another rule that appeared in the best book on management that I ever read, and I believe it should be observed in the House. It said that it was useful to have someone on the board of directors who knew where the factory was. During my business career I have noted how appropriate that aphorism is and believe that it should apply almost de rigeur in the House.

I was a member of my health authority and I know, because I was involved in its implementarion, that, horrifyingly, our district manager gets £7,000 less than his own district medical officer, after his enhancement. Yet the district manager is in charge of the district medical officer and is the primus inter pares. If that was not illogical enough — there may even be some marginal justification for it — he gets £6,000 less than Milton Keynes district general manager. I do not know that man, although I am sure that he is a splendid person, but he happens to be a former doctor. Nevertheless, the budget of the whole Milton Keynes authority is less than the budget of the largest hospital in our district, the Royal Berkshire, and makes nonsense of the idea of providing a career and salary incentive structure.

Lynn Alleway, writing in the *Health and Social Service Journal*, noted:

"For people coming from outside, while the sky was not the limit, there were no such clearly defined restrictions. This has led to some significant anomalies. For example, the highest-paid RGM, Mike King in East Anglia, a former management consultant, is earning about £45,000 a year, £15,000 to £18,000 more than other RGMs from the NHS. Similarly there are district general managers from the private sector earning as much as £32,000—about £4,000 more than even many regional general managers with an NHS background. And yet in spite of this, salaries of £30,000 or £40,000 do not compare with deals available in the private sector."

I understand that a report prepared by the Department on the whole issue of general managers' pay, containing advice from three or four regional chairmen, and from management consultants brought in from outside, has been with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State since June 1985. I see him demurring, and no doubt he will clarify the position later. However, I am sure that professionals would welcome clarification of the position. It is important

to get pay right. We are talking about producing a much more relevant career structure for professionals, and pay is a factor in that.

Incentive is equally important. I acknowledge that we probably do not have the mechanism for introducing the right type of incentive for managers beyond the incentive of seeing a job well done. We must give some priority to that. We must create what any business person knows is his first and most important task — a happy and motivated management team. I am not suggesting for one moment that there is no motivation or that there is not great dedication and expertise, but we have some way to go.

General managers' pay is negotiable, subject to upward approval, but other staff posts are appointable only within the general structure of the Whitley council agreements. That is not surprising, bearing in mind the effect that Whitley has had on the pay and conditions structure in the NHS, but it only underlines the extent to which Whitley was a reflection of the old management arrangements. It needs a radical overhaul if it is to be relevant and effective.

I warn my right hon. Friend that the nature of NHS decision-making may be working against the interests of independent manager operation. I welcome the district review procedure, the annual report procedure and the whole accountability review process, but decisions are being implemented from the Department down the ladder, and general managers are often merely the method of implementing policies that have been decided elsewhere.

Members have been affected by the management reorganisation far more than we have been prepared to recognise. The circular defines members' role as follows:

"Determine policies and priorities for their district within national and regional guidelines and on the advice of their officers; Review and, where necessary, challenge proposals by the district management team and to make effective arrangements for the implementation of the authority's decisions; Appoint and monitor the performance of their chief officers; As the direct employer of a large number of staff, concern themselves with their working conditions, general interests and welfare (but not pay and conditions of service, which are determined nationally)."

That was wholly appropriate to the old arrangements but Griffiths has changed it all. If general managers now report much more closely to chairmen, who are the only paid representatives on the authority, health authority members have a role much more akin to that of community health councils. Both are appointed bodies.

The more one examines the old role of members and how it has been changed fundamentally by Griffiths, the more their new role is revealed as being the patient's friend, the monitor of standards, the determiner of priorities and the articulator of public concerns. The role of CHC and the authority member, which has always been anomalous, ought now to be reconsidered. It is unnecessary to have two bodies charged with almost identical roles for the supervision of standards which often act against each other and against interests of the service.

I am sure that the NHS Management Board has made great achievements, especially in computing and information systems but, talking to senior NHS personnel, I discern no recognition of achievements on the ground. That comment is based not on my experience but on what I have been told by many professionals. These are early days and my right hon. Friend might be able to reassure the House but, unless the board proves its worth shortly and illustrates that it is contributing to the more effective and efficient management of the services the sooner yet another layer of bureaucracy goes, the better I shall be pleased. We must see results soon.

It would be wrong to assume that the whole debate should centre on Griffiths. I should not be doing my right hon. Friend any service if I did not make it clear that the introduction and innovation of management budgeting, the value-for-money initiatives, the Rayner scrutinies and, contentious as it might be to say so, the competitive tendering exercises, have been of the most positive benefit to authorities in providing and unlocking funds that can be used for patient care. It is scandalous that resources are wasted on hotel and catering services when they could be spent on patient care.

As the DHSS controls the budget, it controls manpower. If caring services in the NHS are about people, what is saved on cleaning should be spent on nursing. If there is a £70,000 saving on catering and that money can buy seven community nurses, I do not want an artificial control on manpower which prevents the money from being spent in that way.

I have great admiration for what has been achieved. The introduction of management efficiency was desperately needed. As Baroness Trumpington said in another place last week:

"the key objective in introducing general management to the NHS . . . has been to improve service to patients." [*Official Report, House of Lords*, 4 March 1986, Vol. 472, c. 158.]

I apologise for the length of my speech, but I am reminded of the words of one of my favourite popular songs which runs:

"It's my party, and I'll cry if I want to."

If there is any merit in winning the ballot, it is that, for once, I do not feel quite as constrained as I might normally. I know that the Government's paramount objective has always been to improve the service to patients. The broad thrust of management reorganisation will assist to that end. I urge my right hon. Friend and his colleagues to take account of what I hope he will regard as my constructive criticisms of the performance so far, and continue his laudable and vital initiative.

10.17 am

Mrs. Renée Short (Wolverhampton, North-East): I congratulate the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Norris) on winning the ballot and on presenting his case with such lucidity, drawing on his considerable experience of the NHS. He was a valued member of the Social Services Select Committee for some time, but then he decided to desert us. We miss him very much.

As the House knows, the Select Committee examined the Government's proposals for setting up the Griffiths management complex, and we were worried about the manpower and resource problems of the NHS, as was the Secretary of State. We reported in February 1984 after hearing evidence from all the major professional, medical and nursing organisations and others who work in the NHS. We also heard from Mr. Griffiths himself.

Nobody in his right mind can object to reasonable proposals for the better and more effective use of human and financial resources. Nobody can object to better management aimed at delivering better patient care. That must be the object of the exercise, but we felt that the Griffiths proposals were thin in detail and lacking in lucidity. We said in our report:

[Mrs. Renée Short]

"there is an obligation on the Secretary of State to be more than commonly lucid and explicit when he comes to announce his decisions."

The House must judge whether he took that good advice to heart. I have very strong views about the results so far of Griffiths and its applications.

The House will recall that there was a signal lack of enthusiasm when the Griffiths proposals were published. They were seen, rightly in some respects, as an attack on doctors and on NHS staff at all levels, but they were seen especially as sounding their death knell for nurse management, which had been introduced some years previously. Griffiths was the third attempt in 10 years to deal with NHS management, and we thought that this upheaval was taking place too soon after the recent attempts to change the management structure. NHS staff at all levels become fed up when people with no experience of their great service begin yet another attempt to meddle. The House may find it difficult to comprehend, but it is true that, originally, Griffiths had no intention of including the chief nursing officer on the supervisory board or the management board. That was changed as a result of the Select Committee report. It was a telling omission by Griffiths — a Freudian slip of mammoth proportions.

For some time the Royal College of Nursing has been worried about the failure of the innumerable layers of management to ensure effective and safe patient care. That is unfair and dangerous to patients. It is also unfair to doctors prescribing treatment to patients for whom they are responsible. Of course, it could be fatal for the unfortunate patients. Who is responsible for nursing staff at district level if there is no chief nursing officer? Who will take resposibility for nursing care when the chief nurse/adviser — as some health authorities call them — is involved only with nurse education? That is a dangerous development and the Secretary of State should take the point on board.

The Secretary of State must know that, in many areas, nurses who care for patients are expected to be subject to managers who know nothing about nursing and who cannot have a professional view of the competence of the nurses on the wards. That is another difficult problem that has arisen in many areas and it has created much hostility between nurses and managers. In some hospitals, ward sisters' posts will be abolished. We shall have the nonsense of managers being appointed, down to ward level, who know nothing about nursing. The Secretary of State must do something about this Gilbertian situation.

Does the Secretary of State have any idea of the cost of all this bureaucratic nonsense? As the hon. Gentleman said, we want to spend money on hands-on patient care, which is what the Health Service should be about. We must invest in more caring staff, not in dictators at ward, unit, district or regional level. This is a bureaucratic nightmare, and an expensive one, too.

Chairmen have an important role to play in the management of their areas. Many new chairmen have been appointed in all the regions, especially since Griffiths. In the west midlands, 10 district chairmen were recently turfed out after only one term of office and 10 new chaps were brought in. I say "chaps" advisedly, because there were no women among those who were sacked or among those who took their place. How much experience of NHS management do their replacements have? It is extraordinary to think that before people have got their feet on the ground and obtained an understanding of how the Health Service works, especially under the new management system, they are being sacked. What criteria did the regional chairman use to measure the value or otherwise of the deposed chairmen? Perhaps he thought that the chairmen were getting on too well with the managers and that he should break up that cosy relationship.

Doctors have not come out too well under the new management structure. I understand that there is only one doctor regional manager, 13 doctor managers at district level and about 20 per cent. at unit level. There must be doctors on the district management teams. The British Medical Association is keeping an eye on appointments and is asking that a consultant, a general practitioner and a community physician be appointed to each DMT. Perhaps the Minister will let us know what progress he has made with that.

Recently, the Comptroller and Auditor General drew attention to the way in which some health authorities had been saving money at the expense of health care standards. He is concerned that efficiency savings are not being put back into patient care. I am sure that the Minister wants efficiency savings to be used for that purpose, and perhaps he will respond to the Comptroller and Auditor General's comments. I understand that cost improvement schemes saved £105·2 million in 1984-85. In 1985-86, savings are estimated to be £153 million, which will represent a considerable increase. What will happen to that money? Will it be used to improve patient care?

Unless more money is invested in the National Health Service, managers will be left with the appalling dilemma of having to choose between meeting the needs of the service and reducing salaries. There is no other option. The Royal College of Nursing and the Institute of Health Service Administrators have told the right hon. Gentleman clearly about this, and the centre for Health Service management at York university has given similar advice. The Minister says that that is a major error of the report, but I challenge him to enter any large hospital and find out exactly what is happening. He need not go much further than the hospital across the river, St. Thomas's, or to Westminster hospital, to discover the difficulties that they are experiencing. In many especially sensitive areas, such as the perinatal mortality rate, he will discover a considerable contraction in service to patients and advice to mothers in hospitals and in the communities which they serve. That is extremely worrying to hospital administrators.

As one of the small minority of women in the House, I must protest at the small number of women who have been appointed to management posts in the NHS. Since 1974, more than half the graduates attending NHS management training courses have been women, and women comprise more than 70 per cent. of National Health Service employees, but not——

Mr. Laurie Pavitt (Brent, South): Is my hon. Friend aware that the only medical specialty on which the Government have spent millions on management training is nurses, but that few of them are being appointed?

Mrs. Short: That is correct, and that is part of the difficulty to which the Royal College of Nursing drew

attention. The efficient women who work in the National Health Service, even those who do not wish to take on management responsibility, feel deprived and frustrated. Since 1974 more than half the graduates attending NHS management training courses have been women, which is a significant proportion. Yet women comprise more than 77 per cent. of NHS employees. Therefore, one can legitimately ask what has happened to all those women trained at public expense. Where have they gone? Why have they not been appointed to management posts? A survey carried out by the King's Fund shows how unsatisfactory the position is. The wastage occurred among men as well, but it was three times as high among women who had taken training courses. Therefore, it is a serious waste of talent. I hope that the Minister will do something about it.

Some time ago the Secretary of State defended his health plan in a speech to chartered accountants in Brighton. Perhaps he will recall what he said. According to a newspaper report,

"He said it did not mean 'increased costs and more jobs for the boys.'"

It certainly has meant a large number of jobs for the boys, and very few jobs for the girls. The right hon. Gentleman should take that on board. He said in that speech:

"We are not just giving people new titles to put on their doors and more money for doing the same jobs . . . The general manager will have to show that he can make the Health Service run better and can get decisions made and put in effect."

The Secretary of State must admit that that honourable goal has not been achieved. The House will want to know what he intends to do to improve not only the standard of management but the breadth of talent that he proposes to take into the different levels of management to meet the considerable objections that have been made to the type of persons who have been appointed to many of the posts. A rationalisation and simplification of the several layers of management will go a long way towards meeting the real objections of the professionals working in the NHS, who feel that their expertise has not been used and taken into account.

National Health Service (Management)

10.31 am

The Secretary of State for Social Services (Mr. Norman Fowler): I should like to intervene at this stage of the debate. As I explained to my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Norris), I shall not be able to stay for the whole debate, but my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State will be here throughout. As he has responded to four debates during the past 13 hours, we thought that he might as well stay for this one.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East on giving us the opportunity to debate the management of the National Health Service. At the beginning of his speech, he made some remarks about putting his name in the ballot, but, whatever may have been the pressure brought on him to do so, it is entirely from his own choice that we are debating the Griffiths report today. I congratulate him not only on his speech but on the way in which he has emphasised the fundamental importance of the issue.

I agreed with what my hon. Friend said about consensus in management. Although the new changes mark an end to the old system of the consensus teams, they do not mark an end to consensus in management. General managers are not autocrats; they cannot be. They must build on the present consensus team approach.

I also agreed with what my hon. Friend said about the signs concerning the new management process. Like him, I believe that the signs are encouraging, not discouraging. My hon. Friend referred to the permanent pay structure for general managers. I accept that such matters will have to be settled shortly, and I think that we shall be able to satisfy my hon. Friend on that point.

I agreed with a number—not all—of the points made by the distinguished Chairman of the Select Committee on Social Services, the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, North-East (Mrs. Short). No one would be more pleased than me if we could get more women managers into the Health Service. That is a good policy aim. I should also like to see the development of management training throughout the Health Service.

Basically, the debate is about seeking to get the NHS to work better. Over the coming year, the Health Service's budget will be about £18·7 billion, an increase of 24 per cent. in real terms since 1978-79, but it is vital that those resources are used to best effect, by which I mean that we should give the best possible service to the public. The starting point of any policy must be to seek to provide the best possible service to the public. It is not a matter of controversy between hon. Members that, in seeking that goal, we must aim to achieve as effective management in the Health Service as possible.

That is the same challenge faced by any service or company, but with perhaps this differenee. The challenge of management in the Health Service is probably greater than that in any other service and possibly any other industry. The Health Service employs about 800,000 full-time staff. By any standards, that makes it an enormous service, the biggest employer in the country, and probably the biggest employer in western Europe. We should be under no illusion about the problems that are implied in the management of a service of that size, for if good management is essential in small and medium-sized companies, it is doubly important in a giant service such as this. Again, I hope that that is not a matter of controversy between both sides of the House.

At the same time, we must recognise one other feature of the Health Service—indeed, of any health service in any country. Demand for services is constantly rising. The fact that the number of elderly and very elderly people is increasing and likely to go on increasing provides inevitable demands on a service where a high proportion —about 40 per cent.—of the costs is accounted for by services for the elderly, while medical advance—the development of new treatments — also makes new demands from the public.

For example, in 1978 there were about 20,000 hip replacements. Today the figure is up to 30,000. Let us look at the history of other medical advances. In 1970, only 1,830 people were treated for kidney failure. Today that figure is over 11,000. In 1977, 2,800 patients had coronary artery bypass surgery. Today that figure is over 9,400.

My point is that it is inherent that medical advance itself produces new demands from the public, which any health service must seek to meet. Therefore, there is a management problem for the Health Service in trying to meet a virtually limitless demand and at the same time trying to improve the quality of the services that are also available.

In meeting that challenge, we have one inestimable advantage, which is the skill and dedication of the staff of the Health Service—not only the doctors and nurses on the wards, but the staff who ensure, for example, that the appointments system does not break down, and the ancillary staff who provide the services that are necessary for any hospital to function properly. I pay tribute to all the staff working in the Health Service, who seek to give a high standard of service to patients day in, day out, and sometimes in circumstances that are far from ideal. That is where the strength of the Health Service lies—in the skills and hard work of its staff.

My concern is not the dedication of the staff, but how this asset is managed. The evidence of the past has not always been enouraging. Let me give one example, which is very much in the recollection of the House, of how the old system of management was clearly, sadly and tragically defective. In the outbreak of food poisoning at the Stanley Royd hospital in Wakefield in 1984, which was prior to the new management changes, 19 people died and 450 patients and staff were infected.

The report clearly revealed a number of basic management difficulties. We now know that grossly unhygienic and unsatisfactory practices were allowed to flourish in the kitchens at Stanley Royd. For example, a drain in the kitchen was found to be blocked by cutlery which had not been removed. There can be no excuse for that. It was a failure of supervision and management. Once the outbreak had occurred the staff on the wards—the nurses and junior doctors—acquitted themselves with real distinction. I pay tribute to them. However, I have to say that some of the managers did not take a sufficiently active role in handling the outbreak. In particular, the report of the inquiry said that it regarded it as unacceptable that some managers considered it their function to monitor

and to attend meetings rather than to go out and see what was happening. That was the old system being described. The Committee said it was

"one major explanation of why nurses from outside Stanley Royd were not brought in, a decision which was taken without first-hand examination of the situation by those taking the decision".

It is clear that the regional health authority did not have a clear and positive view of its management and leadership role within the region. I think that both sides of the House should be concerned about that. A capital scheme for the improvement of the kitchens at Stanley Royd had been in operation for over four years, with very little progress to show for it. The business simply drifted on with no firm management to ensure that decisions were taken and action progressed.

I go over that ground not to point the finger at individuals, but to remind the House of what the tragedy tells us about the management system which prevailed at that time. It was a system in which authorities and senior staff were not always clear about their roles and responsibilities, in which there was often a lack of leadership and in which individual reponsibility was submerged. No one was responsible and no one was accountable. Such a position would not be tolerated in any well run company. There is no reason—and again I hope that this is not a matter for controversy—why it should exist in the National Health Service. It was because of concerns about the management of the National Health Service that in 1983 I asked Sir Roy Griffiths and his colleagues to give us their advice. Building on the programme that the Government had already established to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the Health Service, the Griffiths report recommended new and important measures which hold the key to improved management.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): May I intervene before the Secretary of State gets to the substance of the Griffiths report? I do not in any way want to underestimate the terrible tragedy of the Stanley Royd hospital and the appalling suffering which occurred as a result. Obviously, there is common ground on that point. However, will the Secretary of State, in his strictures on that tragedy, also consider, by way of getting the record straight, the large number of serious contract failures which have occurred where private cleaning companies and private enterprise have been involved in the National Health Service? There are a large number of them, and I hope that he will recognise that.

Mr. Fowler: I am not sure that there are a large number of them. However, if the hon. Gentleman is asking whether we have the same standards for inside and outside contracting, the answer must be absolutely yes. There is no question of seeking or allowing a lower standard from outside. My point about Stanley Royd was not concerned with any particular method in the sense of the difference between inside and outside contracting. I was saying that it is quite clear that management and supervision had broken down in the hospital. It was not just at kitchen or hospital level, but throughout the whole structure of management.

We are now well advanced in the implementation of the Griffiths report. I think that it is only too easy for the basic message to be obscured or misrepresented. Let me explain what we are aiming to do in introducing the recommended changes. As the report said, the National Health Service is about delivering services to people. It is not about organising systems for their own sake; it is about securing the best deal for patients and the community within available resources, the best value for the taxpayer and the best motivation for staff.

The fundamental importance of the public and patient provides a starting point for all our work. Our aim is to strengthen and improve the service to the public. It is not in the interests of the patient that the NHS should be run ineffectively. Our thrust is to strengthen management and give it a clearer sense of purpose and the means to achieve that purpose.

Dr. M. S. Miller (East Kilbride) *rose*——

Mr. Fowler: Please let me continue for a while.

The Griffiths report also identified the need for general management in the NHS. Its absence meant that there was basically no clearly identifiable officer in charge at regional, district or hospital level. I regard that as a basic defect. There was no driving force seeking and accepting personal responsibility for getting plans carried out. The establishment of general management means that at long last there is an answer to the question of who is in charge.

An essential part of the general manager's position is that he should accept personal responsibility for getting things done. Clearly—and I accept what my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East and the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, North-East said—the general manager cannot be a one-man band. Personal responsibility must also be placed on the other staff within the management structure, so an important part of the reshaping of management is the clear definition of the tasks that each person must carry out and the placing of personal responsibility on the individual for carrying them out.

Equally essential are arrangements for holding individuals and authorities accountable for what they do. Before the Griffiths report we had begun the process of sharpening up accountability within the service by introducing reviews of regions by Ministers to monitor performance against agreed objectives. That process has now been developed and extended further.

Dr. Miller: Are we going far enough in this respect? Have we not fallen into the same difficulty as we fell into some time ago in our manufacturing industry where people thought that the only thing to do was to manage and to administer, but we did not have enough engineers who understood the processes to do the administering and managing? Are we not in danger of perpetrating that on the National Health Service? The whole sphere of medicine is not as it was when I graduated. It has become an extremely complicated matter. There are technological and scientific advances, the purpose and operation of which must be understood by the people who are doing the managing. Should we not be going further and having people doing the managing who understand the processes?

Mr. Fowler: To some extent, I agree with the hon. Gentleman. I think that we are at the start of the process. Many of the general managers who have been appointed have come from within the Health Service. Clearly, some administrators have become general managers, but also there have been many doctors and nurses. A minority have come from outside. It is an important minority because it brings fresh perception and management skills to the Health Service. To make the parallel that the hon.

[Mr. Fowler]

Gentleman is making, I think that over the coming years we will need to develop the management skills within the Health Service. We shall have to put more emphasis upon management education and training. To develop good management is not against the interests of the Health Service. It must be in the interests of the Health Service. If I can get no other point accepted, I hope that the House will accept that one.

Dr. Marek: As of 21 January 1986, two of the 14 regional managers and 41 of the 191 district general managers appointed came from outside the NHS — a large number. We are worried that, if the nursing staff has to report, the only person to whom a sister on night duty could turn would be someone with a degree in business administration. Will the right hon. Gentleman comment on that problem?

Mr. Fowler: I think that the hon. Gentleman will accept that, whatever the background of a particular manager, the line for providing professional advice will still continue. That must happen.

The majority of general managers have come from within the Health Service. Of the 676 managers at all levels—regional, district and unit—more than 100 are doctors, 400 are from administration, more than 55 are nurses and 81 are from outside. I am glad that 81 people have come from outside because I believe that is an important aspect of management improvement. It is wrong simply to believe that all the management skills of the Health Service now exist in the Health Service. We want to achieve a reasonable balance. In some ways, I should like more nurses to be appointed, especially at unit level, although more nurses have been appointed at unit level than at any other level. Whatever else has happened, there has been a reasonable range. There has not been a mere redrawing, renaming or relabelling exercise, as we have sometimes had in the past.

Of course I accept that there has been some concern —it has already been expressed in the debate—about the impact of these changes in management on professional staff, especially nurses. I understand that, at a time of change, people are apprehensive about how it will affect them. We shall listen carefully to what is said in the debate.

I shall seek to put straight at least some of the points on record. The Government have the highest regard for nurses and for their contribution to the Health Service. We are employing more nurses than ever before. I believe that changes, such as the introduction of the Nurses and Midwives Pay Review Body, have been widely welcomed by the profession. I wholly agree that nurses should play a full part in the management of the Health Service, both as managers and as professional advisers to general managers and health authorities.

In all, 55 nurses have obtained general manager posts, mostly at unit level. However, a much larger number of nurses are widening their management experience as a result of the changes now occurring. Many senior nurses now combine their professional role with a wider task, such as that of personnel director or director of patient services. The introduction of general management is giving staff of all backgrounds opportunities to show what they can do.

On the provision of nursing advice to district health authorities, I have insisted that every authority should continue to designate one nurse as its principal nursing adviser, that that nurse must be at an appropriately senior level, and that, in that role, he or she must have guaranteed access to the authority. Part of that responsibility will continue to be the monitoring of professional standards of nursing care throughout that authority. The titles by which that nurse is designated vary across the country. Some of the posts may no longer be called chief nursing officer, but every district level authority has its own chief nursing adviser. As I mentioned earlier, some of the chief nursing advisers undertake an additional management role. We have told authorities to ensure that the professional advisory function is the main responsibility and that the chief nurse has adequate support to discharge it.

As far as units are concerned, it is important to be clear about the position from which we are moving. Previously, the director of nursing services answered both professionally and managerially to the district nursing officer. Clearly, with the introduction of general managers at unit level, that arrangement cannot and, indeed, should not continue, and the line of responsibility should go to the manager of the unit. The manager has the responsibility for getting things done, but he leads a multidisciplinary team and he must, of course, respect the professional competence of each professional in the team.

Our approach to management structures has differed from the one adopted in the early 1970s when the Government sought to impose patterns and a blueprint throughout the United Kingdom. Our approach to management structures has been to allow health authorities the flexibility and freedom they need to make arrangements that best suit local circumstances. That is a deliberate policy. It is a sensible policy because we want to avoid centrally imposed bureaucratic structures. Districts and, even more so, units vary enormously across the country. District health authorities are best placed to devise the right solutions for them. We have insisted that, in doing so, they should consult professional staff interests at every turn.

My hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East raised with me the role of the NHS Management Board. That is not an additional layer of bureaucracy. Griffiths recommended that within the Department and within the existing statutory structure there should be a management board. That means that Ministers remain responsible for policy but now have the support of a board inside the Department which is dedicated full time to better management of the health authorities' services.

The board, therefore, brings the Department's role in management of health authorities into clearer focus. Its aim is to cut down unnecessary intervention from the centre. I assume that we all want that. Its aim is also to bring new skills to bear on those tasks which must be led from the centre — such as personnel, financial management, procurement, estate management and information technology—to give leadership to the health authorities by bringing together people from the private sector, the Department and the NHS itself—they are all represented on the board—and to get better services and better value for money from the health authorities by regular monitoring and review of their performance against those objectives.

Mr. Pavitt: Has not that job description borne out the point made by the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Norris), that another tier of management has been inserted? There are various sections within the NHS—for example, personnel. Instead of those sections having direct access to the Secretary of State, another tier will intervene.

Mr. Fowler: That is a fundamental misconception of how the DHSS is organised. There is a focus now where there was not one previously. The functions remain very much the same but they are focused and the Management Board will report to the Secretary of State. That means more effective management instead of the rather ad hoc system by which, I concede, we did things in the past. The board is introducing greater professionalism into the running of the Health Service at departmental level. It would be extremely curious if, having asked health authorities to do that, the DHSS were not prepared to do it as well.

I believe that we have made significant progress towards improving National Health Service management. I accept that there is still a great deal left to be done because I believe that we are, in many ways, at the beginning of this process. I think that a contribution has been made through the appointment of general managers, the extension of the accountability review system down to hospital level, and the institution of the new system of performance reviews. In the end, what the House and the public want to see are results—results in terms of better services for patients and better value for money.

Clearly, it will be some time before the full benefit can be delivered from all the changes that we have made and are currently making. I would claim that the results are already coming through. This year, we are treating more patients than ever before.

At the same time the National Health Service manpower is being properly controlled. In direct response to the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East, the proportion of front-line staff, especially doctors and nurses, is increasing. That, again, is one of the things which should be achieved from a manpower policy.

This year we expect to achieve improvements in efficiency which will release something like £120 million for use in the service. Moreover, I have just approved the health authorities' plans for the coming financial year. As part of our arrangements for management in the Health Service, we now require health authorities to draw up short-term programmes every year. Those programmes set out their plans for developing services in the coming year. I have now approved the plans for 1986-87. Those plans show that health authorities are planning a significant expansion in services. They will treat more patients, make more advanced forms of treatment available, and continue the progress already being made towards caring for people in the community. The plans build on the progress that has been made in recent years.

Since 1978-79, an extra 17·5 per cent. in real terms has already been provided for hospital and community health services. In the coming year an extra £650 million—6·7 per cent.—is being provided against forecast general inflation of 4·5 per cent.

It is also significant that the steps that we have taken to improve management are now beginning to pay off in this respect. Health authorities are planning to generate cash savings of £150 million in the coming year through a wide variety of value-for-money measures. Those measures include energy conservation, better management of supplies, and competitive tendering for support services. All of that £150 million will be retained by health authorities.

Health authorities will also be making better use of manpower. In the next year, overall numbers are unlikely to change much, but again there will be an increase in staff working directly with patients. Most of those staff, to stress the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East, will be nurses.

The progress being made in developing the services can perhaps best be illustrated in three ways. First, total capital spending will be over £900 million in the coming year compared with £365 million in 1978-79. Next year's figures include an estimated £130 million of receipts from the sales of land and property which the health authorities will be able to retain.

Secondly, we shall continue the move towards community care for the mentally handicapped and other groups of patients. That means, for example, that in the northern region, by July 1986 only four children will still be in mental handicap hospitals, and in South-East Thames region, no children will be in such hospitals by March 1987. That is entirely good news and should be welcomed on both sides of the House.

Thirdly, all regions are also planning important developments in their acute services. They expect the total number of patients treated to rise significantly over the next 12 months and to make progress in the provision of priority services. For example, coronary artery surgery and renal dialysis will be expanded, there will be more hip and joint replacement operations, and a children's bone marrow transplant unit will open in Bristol.

Whatever differences there may be in the House about Health Service policy, one fact remains. The aim must be to use resources to their maximum effect. The Health Service is about providing the best possible services for patients and good management is about achieving that aim. It is not some alien concept. It is a common sense policy aimed at providing the best possible service, for patients, and as such it deserves the support of the House.

11.4 am

Mr. Michael Meadowcroft (Leeds, West): Like other hon. Members, I congratulate the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Norris) on his choice of subject today. I am not sure whether his description of the pressures put upon him to enter the ballot are quite accurate, knowing the hon. Gentleman's propensity for tongue in cheek. Nevertheless, I am glad that he did enter the ballot, and chose this subject.

The hon. Member for Oxford, East, is one of the best Conservative Members at walking the tightrope. At times during his speech he wobbled too far towards the Government, but with a few variations of pace towards the end of his speech, he almost reached the opposite pillar. We welcome that as well.

I also enjoyed being part of the Select Committee on Social Services with the hon. Member for Oxford, East, and the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, North-East (Mrs. Renée Short), who spoke earlier, when we produced the report on Griffiths. I still think that the conclusions and recommendations of the report stand up to examination in the light of the experience so far.

[Mr. Michael Meadowcroft]

It would be possible to summarise the present position with Griffiths as a report conceived in hope, born in doubt, and nurtured with some worry. The representations that all of us have had today will demonstrate that. The hon. Member for Oxford, East quoted a popular song at the end of his speech. There is another popular song which I think that the Government sometimes employ too much, and that is "Wishing will make it so". I sometimes think that the Government embarked on their proposals with that song in mind. I will refrain from giving hon. Members the refrain.

Today's representations are important, as they tend to come mainly from the nursing sector, and the particular focus of the debate has been on the problems faced by nurses. However, if we concentrate solely on that matter, we would ignore some of the more general aspects of management and the control and accountability which are more fundamental to this topic.

Nevertheless, the facts are that, so far, very few nurses have been appointed. Indeed, it is not surprising that the proportion of nurses appointed as one goes down the scale from region, to district, to unit, will be greater. It is also not surprising, alas, in this male-dominated world of ours, that the proportion of men appointed at the nursing level is higher than the proportion of men within the nursing profession. That is a commentary on the present position.

The feeling in the nursing profession is summarised in a letter to me from an official of the Royal College of Nursing in the city of Leeds in my constituency. In that letter I received a copy of the Seacroft and Killingbeck hospital unit general manager's proposals, which say:

"As you can see, there is no one between the Charge Nurse and the U.G.M. other than Consultants, so that money could be allocated to medical propositions while the staff closest to the patients have no line of complaint."

That is the fear in the nursing profession. I am sure that the Secretary of State would say that there are lines of complaint which may not necessarily be within the nursing profession, but it may be too narrow a view to suggest that; or the Secretary of State may say that the designated nurse adviser is the person to go to.

It is the feeling that is important, because so often when one deals with a large organisation and personal services appearance is as important as reality. Unless people feel that they are part and parcel of the system, they are unlikely to accept the mechanics of that system. The feeling is that no one understands the problems that nurses already have. Therefore, there is a depth of feeling that what is happening is dangerously wrong at the point at which the service is delivered to the patient.

Another great concern of the nursing profession is about what they regard as the hasty amalgamation of units. I accept what the hon. Member for Oxford, East said, that to amalgamate is not necessarily bad, and that there are occasions, with changing circumstances and perceptions of care, when to amalgamate into larger units may be better. On the other hand, the opposite is equally true: to amalgamate for the sake of it may not improve things at all. The figures show a drop in amalgamations of almost a third, from 850 to 600. That is alarming.

That means that there will be a lot more split sites and more shared equipment. We all know the worst example of that—someone who thought that he could share a defibrillator between separated units. That piece of equipment was peculiarly required in an emergency. I suspect that changes on that scale occur in every organisation, whatever the Government may wish to say to the contrary. The problem with nurses is that they are the most vulnerable and open to exploitation by management systems. During the NHS strike, the nurses kept the service going, stood up to the pressures on them, and were most open to exploitation from outside.

I hope that the Minister will take on board the feelings of those within the nursing profession, and not simply counter them by saying, "The structure is there and the people are in place to cope with the need," but will somehow inspire confidence in the proposals so that nurses feel part and parcel of the structure.

The two most important matters with which Griffiths was said to deal were how one made a decision when there were disagreements about which policy should be followed, and how to ensure speedy action. Every system must have a way of sorting out disagreements, and not all systems will prove to have speedy action. Sometimes we look for speedy action rather than seek to understand what the action should be. There is no point in speedy action for its own sake. The electorate, for example, wants less talk and more action. Throughout the decades, our policies in housing with excessive action without proper discussion about what we wanted were disastrously wrong. Speedy action of itself is not necessarily a criterion to follow.

I stress that these are not exclusively management problems. To try to contain them in a box marked "management" is dangerous and contrary to the sort of service that we wish to develop. The management of such delicate and important services, for example, involves accountability and decisions about resource allocation which cannot be contained within a unit, district or region. Those decisions are taken, bearing in mind the power to raise the funds as well as to spend them. It is essentially a political problem within the NHS, and every political problem requires a political solution. Problems of politics cannot be resolved mechanically. The danger is that we separate the problem and say that it is a management problem, which I do not believe to be true.

If there was a proper political solution to the structure of the NHS, management decisions would follow much more easily. The separation of responsibility between the Government and the NHS, and local government and social services has demonstrated that there is far less linkage between the different services and separate authorities than there should be. We have joint consultative arrangements and many other structures which detract from the perception of management being an entirely separate body. That type of political problem causes great difficulty.

Mr. Pavitt: Is the hon. Gentleman advocating that reorganisation number four should take the whole NHS into local government, as is the case with education?

Mr. Meadowcroft: I shall come to that. I am not in the business merely of providing problems.

The root of the problem from the Government's point of view is their obsession not merely with management but with control. They adhere to the fallacy that central administration from London to the regions, districts and units is somehow efficient of itself. I do not believe for one moment that that is true. The problems of scale are immense and contrary to the efficiency of a service and the

sensitivity with which it is administered. I am pleased that the motion carefully talks about efficiency, effectiveness and sympathetic management. Those three characteristics must go together. The desire for central control is dangerous if one seeks sympathetic management.

The Government are obsessed with uniformity, and think that if there are to be general managers in one area there must be general managers everywhere. The hon. Member for Oxford, East said that the problem with the renewal of a fixed contract depends on whether one's face fits and whether one is popular. The same is true of the chairman of the health authority, and that these are important and powerful considerations in deciding whether to reappoint him. I do not believe that that is so. The hon. Gentleman drew attention to the changing role of authority members, and I am glad that at present he is not being too distracted. It is important to consider the implications and knock-on effects of changes in management.

Similarly, what happens with district authority chairmen is important to the whole structure because it affects the way in which the chain is implemented all the way down. In my region three of the district health authority chairs have unfortunately not been reappointed.

Mrs. Renée Short: The hon. Gentleman is lucky that it is only three.

Mr. Meadowcroft: The same problem was dealt with in *The Guardian* yesterday. The chairman of the west Lambeth health authority, who resigned, was quoted as saying:

"I was told by two senior Conservatives that Central Office was vetting all candidates in London and the South-east for the chairmanship of health authorities because they wanted a smooth ride during the run-up to the general election."

That is not conducive to sympathetic management. If a chairman is worried about whether he will be reappointed, how on earth can he deal properly with staff management? The position is intolerable, and is focused particularly on management. In Yorkshire, for example, the person chosen by the other chairs to be the district representative has now been set aside. It means that if one says unpopular things, one's future may be in doubt. That is dangerous.

I do not think that the problem involves either general management or consensus, as if the two were mutually exclusive. Any general manager who does not have a large measure of consensus is doomed to fail, and any consensus arrangement which does not have a way of resolving disagreements with some efficiency is also doomed to fail. It is extremely artificial to pretend that the two are mutually exclusive.

Similarly, the question of defining efficiency is artificial. Some people may define a system as efficient, if it is run on military principles. Indeed, some people from the military have been appointed. Stories are told with amusement and mild horror about the way in which some ex-military general managers sit down with something like a chess board and try to move the pieces about without understanding the consequences. The hon. Gentleman said that it was useful to have a director who knew where the factory was, but I always understood that the managing director knew where the factory was. If the general manager is not in tune and aware of where everything is and of the different pressures within the system, no amount of efficient management in the Government's terms will solve the problem.

The heart of the problem is that, if one separates the power to tax from the power to spend, one will always have problems. Strangely enough, one of the key documents about politics in the NHS was produced by the right hon. Member for South Down (Mr. Powell), following his experience as Minister of Health. Two short quotations from "Medicine and Politics" are relevant. The right hon. Gentleman said:

"the constitutional principle (is) that the proceeds of taxation must be expended by those who are responsible to the representatives of the taxpayers."

He said of the boards that are appointed by the Government:

"They are, directly or indirectly, the Minister's appointees. They must obey his instructions. They have no independent authority derived from any other source, such as a local electorate, which could put them in direct relationship with the public. They have, for practical purposes, no independent sources of revenue, but spend what the Minister allocates to them."

That is the difference.

The right hon. Gentleman also compared the NHS unfavourably with local government social services, and spotted the point that the latter are locally accountable for the service and must stand up in a public forum and defend their decisions because they both raise and spend the money. Once that is separated, as is the case with health authorities, no amount of obsession with Griffiths and efficient management will get us out of the problem.

If we are to deal with the problems of accountability and uniformity, different general experiments must be adapted to different methods. The Select Committee recommended that there should be some experimentation before we launch the report's recommendations everywhere, and to see what advantages there are. Why is there uniformity in the regions rather than variation? Why can we not have experiments within the district health authorities with local government? The district health authorities are now conterminous with local county boundaries. Uniformity is not displayed in every other service.

When we were debating the fluoridation of water, we discovered that, for example, in Scotland water is not controlled by appointed water boards but is part of the regional councils. If it can be done elsewhere, why can it not be done in the Health Service? There do not have to be general managers everywhere.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security (Mr. Ray Whitney): I am listening carefully to what the hon. Member is saying and I am trying to understand the recommendations he is seeking to put forward. He is suggesting that the power to tax and the power to spend ideally should not be separated. He is complaining that we are seeking—I do not accept it—to control from the centre. Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that there should be a local tax paid to some sort of local health authority? Does he wish to devolve local taxation and break up the Health Service into separate entities?

Mr. Meadowcroft: The Minister stopped me in my purple passage. I do not want to see regional assemblies. I want to see regional authorities with the power to tax and the power to control services which are clearly regional.

We already have regional government in Britain. In Leeds, there is a massive tower block, City house, which contains the civil servants who are the regional government for Yorkshire and Humberside. They are controlled from London, but I want the control to be in

[Mr. Meadowcroft]

Yorkshire and Humberside. There is no intrinsic reason why one cannot have regional government in Britain with the power to tax exactly where the power of spending is centred. That gets around the problem of control and the problem of uniformity.

The democratically elected, accountable authorities will be able to decide what they want. Management in a truly elected forum would have the immense advantage of multi-purpose authority, not confined solely to the National Health Service, however large, but linked to other personal social services, one that has links with other nursing services within the local authority. That would thus enable us to have management which, in the words of the hon. Member for Oxford, East, is effective, efficient and sympathetic. That is what I wish to achieve, but I suspect that it will not be achieved by simply isolating the management in the way the Government have done.

11.22 am

Mr. Roger Sims (Chislehurst): I believe that the Griffiths report and its adoption are landmarks in the National Health Service. Like any other organisation, the NHS cannot stand still, and it must develop.

The NHS is big business, both in the sense of the number of employees and in the sense of its budget. I am sure that Griffiths was right when he said that the NHS needed management structures and techniques. The NHS is not big business in the sense that it is a profit-making concern, such as Marks and Spencer, a petroleum company or, indeed, the grocery company from which Mr. Griffiths came. However, the NHS is certainly comparable with those organisations in size and complexity. It therefore needs management.

The National Health Service is basically a health service or, perhaps more accurately, an illness, disease and injury service. It provides medical and nursing care, but it also provides catering, laundering, cleaning and general administration services, and one has to consider also the financial aspects of its work. Each hospital can be said to be a community in itself.

Any organisation of such complexity needs management. This House, a complex organisation, has a board of management. The National Health Service is larger than many industrial and commercial concerns, but it is not different in its needs. The NHS covers many disciplines. As in commerce and industry, management can be drawn from a wide range of disciplines. In commerce and industry some engineers make good managers, but some do not. The same applies to accountants, marketing men and so on. Surely it is sensible in the NHS that managers should be drawn from a wide range of disciplines—doctors, nurses, pathologists, treasurers and administrators.

We must realise that not only are we introducing a new philosophy to a wide range of people—many of whom are rugged individuals—but we are introducing new ideas to people who will be fundamentally affected by their implementation. The prospects of people in the National Health Service are at stake in the way in which Griffiths is implemented. Naturally people are concerned about whether to apply for management posts, or to accept that they will find themselves answering to managers with whom it will be congenial to work.

What is surprising is not that there have been some grumbles and problems in implementing the Griffiths report, but that they have been so few. It was inevitable that there would be problems and misunderstanding.

Nurses, or, to be more precise, the Royal College of Nursing—I do not know how representative the college is on this issue—has been waging a campaign which appears to show that when the managers have been appointed at various levels, nurses have not been appointed. That is what the RCN is complaining about. When one begins to ask questions, one discovers that relatively few nurses have actually applied for management positions. In fact, in a number of instances nurses have been appointed to management positions. Although the RCN claims that there is a problem, it admits that it is perhaps only in certain areas and that it is not a national issue.

I do not dispute that nurses can be good managers, but it seems unnecessary to assume that every manager should be a nurse. As I understand it, even though nurses may not hold a management position, they are represented on management groups. Nurses have written to me in support of the campaign. I have asked them specifically whether they can give any instances where nurses are not able to make an adequate contribution to management decisions. If they had been able to furnish me with such details, I would have been happy to present them to the Minister. I can only say that I am still waiting for that information.

I do not say that the RCN campaign is without justification, but I think that its campaign has been grossly overplayed. I contrast the RCN with the British Medical Association, with which I have from time to time crossed swords. The BMA has not always been satisfied on the issue of management. It believes, quite understandably, that doctors should have an input in management decisions. However, it insists that the management structures are correct.

Each district management board, writes the BMA,

"or the equivalent body which has succeeded the District Management Team, should include three doctors: a hospital consultant, a general practitioner and a community physician. Proposed structures which were wrong have been challenged by the BMA. Over 50 structures were initially unacceptable; most have been modified and the BMA continues to ensure that the remainder are satisfactory. Similar monitoring is being carried out at unit level."

That is a sensible way in which to proceed.

It is far too soon for us to pass judgment on Griffiths. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, we are only at the beginning of the process, but it is useful for us to watch developments carefully. It is one thing to monitor developments, and another to interfere. The Government, having introduced the Griffiths recommendations, must let the health authorities get on with it. Naturally, my right hon. Friend will want to give guidance on how it should be done, but, having given that guidance, it should be left at that. I speak with some feeling because my local health authority of Bromley took the lead in contracting out for various services, but then found itself in dispute with the Department when it started to do things in its own way.

The Secretary of State has overall responsibility for the NHS, but I urge him to leave district health authorities to get on with the job, to organise themselves and to make appointments in accordance with local needs and conditions and with minimal interference. Meanwhile, it is valuable that the House has the opportunity to discuss

these matters, and it is indebted to my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Norris) for giving us that opportunity.

11.32 am

Mr. Willie W. Hamilton (Fife, Central): I congratulate the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Norris) on initiating this debate. He obviously speaks with much authority and experience in these matters, and I detected in his well-informed speech considerable reserve about the Government's proposals in this context. No Labour Member would complain about that.

We have been told that the Secretary of State has other appointments and has had to leave, and we understand that. However, I object, as I have done on previous occasions, to his selective use of facts to persuade the country as whole as to the improvement of the quality and extent of Health Service provision over the past five or six years. The hon. Member widened the debate to make party political points, and I too want to widen the debate to make my riposte.

I objected very much to Secretary of State's reference to the "skill and dedication" of all staff. That point is made repeatedly, but it does not butter any parsnips with the people who are on the receiving end. The low pay, among vast sections of employees in the Health Service, is well known. Indeed, when the Prime Minister talks about the incidence of income tax, she refers to a nurse on £140 a week having at least 30 per cent. of that deducted in tax. She cites the nurse as a low-paid employee, so it is no good talking about the skill and dedication of these people unless one is prepared to link that with adequate pay.

Mrs. Edwina Currie (Derbyshire, South) *rose*——

Mr. Hamilton: I shall give way later on, because I now want to give some specific examples.

The fine words used by the Secretary of State are far removed from what we see happening all round the country—crumbling hospitals, peeling paint, inadequate maintenance, closing wards and hospitals — all these things are happening, and everybody knows it. The specific point of the debate is the Griffiths report. The House knows that I am sponsored as a Member by the Confederation of Health Service Employees. *[Interruption.]* The Minister need not say "Ah" as if that is a great revelation. I reveal it whenever I speak in such a debate.

COHSE warned about the dangers of the Griffiths propositions about two years ago, but not until the Royal College of Nursing began its campaign did the Ministry see fit to send a circular letter to hon. Members, dated 21 January 1986. That letter was designed, if not to rubbish, at least to defuse and downgrade the nursing unions' campaign against the ways in which the Griffiths report recommendations were being implemented.

That letter was for Members to circulate in case they got representations from the RCN. If the hon. Member for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims) got a copy, no doubt he sent it to the unions. He would have been wise not do so because that letter sought to show, through the usual jargon, that the whole purpose of the exercise was to give patients a better service. Always, when the Government interfere and meddle with the Health Service, in one way or another, they end with a certain expression — it is all designed "to give the patients a better service".

The second aim was to give the patients an increased voice in and influence on the standard and services in our hospitals. We have heard not a murmur about the second claim in the debate so far, and it is difficult to see how Griffiths and its implementation would achieve that aim, even supposing that it achieved the first. I dispute that it would achieve the first either. However, the implications of the letter seem to be that the RCN and COHSE do not want to give patients those things, or that the machinery that exists does not enable them to do so. That is absurd, insulting and inaccurate.

The way in which the Griffiths proposals are working has the nurses — particularly the nurses, but also the doctors — angry and unhappy, to use no stronger language. The implementation is further forward in England and Wales than it is in Scotland. As a Scottish Member, it was with some trepidation that I decided to speak in the debate because, although Griffiths did not refer to Scotland, the Secretary of State for Scotland made it clear at the outset that he would follow the general propositions outlined by Griffiths for management. Therefore, Scotland is to some extent lagging behind England in the implementation of the proposals.

I shall now examine why unhappiness and anxiety exist among the nurses and the doctors. It is not because the nurses have any selfish self-interest. I suspect that, to some extent, the doctors are motivated by that, but the idea that the nurses are peddling their self-interest is too laughable even to contemplate. They are worried and anxious because they suspect—I put it no higher than that—that their role is being eroded and downgraded, and the management of health care is being put into other hands.

I referred to the proposition that the Confederation of Health Service Employees, my sponsoring union, put forward in November 1983. It predicted then that nurses would be squeezed out of NHS management and that the voice of nurses would be ignored as the Government installed hand-picked managers to carry out the Government's plans. The so-called new and thrusting, super-efficient, cost-conscious managers have already brought about a situation in which it is envisaged that there will be no nursing managers above ward sister grade and that directors of nursing education will be responsible to somebody in the personnel department.

Most of the top jobs have already gone either to existing NHS administrators or to outside business men who have been baited with salaries of up to £45,000 a year. As has repeatedly been stated in the debate, only a small proportion of those jobs have gone to doctors, nurses or medical officers. The figures were given in the *Health and Social Services Journal* of 12 September 1985 and they were quoted by the hon. Member for Oxford, East.

The claim has been made repeatedly that there are singularly few women, if any, among them. I do not know whether the hon. Member for Oxford, East has the exact figures of how many women applied, but the fact that they do not apply shows that there is something wrong, somewhere, with the system. The promised good mix of experience from the private sector and the public sector has not been realised. Although the Secretary of State for Social Services claimed that such a mix has occurred, it is minimal. Over 80 per cent. of the top jobs have gone to existing top NHS staff, and four fifths of that total have gone to administrators.

Interestingly enough, nearly six out of every 100 jobs have gone to ex-military personnel. The health authorities

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cannot attract good quality men from private business because of the salary levels offered. The hon. Member for Oxford, East said that one of the reasons why some men will not come into the NHS is that the health authorities cannot match the salaries that they are already getting in private industry. But the military man, the Royal Air Force man, the Army man of 50 who comes out of the services with a good pension presents no pay problem. He already has a moonlighting job. No, it is not a moonlighting job, but he has another income. Therefore, he can afford to take the relatively low salary that the health authorities can offer.

No problems are involved, either, in transferring such people's pensions from the private to the public sector. However, even if the health authorities have followed the correct procedures, a meddling Minister has vetoed some appointments for reasons that have not always been made clear. In the meantime, many health authorities have abolished the post of director of nursing as well as the post of chief nursing officer. This means that nurses will no longer manage nursing and that they will be excluded from decision making.

I wish to say a few words about Scotland. I make no complaint about the absence this morning of a Scottish Minister, because I gave no warning that I intended to speak in this debate. However, it is worth putting it on record that very few Scots believe the Tory claim that the National Health Service is safe in their hands. The vast majority of Scots are deeply suspicious of any proposed reorganisation by the Government, whether in the Health Service, local government or any other sphere.

The Government's claim that the aims of the Griffiths proposals are better care for patients and more participation by them in decision taking gives rise to hoots of derisive disbelief in Scotland. Nobody denies that public money must be spent efficiently and with adequate accountability at all levels. There will be consensus about that both in this House and outside Parliament. The National Health Service cannot be excluded from the exercise of the disciplines and restraints that ensure that those aims are achieved. However, it is interesting—the Scots have commented on this—that the propositions relating to National Health Service management came from Mr. Griffiths, who is the deputy chairman and managing director of a big supermarket, Sainsburys.

The reaction of the Scottish TUC is typical of the rest of the country: that we simply cannot look at the turnover of patients in hospitals in the same way as we look at the turnover of tins of baked beans in a supermarket like Sainsburys. Nurses cannot be treated, either, as though they were of as little account as shop assistants in Sainsburys or Marks and Spencer, although that seems to be happening. The National Health Service is not a supermarket. It is concerned with providing the best possible service to patients. That cannot always be measured in money terms. It cannot always be shown in a profit and loss account. It never is and it never can be. It is not concerned with those things.

The National Health Service as a whole is a complex web of interacting disciplines, skills and interests. The present structure might sound conservative, but it allows those different interests to be represented and heard. It is absurd to pretend that one can select a general manager at each level and expect him gladly and willingly to be accepted by doctors, nurses, technicians, administrators and ancillary workers. That is the meaning of consensus. So many complex interests are at work that this can be organised only on the basis of consensus. To appoint a general manager at each and every level makes the achievement of consensus, in my view, that much more difficult.

A few weeks ago — for the first time, to my knowledge — the Scottish area of the British Medical Association invited Labour Members of Parliament to a working dinner at Tavistock square at which they voiced their grave misgivings about these matters. There was an element of special pleading, but they made the important point that the people who know best how the National Health Service works, what makes it tick and how to achieve maximum consensus and co-operation are the people at the sharp end—those who know it from the inside. The view was expressed, which we accepted, that when they are in position the general managers of Scottish health boards will have, among their other responsibilities, an overall responsibility for strategic objectives and allocating resources. In discharging those functions those general managers will be accountable to the Scottish Home and Health Department in Edinburgh and not to the local health boards.

Since the appointments are also within the effective control of the Government, it means, in effect, that the control of the Health Service will effectively be transferred to the Government as, increasingly, local government has been transferred to the Government. That, along with the various other reconstructions of the Health Service over the past decade, make it understandable that morale at all levels in the Health Service is at its lowest since the inception of the Health Service. Can anyone wonder, at a time when young City slickers can obtain salaries of £100,000-plus and conscientious skilled hospital workers are paid in peanuts?

I return to the claim made by the Secretary of State about the skill and dedication of the workers in the Health Service. A trained hospital cardiographer, after 34 years at the same hospital, earns a basic salary of £98·63 a week. That is at the top of the scale, after 10 years of service. Going through the range of ancillary workers' pay—I see that my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) had an Adjournment debate earlier this morning on the same matter—we find basic wage rates as little as £67 a week before stoppages. A dental technician starts at £5,636 a year—£108 a week gross. Medical laboratory scientific staff start at £115 a week, or thereabouts. A medical secretary receives £89 a week. A general staff nurse—the linchpin of the ward, highly trained and hard working—receives basic pay of £115 a week gross. It costs the Secretary of State not a penny to compliment them on their skill and dedication. It is the pay scales that count.

I quote in conclusion the 14th report of the Committee of Public Accounts on the control of nursing manpower. On page ix, paragraph 22 says:

> "We were particularly concerned about the high rate of loss to the NHS of both qualified nurses and those under training. In addition to the obvious loss of the value for money, the prospect of a future shortage of nurses, both qualified and in training, is a most serious matter of direct importance to patients."

That is very different from the picture painted by the Secretary of State today.

Paragraph 15 of the report says:

"the current shortages in the mentally ill and mentally handicapped areas . . . have occurred despite overall increases in numbers, and that some hospitals are finding it difficult to maintain standards."

That is the reality of the situation today and, much as we want increased efficiency and more steps taken to ensure that we receive value for money at all stages — that applies in every department throughout the economy; there is nothing novel about that — I am of the view, which I think is shared by many people throughout Britain, not least in Scotland, that those ends will not be achieved by the Government's proposals.

11.53 am

Mrs. Edwina Currie (Derbyshire, South): May I add my congratulations to those of my hon. Friends to my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Norris) not only on winning the ballot but on seeking to introduce a subject of such considerable importance of which he has such expertise? My hon. Friend has come a long way since we were at school together in Liverpool. These days he is very much the sort of person from whom one would buy a used car. Indeed, I hope to do so soon.

It has been mentioned that my hon. Friend served on the Select Committee on Social Services, but I believe that his expertise on the Health Service comes from his long membership of a health authority. Indeed, I think that he is still vice-chairman of the health authority on which he has served with much distinction for a number of years. In that, I imagine that he would regard himself as lucky. I always feel sorry that I had to give up being chairman of my health authority, as it was an office of profit, in order to come to the House, and I have often missed it.

I should like to nail another argument that we have heard today. The hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Meadowcroft) has now left the Chamber, leaving the alliance Benches in their true glory — completely unrepresented — but that is nothing new. The hon. Gentleman talked about uniformity, but I did not quite understand his argument. He rightly said that as the health authorities spend taxpayers' money, those who run them should be responsible to the Minister. To me, that is an argument for uniformity throughout the country. The hon. Gentleman then went on to say that uniformity was a bad thing and that we should have regional boards, which is what I thought we had already. That was an argument against uniformity. The hon. Gentleman cannot have it both ways, although perhaps as a member of the alliance party—or parties—that is what he wants.

The hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. Hamilton) referred to low-paid staff, especially nurses. If he is as concerned as he says — and as I am sure he is — he should jump on to two other important bandwagons. The first, on which many of us are trying to ride, seeks to reduce the amount of tax and national insurance contributions that low-paid people have to pay so that they can take home what they earn. I believe that the hon. Gentleman's figures related to take-home pay. He should be aware that those people earn a little more than that and we should like them to have that money.

The other bandwagon seeks to improve the family income supplement and family credit system. It does no credit to the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) that he has consistently voted against those proposals in the Standing Committee on the Social Security Bill. The proposals are intended not only to bring in a more generous family support scheme for low-paid people in work who have families, but to ensure that the money is paid in their pay packets far more quickly than at present. I welcome that scheme, and I believe that it will be of the greatest help to low-paid staff.

The hon. Member for Fife, Central speaks for the Confederation of Health Service Employees. I put it to him that hospital cleaners will never be well paid, but they do essential work and we should join together to ensure that they at least take home 100 per cent. of the money that they earn.

Mr. Corbyn: Why not pay them a decent wage?

Mrs. Currie: There is no point in paying them more if it simply disappears in tax.

It has been argued that Britain spends less than many other countries on its health services. I have looked at the OECD figures for percentages of GDP which were published recently. Those figures go back to 1960, but I have gone back to 1955. The percentage spent by the United Kingdom is certainly lower than that spent in other countries—about 6·2 per cent. compared with 10·8 per cent. in the United States, 9·3 per cent. in France, and so on. But even in the earliest years of the National Health Service that was so. The United Kingdom has always been behind the United States, Germany, France, Canada, Australia, Austria, Italy, and so on. Moreover, as those countries have become richer, the gap has widened. If there was ever an indictment of Britain's relative economic decline in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, it is that those countries have been spending a relatively greater proportion of an absolutely larger amount on health care. Nevertheless, the United Kingdom has steadily devoted a larger percentage of GDP to health care. The figure was 3·9 per cent. in 1960; it is now 6·2 per cent.; and I am delighted to report that under the first Tory Government of the 1980s the gap between this country and the OECD average has at last begun to close.

Presumably, we are talking about public expenditure on health. I imagine that the hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) will seek to make this point in speaking for the Opposition, so I will unmake it before he starts. In fact, the United Kingdom shows up a great deal better in this respect because many countries devote a high proportion of private funds — personal, trade union and company funds — to health. Health staff in those countries, therefore, include billing, credit and invoicing staff and others who do not devote their time to the care of patients. When that is taken into account, some nine OECD countries devote a lower percentage of GDP than the United Kingdom to health care. In some cases, the percentage is far worse. Some of the countries that come out worse than the United Kingdom on this ground are eminently respectable and health-conscious nations, such as Australia, New Zealand, Finland, Japan and the United States.

Of the 10·8 per cent. of all resources devoted to health care in the United States in 1983, only 4·5 per cent. came from public resources. In Japan, 6·7 per cent. of all resources went to health care, with 5 per cent. coming from public funds. In the United Kingdom, 5·5 per cent. of the resources devoted to health care come from public funds, so we are not doing too badly. Indeed, we are doing a great deal better than some much wealthier nations.

I shall pick up some of the comments made——

Dr. M. S. Miller: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Will you rule on the difference between the copious use of notes and direct reading from a brief?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): The hon. Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie) is making use of notes, and that is in order.

Mrs. Currie: I am most surprised by the intervention of the hon. Member for East Kilbride (Dr. Miller), who knows so much about health care. I am sure that he is well aware that it is exceedingly dangerous to quote figures without having the figures in front of one. I am extremely careful to get figures right.

Many of the criticisms of the Griffiths report are well founded, and it has never been pretended that the report has all the answers. It is worth saying that not all general managers are in post. I think that my right hon. and hon. Friends in the DHSS have estimated that not all general managers will be in post until May or June. We cannot expect to have all the results of the implementation of the Griffiths report at this stage. We have been reorganising the Health Service since 1981, and those of us who were involved in that process in 1981 will recall the hours, days and months that were spent interviewing applicants for the posts that had been created. We spent many hours discussing structures, followed by further hours rediscussing the new structures. We consulted all the various interests. I remember going through six rounds of interviews for the district medical officer position. It was one of the positions that had not been filled during the 1970s. When I had authority, I knew exactly what I wanted. However, it was necessary, because the DMO was to be employed by the NHS, to pass through all the ring fences that the trade unions had forced on the NHS and which those in charge of the service had been foolish enough to accept instead of having open competition. However, we ended up with the chap we wanted.

Under the Griffiths report the whole business has started all over again. Officers have been reinterviewed, and in many instances they have been paid £2,000 or £3,000 more for undertaking exactly the same job. I cannot see that we have benefited to such an enormous extent from reorganisation after reorganisation. This is the fifth successive year of economic growth and of reorganising the Health Service.

Dr. Marek: I must ask the hon. Lady who brought about the various reorganisations. I am glad that she takes the view that the Griffiths report does not have all the answers. On 20 November 1985 the Minister for Health wrote a letter to the chairmen of regional health authorities, part of which stated:

"I do not wish to give the impression that this is a widespread problem or"—

this is the important part—

"that we would favour any derogation from the fundamentals of the Griffiths approach."

If the hon. Lady thinks that the Griffiths report does not have all the answers, perhaps she should talk to the Minister for Health.

Mrs. Currie: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will agree with me that my right hon. and hon. Friends in the DHSS are capable of answering that sort of question themselves. My views on the Griffiths report are on record in the debate on the report which took place some time ago. I said then that I doubted whether it had all the answers. It would be foolish to say that one reorganisation can produce all the answers. The reorganisation was introduced by a Government who have tried extremely hard to get things right in the Health Service and who have devoted more resources to it than any other previous Government. If that has led to any particular feelings on my part, it is a fear of reorganisation, and that fear has carried over to some of last suggestions which have been made in the dark hours of the night about education vouchers. We should beware of political panaceas. Reorganisations postpone the resolution of problems that do not go away. They make the resolution of problems harder as they divert resources and effort.

I had lunch recently with a splendid gentleman who took my place as the chairman of the Midlands health authority. I was delighted to hear that he still faces the same problems, which I felt reinforced my judgment of them, but I was sad to hear that they had not been resolved.

One of my suspicions about reorganisation and some of the arguments that have been advanced during the debate is that we tend to regard better management as an objective. Some of the comments of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State tended towards that. There is a tendency to see better management as an objective, but it is a means to an end, not an end in itself. The objective is better health care. But, as always in such debates, we seem to be concentrating on input instead of output, or the results. Good management is merely the method by which we achieve those results. The evidence of good management is the more efficient use of resources for better health. I think that we are seeing that now. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State quoted all the figures for more treatment, more patients, and so on. The fact that people are living longer and that 95 per cent. of our people have enough confidence always to use the NHS is proof of its success.

I shall give some figures to illustrate the efficiency of the NHS and of its management. They come from page 72 of *The Economist* of 8 June 1985. I hope that the hon. Member for East Kilbride will not mind if I refer, occasionally, to my papers. They show the comparative cost of transplants in the United Kingdom and the United States of America, which is, by any standard, the wealthiest country in the world and spends the most on health care. In the United Kingdom a heart transplant costs about one third of the price in the United States. A heart and lung transplant—one of the most advanced forms of surgery — also costs about one third of the price in America. The same is true of liver transplants. A pancreatic transplant is about half the cost of a similar transplant in America, as is a kidney transplant. Moreover, a bone marrow transplant probably costs five times more in America than in the United Kingdom. Thus, although the United States is devoting many more resources to health care, we achieve better health care out of the money that we are able to spend. The results speak for themselves.

I turn to the campaign run by the Royal College of Nursing and to some of the disgraceful remarks made by nurse administrators and senior nursing trade unionists about the Griffiths report and its implementation.

An advertisement in *New Society* of 24 January 1986 shows a picture of Florence Nightingale and a picture of a modern nurse. It says:

"The nurse on the left"—

splendid Miss Nightingale from Derby—

"established British nursing standards. The nurse on the right is being forced to compromise them . . . because, whilst we agree that administrators can run hospitals, we don't believe that they can run nursing. More and more Health Authorities are appointing executives: at the same time, they are depriving nurses of any meaningful management role."

There is nothing to prevent nurses from applying for such posts. But they do not do so, because they like nursing, being on the wards, and being involved in patient care. They look at the general management job and realise that they like what they are doing. For much the same reason, all the capable ladies in the real world, the councillors, magistrates, head mistresses, and so on, look at the House of Commons and decide that they do not want to go there. One sometimes wonders who is right.

There is nothing whatever to prevent nurses from applying. In recent weeks, the nursing press has been full of horror stories, such as the story that 70 or 100 applications were received for general management posts, although only one had come from a nurse. Too seldom do nurses make any real effort to become good managers, even of nurses. I know of horror stories concerning senior nurse managers during the 1981 reorganisation. I asked one such person what the turnover of trained nurses was in his hospital. He did not know. When I sent him to find out, he came back with a scribbled bit of paper. But he should have been asking that sort of question, he should have had the information to hand, and he should have been acting on it. It was not right that someone should have had to come in and probe like that. But too seldom do nurses make the effort to make good managers and too seldom do they have any real knowledge of what other skills and professions can do. In other words, they suffer from exactly the same problems of ignorance of other professions as they criticise in others.

The Health Service needs the best managers that it can lay its hands on, and I do not much care which discipline they come from. That being so, some general managers will not be nurses. I am surprised that the RCN cannot find anything better to do than knock its colleagues. If it really wants to go back to the days of Florence Nightingale, it is talking about going back to the days of nurses working 100 hours a week, scrubbing ward floors on their knees and having to resign when they got married. I am not sure that I would want that.

One of our aims with Griffiths was to bring in outsiders. If there has been any failure, that is the one that we have to admit because, as reported in a written answer of 5 February 1986, we managed to find all of 35 outsiders out of 423 unit general managers. That is fewer than the nurses. Many are not industrial people, but have come in from the service.

I found an article by an industrialist called Lorne Williamson, who, for his sins, is the district general manager for the Brent health authority. I hope that he is enjoying it in Brent. I am sure that the hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Pavitt) will be acquainted with him. It is interesting to read his criticisms of the Health Service. He commented on the public scrutiny with which they work. That strikes everybody who enters the NHS. One cannot do a thing without everybody taking an exceedingly keen interest and criticising absolutely everything. He said:

"I feel like I am managing in a goldfish bowl."

That will not go away, and it will not attract industrial managers.

Mr. Williamson's second criticism is of the lack of agreed objectives. He speaks of the enormous verbiage of the NHS and mourns the absence of monthly quantitative measures of performance. That reflects the fact that there are not any real objectives. He comments on the literacy and articulateness of senior staff and their relative innumeracy. We may have a problem there. I suspect that he is right.

The third criticism was that the absence of any kind of incentive for performance is striking. He wrote that, as a result,

"delays seldom have cost penalties and frequently bring positive benefits!"

We have to devise a system for giving incentives for good management. We tried to do it in local government, but I suspect that we have halted that recently. If we are to encourage good management, we have to take such criticism. Mr. Williamson does not mention the biggest pressure of all on the NHS and its administrators—the fact that there is always a budget limit but that expectations are infinite. The public are never satisfied and they never will be. It takes a very special type of person to work under those circumstances.

I am extremely fortunate to have had a close association with the NHS for many years. I have met and worked with NHS managers from all sorts of backgrounds and of the highest calibre. We are very lucky to have them. They are honest, hard-working and committed. We should be very proud that the NHS is safe with them.

12.13 pm

Mr. Laurie Pavitt (Brent, South): As a good House of Commons man I am always sad to hear a mere knockabout politics speech such as that made by the hon. Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie) after hearing a thoughtful opening speech. Although our views differ across the Chamber, there was at least a genuine debate until the hon. Lady spoke. I am afraid that she does herself no good by bandying about figures, most of which I can refute, especially those concerning Germany and France. She mentioned one of the finest constituencies in the country—mine.

The House will know that I am not unacquainted with health matters. I am not unfamiliar with serving in what used to be called the district health authority. The hon. Lady made comparisons with my area, but we are fighting vigorously to prevent the closure of another 100-bed hospital. A 94-bed hospital has already been closed and two others have been reduced to one third of their original capacity. The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State knows that I approve of the policy affecting the mentally ill and Shenley, but I urge the hon. Lady to do as much homework for her speeches as the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Norris) did for his.

Dr. M. S. Miller: Instead of making the comments that she did about the Health Service, the hon. Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie) should have attacked the Government for making cuts in the service. Will my hon. Friend expand on some of the figures that she gave? She mentioned the cost of surgical operations and procedures here as compared with those in the United States. However, she did not say that in the United States the cost is borne entirely by the patients, whereas it is not in Britain. The difference becomes enormous. It is not just two or three times more expensive, but sometimes a choice between going bankrupt and not having the operation.

Mr. Pavitt: My hon. and qualified Friend makes an important point, and I wish that I had time to deal with it. The hon. Lady gave the figures for renal dialysis, renal transplant and heart bypass operations. Every year, I am privileged to be invited to lecture to medical faculties in universities in the United States, for which my fares are paid and I receive a fee. My hon. Friend is right. In America, some patients cannot obtain necessary operations because they have been priced out of the market. That is another problem that we must watch. I know that the Under-Secretary of State will be worried about the growth of litigation in the United States, where before one signs a form for an operation one must ensure that the doctor has enough money to pay for insurance cover in case he receives a bill for $500,000 after a failed operation. As usual, I am digressing from the main theme of the debate. I apologise for that, but it was an interesting point.

I criticise the entire Griffiths report. The hon. Member for Oxford, East and the Secretary of State recognised in words—the hon. Member for Oxford, East recognised it in more than words—that management in the National Health Service is a different ball game. But although the Secretary of State recognised that in his words, he has not recognised it in his implementation of policy. For those of us who read the Griffiths report line by line, there is no doubt that he was talking about a separate, individual, management skill — an expertise in commodities, equipment and units of production.

My hon. Friend the Member for Fife, Central (Mr. Hamilton) said that Health Service provision is about caring people who are in service, and about caring for patients. Any experience in that area is much superior to book learning, certificates or Institute of Management expertise. That is at the heart of the campaign being conducted by the Royal College of Nursing in protest against the downgrading and demotion of their traditional experience. They have had 100 years of practical experience since Florence Nightingale, although not personally, created St. Thomas's hospital. The disastrous consequences to nurses and patients of the Griffiths report lie more in the Government's interpretation and implementation than in anything it contains. The report did not recommend the wholesale restructuring of the NHS at local level, or the downgrading of nurses' professional responsibility, yet that is what is happening.

What is especially sad to those of us who have a strong affection for our Health Service is that nursing morale is at is lowest ebb for 40 years. That is because each reorganisation knocks to pieces all security for senior nurses. The House saw the disaster of 1974, the brainchild of the present Secretary of State for Education and Science. There was turmoil when senior nurses had to re-apply and find new positions in the new structure. That took place as from 1 April 1974. It was so appalling that when the Conservative Government returned to office in 1979 they had to do something about it, so the then Secretary of State for Social Services, the right hon. Member for Wanstead and Woodford (Mr. Jenkin), had a mark 2 reorganisation. He had to clear up the mess that had been made. However, once again the jobs of senior nurses were put in jeopardy. We eliminated the area health authorities and created 191 district authorities. Many nurses in senior grades spent two years not knowing whether they had a job, and having to reapply for jobs. Again, that affeced the morale in our nursing service.

I claim that the Griffiths report is the No. 3 massive reorganisation. It is not just about management. It is reorganising the National Health Service for the third time. In the past year I have had discussions with colleagues in health authorities and, of course, with nurses, and I find that nurses with 20 or more years' experience — qualified state registered nurses, such as the daughter of my hon. Friend the Member for Fife, Central and my daughter, who trained at Guy's at the same time—do not know whether, after 20 years' service, their job is still the same with the same responsibilities, or whether it has any future at all.

Therefore, I claim that the Government have implemented Griffiths in the most ham-fisted way. I also claim that the Tory Government are a suitable case for treatment for their own congenital disease, which causes each Minister for Health to reorganise as a substitute for dealing with the real problems of health provision. I repeat the cry of anguish by Petronius Arbiter 2,000 years ago:

"We trained hard, but it seemed that every time we were beginning to form into teams we would be reorganised.

I was to learn later in life that we tend to meet any new situation by reorganising; and a wonderful method it can be for creating the illusion of progress while producing confusion, inefficiency and demoralisation."

I am afraid that those words of 2,000 years ago are true today when we look at the Griffiths report.

One of the immediate consequences is that the input into policy of skilled trained nursing has been dismantled. Organisation of the new structures is geared more to the administrative convenience of the administrators than towards patient care, despite the Secretary of State's protest this morning. Nurses have been demoted. They have positions of secondary responsibility in their own area. Now they will be mere advisers.

I quote from the Secretary of State's letter to the Royal College of Nursing:

"In practice so far as nursing is concerned we would expect authorities that will need a nuring adviser at a senior management level whose main responsibility is the provision and quality of nursing advice to the authority. The officer may of course carry out other duties in support of the general manager."

That is patronising in the extreme; soft soap that seeks to ease the tragic consequences for our Health Service. What an upheaval.

Nursing is now in the middle of an earthquake. In another place, on Tuesday 4 March, Baroness Trumpington, the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security, said that the number of nursing units in the NHS in England is expected to decrease from 850 to 600. That is a 25 per cent. decrease, to happen in months. How does the Secretary of State think that the nursing service can withstand such shocks with equanimity? The Royal College of Nursing is seeking to advise us on those matters. I wrote to the Minister, arising from his letter to me, on 14 February and I am still awaiting a reply.

The Minister will deny that this is a major reorganisation of the Health Service. I claim that it is. Because of the importance of the hospital service, we sometimes forget that the Cinderellas of primary care—the district nurses, health visitors and school nurses—are also being profoundly affected by the way in which this report is being implemented. Shirley Goodwin, who is one of the experts, in my opinion, on the issue of domiciliary nursing care, says:

"There are a number of negative effects upon the service when community units disappear. One major cause for concern is that if the nursing management structure is split among several units,

the level at which community nursing services are led by a manager with the necessary community qualifications and expertise is forced down. In some areas, the most senior managers within a unit will be graded as Senior Nurses and will report to a general manager, not a Director of Nursing Services.

It is not difficult to appreciate that busy immediate managers (the nursing officers or Senior Nurses) will have neither the time, the expertise nor the perspective to provide professional leadership".

That is an important point, because within the team work which takes place in the NHS, nurses have provided professional leadership over the decades. Shirley Goodwin goes on:

"Without a Director of Nursing Services, these tasks will either remain undone or will be undertaken by a unit (or lower tier of) general manager who knows nothing of nursing generally, let alone of the specific services provided by district nurses, health visitors and school nurses."

I shall quote again from Shirley Goodwin because I believe that she has done so much for this subject. The House and the public are inclined to pay lip service to primary care. We concentrate, inevitably, because of the large amount of resources it takes up, on the hospital service. Shirley Goodwin says:

"It is easy to see what will happen to community nursing in an authority where, for example, it forms only one part of a unit which also contains a large hospital. The unit general manager can hardly fail to find himself responding as a priority to the more dramatic and urgent needs of a district general hospital where paediatric or intensive care beds might be threatened. We all know that running today's health service is a case of constantly robbing Peter to pay Paul. But where Peter is represented by acute services vociferously championed by shroud-waving consultants, how successful can the general manager be in keeping Paul's needs firmly to the front of his mind"?

I think that Shirley Goodwin could qualify for a debate with the hon. Member for Derbyshire, South. I would put my money, I am afraid, on Shirley Goodwin.

The post of chief nursing officer has been retained in only 11 of the 191 district health authorities. That post has no power and no participation in decision-making; it is merely advisory. Another catastrophe is the change down. That has already been mentioned by other hon. Members and I shall not go too far into it. There is a change to an adviser educator in 49 district health authorities. The Royal College of Nursing is right to fear for the future of student nurses.

In case the House thinks that I am a spokesman for the Royal College of Nursing, may I say that I am a member of the National Union of Public Employees, although I am not sponsored by that body. Where nursing is concerned, there is no difference between my hon. Friend the Member for Fife, Central talking for the Confederation of Health Service Employees and me talking as a member of NUPE or for the Royal College. We are talking about the basic problem faced by nurses of all kinds, whatever organisation they belong to.

A new piece of management jargon is the hybrid posts. I always think of the hon. Member for Tiverton (Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop) when I hear anything about hybrid posts. However, there are hybrid posts in 63 of the district health authorities. If anybody cared to look at nursing structures, I think that they would realise that the hybrid post must be one of the most confusing things which have ever been permitted to exist.

If Ministers had any real understanding of the NHS or a genuine involvement in its basic principles or the caring philosophy, the harsher effects of the two previous Tory reorganisations could have been avoided. Instead, in implementing Griffiths, they have magnified the effects. Ministers come to the Dispatch Box ad nauseam with platitudes giving the impression that nurses are in favour of the Griffiths recommendations in general and oppose only small details.

As I said in my letter to the Minister, we must admit that the Royal College of Nursing is not a Government basher. It is not concerned with its own status and with the number of posts. It is concerned with morale throughout the nursing services, which have been eroded.

If the Under-Secretary of State had any sense of the mounting grievance among nurses, his first action on Monday morning would be to get down to a round-table discussion with the organisation of nurses concerned and ascertain whether, even at this late stage, something could be done. The Griffiths report has been implemented, causing much anguish to individual employees. The harsh effects have been magnified. Because of the way in which the Government have acted, they should return to the drawing board.

I join the congratulations extended to the hon. Member for Oxford, East. He made a gentle, thoughtful speech. He was loyal to his party but his speech contained enough good points to lead the Under-Secretary of State to think again.

Last night, when I was crossing swords, as usual, with the Under-Secretary of State, I told him that I would send him copies of all my correspondence. I knew that, although the big guns fire first, all the pieces had to be picked up by junior Ministers. I was not disappointed today. I realised, after the hon. Member for Oxford, East explained how he chose this subject, why on a Friday, for the first time in centuries, we saw the Secretary of State in his place. I did not expect him to last long and so the Under-Secretary of State takes his place. In these as in other matters I shall keep the hon. Gentleman fully informed. I know that he, in turn, will twist the arm of the Minister for Health to obtain answers to letters sent more than a month ago. I have not yet received replies to my letters.

12.32 pm

Mr. Colin Moynihan (Lewisham, East). I always enjoy participating in debates when the hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Pavitt) speaks. I regret that I do not share a platform with him in the United States and share his fee. I hope that I share with the hon. Gentleman and all hon. Members who speak in this debate the knowledge that we are talking not only about management structure and incentives but about how we can maximise the provision of health care to those in need. That is what the whole exercise should be about. I agree that it is a mistake to rule out the element of consensus from management. It is important in the Health Service to have a strong element of consensus management among those involved in the provision of services.

For line management to be effective in any business, it requires management tools to do the job properly. The first and most important of those tools is the availability of data and information to enable management in the Health Service to effect an efficient service. I am concerned that, in trying to use resources to their maximum effect, we have not travelled anywhere near far enough down the road towards accurate clinical budgeting, all the way through from unit budgeting to budgeting for consultants. We must consider this important point in the development of an effective NHS management service.

[Mr. Colin Moynihan]

The new structure requires that managers recognise that professionals find it difficult to be managed. Not only in the House but in the NHS, sensitive handling by new managers in post is needed to persuade professionals to be accountable to new structures.

I shall concentrate on financial provisions. If one wants to achieve a change in the provision of out-of-hospital based services of community care, it is very difficult to ask management to implement that in a long-term policy on a year-by-year financial basis with year-by-year financial accounting. We must be very careful, therefore, about the issue of the rates and the speed of change that we expect from year-by-year financial accounting against what are careful and long-term projections of, for example, community health care provision.

As I mentioned, I want to concentrate on the most essential tool for any management system which is to be effective. That is the financial plan and how performance can be assessed against reasonable targets. The problem is that the financial criteria used by regions for the distribution of resources to those who manage the districts are often not the right and best form of distribution of resources. I particularly consider London's case in that context.

The most important issue faced by NHS bosses should be the financial system under which the managers work. Allocation of sub-regional RAWP has a detrimental affect on unit management performance at present. I have nothing against a national RAWP concept and the way that that works, although my minor reservations on that are for another place and another time. I would like to concentrate on my major reservation about sub-regional RAWP as it affects management.

Mr. Corbyn: Would the hon. Gentleman not accept, if he is dissatisfied with sub-regional RAWP, which I am, particularly in the way that it affects London, that that is of itself an inevitable consequence of the national RAWP formula, which sucks money away from urban centres such as London into the more rural sectors? While I share his criticisms of sub-regional RAWP, the hon. Gentleman will have to oppose RAWP as a whole in order to protect services in the inner urban areas.

Mr. Moynihan: I accept that there are problems and I have reservations about the national RAWP formula. My major concern about the management effects of sub-regional RAWP is that there are far greater cross-boundary flows between districts than there are between regions. I want to concentrate on that point, as my argument today will centre on the fact that major cross-boundary flows make it difficult—however efficient the management of a hospital such as St. Thomas's might be — to implement an effective policy for that hospital without running foul of financial targets. I hope that the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) will allow me to concentrate on that aspect.

Mrs. Currie: Does my hon. Friend recognise that the changes brought about by RAWP are helping inner London health authorities? My constituents in Derby no longer have to travel down to London for health care treatment because they can now get that in the midlands through the allocation of resources at home.

Mr. Moynihan: I only wish that in practice that was borne out by the numbers of people still coming into London. There is, however, still massive demand from outside London to come to London teaching hospitals. One of the major problems—rightly so—is the clinical freedom allowed to doctors to refer patients to consultants. Doctors who have a close affiliation with or training background in a London teaching hospital still refer large numbers of people to London to be treated. Financially, that acts against people living in those districts.

On the performance indicators given by the DHSS, virtually all the London teaching hospitals perform very well. Yet it is still a fact that they are massively over target. The traditional argument is that the net flow by specialty is done on national average costing by specialties. That has always been thought to be the problem, as it was regarded as insufficient. For example, in St. Thomas's hospital that is not so. There is renal medicine and surgery in that hospital which is a high cost specialty and also a regional specialty. The regional health authority makes a general allowance at full cost reimbursement for what the hospital considers to be the cost.

That is not the answer. Management is still faced with being told by the region that it is grossly over target, with the implied criticisms of inefficiency and extravagance. That is simply not borne out by national criteria. The real reason why it is so difficult to manage is that the regions say to a district, "We shall fund you for your population and give you a net credit or debit according to your inflows or outflows. We see that you have a large inflow component and a large outflow component, but our target can leave you only with a small residual component for the residents inside your district". That is fine nationally, where the cross-flow is small, but not locally where it is great. In effect, the region is saying that it is in the interests of management to treat as few patients as possible from inside its district, and, at full national costing, to treat as many people as possible from outside the district, and to have as few people as possible being treated outside the district. That is the way to reduce the cost of medical provision to those living within the district. The best thing to do financially to improve performance against target is to increase the number of day patients and out-patients coming from within the district, and to supplement that with as many people as possible from outside the district staying overnight.

If every hospital did that, NHS funding could not work on either a regional or national level. Ironically, a hospital can perform worse against target if it treats someone from its own district, because it recoups only about 42 per cent. of the cost of treating somebody from outside the district. Therefore, there is a positive incentive to draw people in for treatment from outside the district. Even if a hospital is brilliantly efficient, and treats many more people from inside the district, it can perform worse against target. I am extremely concerned that urgent attention is given by the regions under the present structure to ensure that that problem is tackled.

Other factors need to be considered by regional health authorities in allocating their district resource. The first point deals with hospitalisation rates, rather than the pure population point. It is well known that only those on the tip of the clinical iceberg are treated, and that there is a great deal of sub-mode sickness in the community. Roemer's law, developed in America, recognises the fact

that if one builds a hospital, it will be filled. Hospitalisation rates vary enormously. In Boston, for example, there is twice the provision of hospital facilities that there is in New Haven. Although there are huge inequalities in provision, nobody is up in arms. Even in Chichester, taking into account age, sex and standard mortality rates, there is half the demand for hospitalisation that there is in Wandsworth. The provision of a large number of hospitals in a district of London leads people to want to use them, so the demand for the services in inner London is greater.

Given that background, it is no good a region saying, "We shall take a national average of population and as there is over-demand for hospital resources in your district, you must do something about it". RAWP fights to correct Roemer's law, but I hope that we shall move away from the population-based RAWP formula within a region to recognise some of the criteria that I have mentioned, including hospitalisation rates.

There is a historical quirk involved in the present important problems of St. Thomas's and the West Lambeth health authority. St. Thomas's lies at the tip of a triangular district. St. George's hospital is much more convenient than St. Thomas's for many of the local people. Seventy per cent. of the cases come from outside the district, and that means that two thirds of the local population choose to go elsewhere for treatment. It is difficult for management to intervene when management has no control, rightly so, over the doctor's decision as to where he is going to refer his patient for consultant and hospital provision.

Against the background of RAWP and the targets, it is difficult for some people to avoid the conclusion that it is not the efficiency of St. Thomas's hospital which is in question but the nature of the financial provision under the existing system. It gives the hospital the appearance of being inefficient. It gives the management the appearance of being profligate by virtue of being well above target.

I hope these points have been taken into account during the review of RAWP. The critical issue of the particular districts where there is a large proportion of inflow and outflow patient care can be considered in the light of the points I have made.

In conclusion, I wish to reflect on the substantive issues which have been raised today. The implementation of the Griffiths report is an important first step in improving management. I strongly welcome it. I also believe that the quality of management from outside and inside the Health Service is very high. We should not under-estimate the quality of the management that has come through from inside the Health Service. The next step for improved management is the need for better clinical and unit budgeting down to the individual consultant level. This would provide an important benefit to the quality of management and the quality of health care provision. I firmly believe this can be achieved only by an overhaul of the criteria used by the regional health authorities in allocating limited resources to their districts. That will enable us to have the good management we need for the most important service we provide the community—the National Health Service.

12.47 pm

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): I welcome this debate on the structure of management in the National Health Service because I think that it is a subject that is not discussed sufficiently. I believe that the effect of the Griffiths proposals is not fully understood by many people outside the NHS.

I was studying the NHS annual report for 1985 earlier in the debate, and I noticed that in the introduction to the section on management it says:

"The NHS needs an effective system of general management to ensure the best possible service for patients and value for taxpayers' money."

The report goes on to say how last year's report discussed the recommendations of the Griffiths inquiry, and states that many general managers have been appointed. That is perfectly true. Where I part company from the Griffiths proposals for the reorganisation of the Health Service is over the effect of the reorganisation on the Health Service. I object to it because it undermines the principle of a publicly accountable, democratically run Health Service.

I do not pretend that the pre-Griffiths system of management was especially accountable or a democratic form of management. It had many faults and inadequacies, but the way to treat those inadequacies and faults is not to bring in experts from every other industry and ask them to treat the Health Service as one would treat a supermarket chain, a biscuit manufacturer or a motor manufacturer. One must look at the effectiveness of the Health Service in relation to the health of the people whom it is supposed to serve.

I strongly object to some of the management measurement techniques that are used in the Health Service. Instead of examining the overall health of a particular community or district, there seems to be an obsession with the throughput of patients in a National Health Service hospital. The Minister is fond of claiming that more patients are being treated than ever before within the National Health Service. That may be true, but what those figures do not show is the number of those patients who are readmissions to hospital because they were released too soon and had to be readmitted for treatment. That is portrayed as an improvement in health care, when in fact it is a deterioration and something that causes great suffering to many people.

Dr. Marek: Would my hon. Friend care to comment on the point that we should measure, not the number of people who have been ill and who have been cured of their illness, but the number of people who would have been ill if it had not been for the NHS, and therefore did not have to go to hospital in the first place?

Mr. Corbyn: My hon. Friend is correct. We must look at the overall health of the nation, and that is not the priority of the Griffiths proposals or of the system of general management. The Griffiths report is obsessed with the management of existing health units rather than with examining the health of the nation as a whole.

I remember, on a visit to Nicaragua three years ago, a rather wry comment being made by the Minister for Health there when I complimented her on the development of its new health centres and hospitals that it was trying to build. She asked what it was like in my area, and I had to tell her the tale of woe of closures and cuts in hospitals and hospital facilities in the borough of Islington over the past 15 to 20 years. She said, "But Mr. Corbyn, you must be very pleased that in Britain the National Health Service has so improved the health of the people of your country that you no longer need so many hospitals." Unfortunately, I

[Mr. Corbyn]

had to tell her that they were being closed because of financial management, and not because of the health of the people in my community. That is still the case today.

On establishment in 1948, after much debate within the Labour party, the Labour movement and the group of people who sought to establish the Health Service, a decision was taken to go for a National Health Service, with essentially national control. While I admire Nye Bevan very much, I wish that in everything that he did to establish the National Health Service, and the undoubted success that it was, there had been a much more local input to the running of it, because this would have played an important part.

I say that because the present system of national structure and national funding effectively means that the Chancellor of the Exchequer, through the Cabinet, decides on the overall levels of spending on the Health Service, just as he decides on other services. That decision is communicated to the Secretary of State for Social Services. The decision goes out to the regional health authorities, and when the RAWP formula comes into operation those decisions are handed down to the district health authorities. In effect, it means that the spending patterns of each health authority throughout the country are decided at national level.

In areas of declining health expenditure, because of the way that the RAWP formula operates, the powers that health authorities have are unclear. In my own borough of Islington, for example, until recently we had a significantly declining population — that I recognise, although the corner has now been turned and the population is stable, if not increasing. Nevertheless, we have been told that for the rest of the decade we can expect cuts in real terms in health spending in the borough of Islington, to the tune of around 15 per cent. in real terms. Within that, there has been a centralisation of health facilities at the Whittington hospital, which has exacerbated the decline and closure of outside health facilities such as the Royal Northern hospital and some of the health centres.

Mr. Pavitt: Do not my hon. Friend and I have the same problem? We both have inner city areas that are vastly different from other parts of the constituency where there is a demand, where RAWP should not apply. In my area, despite urban aid, we are having to cut resources for Brent to send them to Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire.

Mr. Corbyn: That is a valid point, and it is similar to the experience of my area. I have no quarrel with the people of Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire, Essex or anywhere else. I want them to enjoy good health facilities, just as we wish to enjoy them. We resent being told that we are in competition with the people of Southend to get a decent hospital because we are in the North East Thames health authority. It is a ludicrous way to go about decision making. It creates false conflicts when in reality the conflict should be between the poorest people in the inner city areas and central Government who are denying to them money for decent health services in their communities.

If we look at the overall position in London, we notice that, because of the way in which the four Thames health regions are delineated, there is an outflow of resources from the inner London area to the so-called growth areas in the home counties. I do not want that to continue. I want there to be at least stabilisation and an end to the desperate and miserable process of cuts and closures that is the lot of the inner London health authorities.

That brings me to the point that I want to make about the role of elected members and the role of democracy within the National Health Service. The area health authorities; were set up in 1974. It was decided that there should be a mixture of appointments and automatic membership of area health authorities; some members were appointed by local authorities, while others represented trade union and professional interests.

The problem with that system was that although people were appointed to represent an interest as a whole—for four years I was the trade union appointed member of an area health authority — they had to operate within the terms of reference of the area health authority. They had to operate within an overall level of health expenditure, and they had to carry out the decisions that were handed down to them from a national level. This led to a reduction in the ability to innovate at local health authority level. It led to great difficulties when a local health authority wanted to increase the amount of money that it spent, for example, on Well Woman clinics or local health centres, or when it wanted to decentralise health services at local level. It is difficult to do that if a local health authority is told by higher management that so much money is being allocated to it to spend on a particular aspect of local health service provision.

When we look at the way in which the Griffiths proposals are being implemented, we have to ask whether it is sensible to appoint to a body which is funded with public money and which is designed to ensure the health of the nation a series of business experts in private enterprise who in many cases have no experience of running health services and who are obsessed with cash flow figures rather than with the health of the people whom they are supposed to represent.

If general managers from outside the National Health Service are appointed to fill the top jobs—people who have no record of involvement in the National Health Service — we shall find that the prospects for further privatisation of the National Health Service are enhanced, because their mentality is to privatise services, cut jobs and achieve short-term savings within the National Health Service. Technical savings within the NHS budget may be made, but in reality those savings are picked up by people losing their jobs, or by social security and unemployment pay when people lose their jobs in the National Health Service, or by badly cleaned hospitals. That is a common tale when privatisation of cleaning services has taken place.

Mr. Pavitt: The privatisation of a laundry service by means of a short-term, three-year contract may result in an immediate saving, but the National Health Service will be unable to provide that service again. In three years' time a hospital could be held up to blackmail. The National Health Service will be unable to provide the service again because the laundry facility at that hospital has disappeared. The longer-term provision is no longer available.

Mr. Corbyn: My hon. Friend has hit the nail absolutely on the head. If a hospital laundry service is deemed by some slick—suited individual from a biscuit

company to be inefficient and overpriced, it is privatised. Its capital equipment is sold off or closed down. The hospital then has to depend upon a private laundry service. Even if, within a year, that private laundry service is deemed to be inefficient and expensive—as it often is—and the health authority wishes to return to the use of direct labour, it cannot get either the necessary capital allocation from the region or a national agreement to rebuild the laundry and the publicly owned infrastructure that has been so wantonly destroyed. The Griffiths proposals lead on to that position.

We must look at the membership of health authorities and the appointments system. Is it right that the health authority in an area such as mine should have someone appointed to the chair who cannot be said by any stretch of the imagination to represent the political will of the people of my borough? Our chairman does not, and there are many such cases.

Can it be right that health authorities should have entirely appointed members who, when they go against the wishes of the Secretary of State as they did in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, South (Mr. Pavitt), are sacked for their trouble? They were dismissed from office because they refused to carry out the cuts and closures which were determined by the Secretary of State. It is for those reasons that the time has come to look at the fundamental democracy of the NHS.

That means two things. First, it means recognising the close relationship that should and must exist between the NHS and local government. Local government, particularly in social services and environmental health matters, is concerned with the health of the people of the community. The NHS is also concerned with the health of the people in its area, but increasingly the NHS is seen as the national sickness service, whereas the local authority is trying to do the curative part through community care, social services back up, and so on. I wonder whether it is time to look at a much closer relationship between social service departments and the NHS. Increasingly, there is an overlap.

If community care policies mean anything, they mean a much closer relationship between the social service departments and the National Health Service. I remember vividly the discussions that took place between health authorities and local government. Some discussions are fruitful and productive, but often they are not. Often it is a matter of finding out who is prepared to foot the bill for what and trying to get rid of that, chiefly because they have clearly constrained budgets. The time has come to look at that.

The time has also come to consider the relationship of appointed and elected members of the health authority. If members are appointed or elected to an authority, but are controlled within the terms of reference of that authority by national decision making, that obviously undermines the effectiveness of any kind of local democracy and accountability for what is going on in the Health Service.

I want to see our Health Service expand and become more responsive to the health care needs of the people. I want to see the end of the concept of a national sickness service, and a move to the concept of a National Health Service. That will not be achieved by appointing general managers from outside the Health Service to run the service. It is not achieved by the sort of centralised dictation that is going on at present. Let us see the maintenance of national minimum standards, and with that the ability of local authorities to develop their services much more widely into preventive medicine, Well Woman clinics and health education—all those areas which are so important but which are not being achieved at present.

It is not on to have two principles in operation within the Health Service—on the one hand the principle that we have health care irrespective of the ability to pay and irrespective of the needs of the people who are seeking health care, and on the other the concept of making money out of people's ill health or through private medicine in Britain. I want to see a National Health Service that is truly that.

That brings me to the obvious question of how all that will be paid for if there is an open-ended ticket. The issue must be faced of the amount of money that is being spent on the NHS. Moreover, we must face the issue of the amount of money lost through ill health and people in hospital queues and on waiting lists; and the inefficiency of having an unhealthy population when we could have a much more healthy one.

Britain spends less on the NHS than any other equivalent western European country, despite the most dramatic propaganda campaign by the Government. People outside realise perfectly well that in real terms Health Service spending is going down. They see hospitals being closed, increasing queues for operations and the creation of images. We talk about creative accountancy, but this is creative publicity in the NHS.

Far from being safe in the hands of the Government, the National Health Service is in grave danger in their hands. The NHS is faced with cuts, closures, the centralisation of power and the gross exploitation of the lowest paid health workers. Perhaps the Minister will now answer a question which he was unable to answer in the Adjournment debate on this subject. When agreement is reached on pay for nurses, ancillary staff or Whitley professional technical "B" grades, will the Government underwrite and honour the agreement and not pass it back to local health authorities so that any pay increases have to be paid for by cuts in services, as now happens?

1.5 pm

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): This has been an interesting debate. All hon. Members have tried to be reasonable, with only occasional outbreaks of slapstick politics and selective statistics. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Norris) for raising this topic and for making a speech which caused every one of us to think carefully.

I even thank the Secretary of State for most of his speech, although not all of it, as he again trotted out the 24 per cent. figure as the increase in NHS spending in real terms since 1979. As I have said before, that does not represent the real situation. The Secretary of State takes a good starting year for his calculation, and then fails to take account of demographic changes with the increased health care needed by an older population, or the fact that the retail prices index for medicine and medical equipment rises much faster than any general household index. He also fails to mention that operations considered risky and unproven five or six years ago are now commonplace and are performed without any trouble at all. If the population increased by 1 million or 2 million, we would have to spend more on food. Similarly, as medical techniques expand, we have to spend more money to give life to people who five years ago might have died.

[Dr. John Marek]

The Secretary of State also said nothing about the evils of unemployment and the proven connection between ill health and unemployment, especially long-term unemployment. If more people suffer ill health as a result of unemployment, more money must be spent on the NHS. I do not challenge the 24 per cent. increase in itself, but it must be put into perspective as it turns out in reality to be far less than a casual glance might suggest.

The Secretary of State said that more nurses were employed, but he did not say that they worked fewer hours. Year by year, the Government indulge in that kind of selectivity to try to pretend to the public that more money is being spent, more people are being employed and everything in the garden must therefore be lovely. That is not true. The real interpretation is that limits have been placed on nursing manpower for the first time. Furthermore, nurses have had their working hours cut, and rightly so.

The Secretary of State read out a list of figures fairly quickly and I was unable to take a note of them all. If I have it correctly, he said that £650 million extra would be spent next year on the Health Service on the basis of inflation running at 4·8 per cent. I do not know exactly what the right hon. Gentleman's figures referred to, but if extra spending on the NHS is to be £650 million, it will not be an increase of 4·8 per cent. and it will not match the rate of inflation. As I have said, I did not hear the right hon. Gentleman accurately in that part of his speech.

The Secretary of State explained that the NHS would receive £130 million from the sale of land. I am sure that that will include the sale of nurses' homes, which is one of the factors that will have an effect on the supply of nurses in the London area. Nurses will not be able to afford to buy their own houses or flats in the London area, and it is necessary that we provide adequate housing for them. Apart from the matters to which I have referred, the first part of the right hon. Gentleman's speech showed that he was trying to address himself to the problems of implementing the Griffiths report and whether the Government have it right. The general impression of my right hon. and hon. Friends is that not everything is right.

I am glad to know that some Conservative Members have certain reservations about the implementation of the Griffiths report, but it seems that by and large they think that it is all right. Conservative Members who are present for the debate are those who care and think about the NHS. Unfortunately, many Conservative Members do not, and they are not present. None of us can be in the Chamber all the time, and that includes myself, but a member of the public who reads the *Hansard* report of the debate will have an impression of Conservatives that is unrepresentative of the Tory party at large and its attitude to the Griffiths report. I hope that any member of the public who reads the report will get a reasonably accurate impression of the thinking on the Opposition Benches on the report.

I wish to address myself to two main points, and I shall do so at some length. The first one is directed to nursing and the campaign that the Royal College of Nursing is pursuing that is designed to make some changes to the way in which the Griffiths report is being implemented. The college had no cause for fear when the report was written because in September 1983 Sir Roy Griffiths, the managing director of Sainsburys, in paragraph 15 stated:

> "A General Manager should be identified from within the existing team or elsewhere according to the Chairman's view of the local requirement."

The important line reads:

> "This is not intended to weaken the professional responsibilities of other Chief Officers, especially in relation to decision taking on matters within their own spheres of responsibility."

The reference to "other Chief Officers" must mean chief nursing officers.

I did not particularly like the Griffiths report when it was published. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn), I do not like the idea of bringing into unit management individuals who might have been bank managers or those with some sort of business expertise who know nothing about the NHS. There is no harm in having consultants coming into the NHS, but management of it should be undertaken by those who know what the service is about.

Mr. Pavitt: Does my hon. Friend recall that when the supremo of the management of the DHSS, Mr. Victor Paige, was appointed, he was given a salary of £90,000 a year? He said that he did not know very much about the DHSS but he was a good learner. I am a good learner, too. If anyone wants to give me £90,000 a year to manage the Health Service, I should be delighted.

Dr. Marek: My hon. Friend has made my point for me. It is with sadness that I agree with him. I am sure that such a person is of no benefit to the NHS. He probably had no interest in it until £90,000 was dangled before his eyes. Unfortunately, such appointments do the NHS a disservice and represent a loss to the taxpayer.

Originally the Griffiths report was such that the nursing profession did not worry about there being any restructuring responsibility within the NHS that would leave it and its management professionals at a disadvantage. Indeed, in the *Daily Telegraph* of 18 November 1983 Sir Roy was quoted as saying:

> "The proposals don't threaten nurses at all. The nurses are doing a good job and the changes that are being talked about aren't designed to affect them, except beneficially."

There is the rub. Sir Roy may think that what has happened is beneficial, but every Opposition Member would disagree.

Ministers tend to focus debates on the Griffiths report on how many nurses have been appointed as general managers. But that is not necessarily an important factor. The significant point is what has happened to the nursing voice, to professional accountability and to supervision in the structures that now exist. After all, precious few nurses have been appointed to managerial positions within the NHS. Indeed, the Secretary of State gave the figures earlier.

I am grateful to the Royal College of Nursing for having provided the following information. It sampled 150 district health authorities in England. As at 10 March, 27 of them — 18 per cent. — had no chief nursing officer. That should be of great concern to every hon. Member. It means that almost one in five of those health authorities has no chief nursing officer. Thus, there is no nurse member of the management team at district level, and responsibility for giving professional advice to the health authority has been delegated to a director of nursing service from one of the units, perhaps the director of nursing education or sometimes the chairman of the Professional Advisory Committee. That means that the management of the NHS is at a serious disadvantage.

In a letter dated 16 November 1984 to the general manager of the Royal College of Nursing, Trevor Clay, the Secretary of State said:

"In practice so far as nursing is concerned we would expect that the authorities will need a nursing adviser at senior management level whose main responsibility is the provision of nursing advice to the authority."

One might have a director of nursing service, but it would be difficult for him just to concentrate on nursing within the district, because he would have other duties. There is a risk that any advice given will not put the emphasis on nursing so much as on areas of more concern to that director.

Of the 150 district health authorities studied by the RCN, it was found that 11—7 per cent.—had only an advisory chief nursing officer post. The individual had a purely advisory role and was not a member of the district management team, so there was no direct line management responsibility for nursing. Such advisory officers might have official access to the district health authority, but they are excluded from participation in day-to-day management, which would give them a real influence in decisions. In such circumstances, access to the district health authority would simply become a system of appeal against decisions that have already been made, perhaps contrary to the wishes of the nursing profession. The RCN strongly objects to that.

The RCN found that 49—33 per cent.—of the sample of district health authorities had an adviser/educator—a person responsible for nursing education, but not a chief nursing officer responsible for nursing as a whole. That causes fragmentation of the service. One of the strengths of the NHS is that it has avoided fragmentation. We used to have the matron who ran everything. More recently, chief nursing officers have been responsible for nurses, their training and education.

There were hybrid posts in other district health authorities where nurse education was relegated to an administrative function. Nurse education is slowly becoming a personnel function. Education is being fragmented down to lower units in some areas. Student nurse intakes are a significant manpower variable and there is widespread anxiety that manpower considerations will begin to take precedence over education and training. Managers from outside the service tend to regard their functions in terms of what is on the bottom line. With the best will in the world, patients tend to become statistics and staff tend to become employees with a payroll number. The training and education of nurses, for example, is not considered to produce any advantages on the bottom line, but it has to be undertaken. There is, therefore, a tendency for it to be given a lower priority. That must prove detrimental to the service.

It appears that many student nurses are experiencing difficulties. The English National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting, the statutory body for the supervision of nursing education in England, has recently had to issue a letter to district health authorities expressing concern that management arrangements mean that recognition of the school of nursing will be put in jeopardy. The Government are selling nurses' homes and not paying nurses adequately. In an earlier debate, my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North said that nurses have not had a real terms wage increase since 1975. It therefore comes as no surprise to learn from a London newspaper recently that a leading teaching hospital is so desperate for nurses that it is offering cash prizes for recruits. Perhaps that is symptomatic of business management, but it should not have anything to do with NHS management. There must be better ways in which to organise recruitment. We know why they must go to such lengths. Hammersmith hospital in Shepherds Bush is a specialist hospital. The nurses have to train longer, and they suffer pecuniary disadvantage.

In the sample of 150 district health authorities, 63—42 per cent.—had hybrid posts. The incumbents of those posts are responsible for nursing and for other matters. Sometimes the title of the post is quality assurance manager. There is no problem if the responsibility is close to nursing, such as the supervision of the meals service in wards or the cleaning of wards. However, some of the officers who hold hybrid posts may be responsible for nursing and the ambulance service. The health authority of which the hon. Member for Oxford, East was vice-chairman has proposed such a hybrid post, with the officer being responsible for nursing and for the ambulance service. That cannot be good management. No manager can have two such disjointed functions and give of him or herself sufficiently to manage both functions well.

All district management structures must be approved by the DHSS. All the posts that I have mentioned have already been approved, despite Ministers' assurances and the contents of the Secretary of State's letter of 16 November 1984. The Griffiths report originally led nurses to believe that there would be no problems with their conditions of work and promotion prospects. However, the position is rapidly becoming different. Many managers have no nursing experience or they have other commitments, or the chief nursing officer is not sufficiently high up the line management ladder in the new Griffiths system to carry any weight or be able properly to consider any problem. The Opposition believe that such a system cannot be allowed to continue. Something must be done about it.

My second main point relates to the changes that are taking place in the number of units, largely without the public being aware of them. This is a serious matter. I thought that what are called the Cinderella services in the NHS would be properly looked after and funded because they would have independent management and an independent source of finance. In many ways, the Cinderella services are as important as the high profile acute services that are available in hospitals. Unfortunately, one of the most serious and least reported effects of the management reviews is that we have an amalgamation of units that were previously under separate management. It is common again for the elderly, the mentally handicapped and the mentally ill to come under one unit, with loss of management priority and identity. In many cases, those services are amalgamated with the community unit—although it should remain separate—which has also suffered disadvantage during succeeding years. The blame for this goes from one Government to another, right back to the inception of the NHS.

Some years ago, there was hope that all these other services and provisions would have some management priority and identity. Unfortunately, that is not so now. There has been much amalgamation. If the amalgamation goes on, especially so that those units are combined with units providing acute services in hospitals, that will be bad for the Cinderella services of the NHS. They are in no

[Dr. Marek]

position to withstand consultants' demands, when they rightly fight for the provision of acute services in hospitals. Things go badly for the Cinderella services because they are not in the public eye. There is little public awareness of them. Unless one is a recipient of those services or takes the trouble to be aware of them, it is not easy to know that they are provided.

The public throughout the county of Clwyd have been campaigning for two body scanners for about two years, raising money here and there. I have been to innumerable functions where money has been raised for those scanners. Whether that should happen, and whether essential equipment should have to be provided by voluntary donations, is another matter which I shall not go into now. Public concentration and awareness is focused on equipment for use in the hospital and, willy-nilly, Cinderella services are left in the background.

Many of the new amalgamated units are large and often widely dispersed. Administrative and financial convenience appear to have taken priority over patient and client group orientation. Theoretically, good management would not find it difficult to give attention to the Cinderella services. However, experience in the Health Service has demonstrated that the sheer pressure from such wide, large and diverse responsibilities can overcome even the best manager. I cannot believe that the patient-client groups, such as the elderly and the mentally ill and the community service, should be lumped together with the hospitals in one unit, hospitals providing acute care and having the powerful pressure groups behind them.

Management at unit level is perhaps the most important because it is at the interface with the patients. There are proposals that some units can be managed without a director of nursing services, even at that level. I shall be extremely worried if that happens. For example, a nurse who has a problem could go and see the sister on duty, but if the sister on duty cannot resolve the problem — an emergency or something that the sister would wish to consult about — it is possible that the next line of management above the sister will be an ex-bank manager or an ex-advertising agent. Surely that cannot be good for the NHS. I hope that no district or regional health authority will allow anything like that to happen.

The new form of management means that managers down the line will become beholden to their superiors for their budgets. The problem will increase if cash sums are available for each section of the service. The cash sums will be divided up and allocated to managers below the management team. They might be reduced in years to come, certainly under this Government. "Reduced" is perhaps not the right word to use. The sums will be increased, but not sufficiently to take account of the indices that I enumerated earlier. There will be a shortage of funds. If line management is worried whether it will have sufficient funds, it will be beholden to its superiors. I cannot believe that that will be beneficial to the Health Service.

It is better to have complete freedom of discussion. People should be able to speak their minds. If there is a problem in a unit or section of a hospital or in any service, the manager should be able to say what the problem is and how urgent it is and make a bid for an alleviation of the problem. I am not convinced that the Griffiths report and that form of management will provide for that. Perhaps more importantly, I think that it will inhibit the freedom of people to speak out on professional matters, not just in terms of work and conditions, but on professional issues such as nursing or medical matters. I cannot see how one can get round managers being beholden to their superiors, unless one brings consultation, co-operation and democracy in some form—I use those words loosely—back into the National Health Service. That would mean accepting that the basis of the Griffiths report is flawed in that respect, and a different solution would have to be found.

The Griffiths report could have been implemented in consultation with the staff, it could have been implemented at a slower rate, we could have had the report a little longer and we could have been given some reasons for some of the proposals in the report. It was not well done. I hope that the Government will not disagree too strongly with that. It is still not right. I urge the Govement to take seriously the views of members of health authorities up and down the country, particularly the views of the staff within the NHS. They are largely critical of certain aspects of the Griffiths report. It can do no harm to look at that criticism to see whether there can be some meeting of minds and an acceptable compromise between the two sides. We need more democracy and more management by consultation.

The Government might disagree, but I believe that they are primarily obsessed with saving money and spending as little public money as possible in order to please the masters in the Treasury and the First Lord of the Treasury. If the Government will not work for more democracy and consultation because it means spending more money, it is a task which the next Labour Government will have to undertake. The next Labour Government will do it by consulting the Royal College of Nursing, the Health Visitors Association and the professional bodies first. After consultation, we would have to put right the mess we have got into with the Griffiths report.

1.37 pm

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): The House should be grateful to the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Norris) for initiating this important debate. So often, debates on some of the most fundamental issues in our society attract relatively few hon. Members, but that does not detract from their value, because everything that is said is in the *Official Report*.

As hon. Members know, I was able to intervene briefly in the opening speech of the hon. Member for Oxford, East, but unfortunately, because of a constituency engagement to open a sheltered housing scheme—which is full of consensus and co-operation, I should add—I was unable to hear the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, South (Mr. Pavitt) or those of other hon. Gentlemen.

I hope to identify a few issues which bear strongly on the management of our Health Service, and two in particular. I begin by trying to identify those matters within the Griffiths' proposals and general philosophy which I think will carry general agreement and those where there has been, and will continue to be, strong disagreement. Unless we identify those issues, the debate will be unfruitful.

The hon. Member for Oxford, East mentioned, quite properly, the morale and importance of the managing team. He dwelt at some length—I make no complaint

of this — on whether there should be a period of appointment against performance — one of the great management tools.

I do not think that we have yet made a fundamental distinction between different types of management. Sir Roy Griffiths came from a well-known chain of retail grocers, Messrs. Sainsbury. We have been adjured by the Government many times to take advice from business men —Marks and Spencer, Boots and perhaps even British Leyland have featured largely among those businesses from which we should seek advice. I suggest to Conservative Members, especially the Prime Minister, that there is a fundamental distinction in management between those providing services on a willing seller/willing buyer basis, and those providing services to the community, especially in health, housing, education and the caring professions. The simple point, which is so often overlooked, is that Messrs. Sainsbury, Boots, Marks and Spencer and even British Leyland have no obligation to provide what the customer wants. Of course, if they do not, they may go out of business. Each package displayed by Marks and Spencer is one that the company finds it convenient to provide. If a customer does not find what he wants on the shelf, he goes elsewhere.

Mr. Whitney: One goes out of business.

Mr. Spearing: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for agreeing with me. However, he may have forgotten that, whereas there may be 10,000 grades of product available from Messrs. Sainsbury, Boots or Marks and Spencer, every client of the Health Service is, at every point in his progress towards full health and strength, a unique case. One cannot put live human meat on the shelf, freeze it or move it in refrigerated vans, and operate à la Sainsbury. Every person requires a certain measure of treatment and human care. The condition of patients, especially acute patients, can change rapidly. I suggest to those concerned with management expertise—I issue the challenge as an amateur—that they are dealing with a totally different type of management in the NHS.

My next point follows what the hon. Member for Oxford, East said in his interesting remarks. It relates to the matter on which I challenged him on principle and to which he did not return precisely, although other hon. Members may have done so. It concerns management experience in relation to decision making. Of course, this is an exercise in stopping buck passing and in the necessity of buck taking. Someone, somewhere has to take a decision, and that person may draw on the advice of others, engender co-operation or try to decide on the basis of consensus. A decision made by Mr. Speaker is his responsibility. A decision made by a manager on the allocation of resources is his responsibility. The same is true of a ward sister deciding how to allocate resources and of a doctor making a difficult clinical decision on the allocation of his resources.

The buck stops somewhere. It may well be that the NHS needed greater emphasis to be placed on line management and on sharpening responsibility, especially in regard to the allocation and use of scarce resources. There is no question about that. That point unites us across the Floor and across parties. — *[Interruption.]* I welcome any intervention which shows that the Under-Secretary of State agrees with me.

As I said to the hon. Member for Oxford, East, hon. Members would not for one moment tolerate a House of Commons Commission which was not governed by Members of Parliament, former Members of Parliament or servants of this place and, therefore, servants of the public. I believe that one of the great weaknesses of British management, and the great weakness in our society, is that too many people who have the privilege and responsibility for making decisions have not had sufficient, adequate experience on the ground floor which would give them important insights into what occurs in practice.

I have bitter experience of that over 12 or 13 years in the teaching profession, and I have no doubt that nursing is much the same and may, indeed, be more fraught. As we all know, particularly in unit management, whether it be in a hospital or in a ward in a hospital, one is under pressure on numerous occasions. Unless one has experienced such pressures, how can one take decisions for others in line management?

The hon. Member for Oxford, East referred to the morale of the management team. I believe that even more important is the morale of what he might call the operatives, the rank and file, the non-commissioned people. They are the people who know.

In all the things that I have read about the Griffiths report — and I have had complaints about that report from nurses who I know personally and from people in my constituency — that distinction is not being made. In fact, I doubt whether that distinction is understood. In the reorganisation which is going on apace in the Health Service, within the management structure people are being appointed — and I trust that the Minister will put me right in his reply, although he admitted this to me in a letter — and it is possible for people without nursing qualifications or experience to be in a position of line management and taking decisions about nursing and medical matters. Medical practitioners would not tolerate that for an instant, and nor would hon. Members.

The situation is even worse. As I understand it, the implementation of the Griffiths recommendations means that people will have to apply for their own jobs. Instead of Griffiths coming along and instituting a form of management appreciation — which may be necessary, because there is no reason why traditional SRN training should include managment skills in respect of complicated scientific apparatus—and adding that to the original job, a member of staff will have to reapply for his own job. Unless somone can show management competence, for which he was not trained or recruited, and for which he presumably has only limited ability, he is liable to be dismissed.

We know that dismissals have taken place, because Baroness Cox, in a debate in another place last Tuesday, said so. I cannot quote the noble Baroness directly; I will have to paraphrase her words. She said that many senior nurses had after many years of professional service been asked to go. In fact, one senior nurse in a London health authority was actually dismissed and sent on eight months' gardening leave.

What would happen in organisations connected with the retail trade or the motor car industry if such procedures were adopted? A business may be able to sustain that using the principle pour enourager les autres. I suggest that the impact on nurses in post at present and those in training is serious, as they know that the people to whom they have been responsible, whom they may respect professionally, who have given years of devoted service and who are highly skilled, are either deciding to take early retirement

[Mr. Spearing]

—as they are—or are liable to dismissal. I put it to the Minister that when Griffths was introduced nobody thought that that was possible. Indeed, all the assurances were to the contrary. The possibility of that happening is causing well-justified concern among the whole nursing profession. I challenge the hon. Member for Oxford, East to deny that.

Baroness Cox is well known for her views. She is not a lady who will criticise the powers that be immediately or readily, but I understand that she said in the debate that it would be difficult to find any nurse who believed that the Health Service was now safe in the hands of the Prime Minister or the Government. The one may be equal or less equal to the other. She is a highly respected professional noble Lady in the other place, and she has not yet been contradicted. If that degree of alarm, perhaps unjustified, has entered into the heart of one of our greatest professions, what the hell do the Government think they are doing? I apologise to the House for an unparliamentary expression. If one is in a position of uncertainty and does not know what will happen in future, while day after day one gives of oneself and then one's boss says that life is hell.

The story does not end there. Yesterday I received an answer from the Minister's twin. Nurses are being evicted from nurses homes. A circular went out to district health authorities telling them that they must be prepared to sell their medical accommodation on principle. I understand that the proposal met with a great deal of argument, and the Government changed their mind and said that it was a matter for local decision.

An answer that I received on 12 March shows that in Chester the Government are planning to reduce our 435 current units to 272 by 1 January 1988. That is a reduction of 163, or one third. The reduction is to be of the same proportion in Warrington and Liverpool. The Government plan to reduce the number of nursing accommodation units in Liverpool by 300. That is almost unbelievable, in view of what we know about that city, and in terms of what we know about the Health Service, especially as there is no guarantee that second or third-year student nurses will get accommodation.

Mr. Pavitt: May I remind my hon. Friend that the Minister for Health asked 14 regional health authorities to submit complete lists of accommodation that would be available for sale? Further, in a recent answer to a question the Minister said that he would not put the list in the Library or tell us which places he would endorse for sale until such time as the decision had been made.

Mr. Spearing: That confirms what I am saying. I hope that my hon. Friend will speak in the debate, especially about co-operation in the neighbourhood. As this is an important subject, I make no apology for continuing my speech.

The way in which the Government have approached the matter shows only too amply their complete ignorance of the psychological havoc that they are creating in our hospitals. Management is not only about people. It is about services — the "hotel" services, to which the hon. Member for Oxford, East referred—and about hardware and medical science.

Not too long ago, when I was in one of the leading teaching hospitals visiting a patient, I found out that a few days previously the staff had had to revert to using paper sheets because the supply mechanism had broken down. In three year's time no doubt the new manager will have to show what he is made of if he is to be reappointed. This is what they are reduced to. I was also told about some of the throwaway medical equipment — I think they are called flungs — which is used for giving blood transfusions. The quality of the flungs has been reduced to save money.

Faced with that situation, with, as I have said, the sword of Damocles hanging over one's head because of the likelihood of being evicted from accommodation which one thought would always be there, what will be the result? What will be the effect on those who are thinking of taking up the profession? What will people in the profession say about their prospects? The people in the higher reaches of the profession appear to be arbitrarily barred from management, yet they are the people who are most needed for the job.

The noble Baroness Cox asked the noble Baroness Trumpington a specific question in the debate in another place on 4 March. I shall paraphrase her question. She asked whether the Minister would issue a circular to the district health authorities asking them to ensure that when they make appointments to the post of manager of nursing, not only is the manager part of the team—some of them are not and I have asked a question about that—but that the district authorities will make sure that the qualifications and experience of the people appointed are within the nursing profession. Baroness Trumpington said that it was a matter for local management. In other words, the Government will not intervene.

The Minister said:

"My noble Friend Lady Cox concluded her speech with four specific questions. I have covered a number of these points, but let me now address them one by one. The question of nursing management is covered in, we expect, the structure of general management and nurse management in each unit to take account of the need for proper supervision of the work in wards and departments. This is a matter which really must be left to local decisions, taking account of the views of local professional interests."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 4 March 1986; Vol. 472, c. 161.]

I suggest to the House that it is improper to leave such a matter for local decision when the Government have already said that they will allow people without the necessary professional experience or qualifications to take these managerial roles.

When an army fights in battle, it must have confidence in the general staff. If it is aware that the general staff have never fought in the trenches, what confidence can the army place in their decision making? I thought that we had learnt that about 70 years ago. It appears that the Government have not learnt it yet.

I refer to the question of professional conduct, not only of nurses, but of medical practitioners. I raise this under the motion on the efficiency of the National Health Service. Later today the Minister will object to a Bill on this subject. The Bill relates to the inadequate powers of the General Medical Council, despite its responsibility under the Merrison report, which said:

"Parliament acts in this context for the public".

It is for Parliament to decide the nature of a contract and the way it is to be executed. The contract is between the public and the profession.

The Minister has sent me a letter in which he says that the president of the council—this is the first time that that gentleman has put an objection in writing—objects

to the Bill because it maintains that the additional power that is proposed would not be helpful because it might lead to a tendency to substitute the lesser for the more serious findings of the GMC.

Mr. Whitney: This has nothing to do with the motion.

Mr. Spearing: The efficiency of our Health Service is part of the debate. I am not surprised that the Minister objects to his letter being read out.

Mr. Whitney: I am glad that the hon. Member has had a good day in his constituency. However, I draw to the attention of the House the fact that the letter refers to general practitioners, as the hon. Gentleman is aware, and this debate is on the National Health Service and the Griffiths report.

Mr. Spearing: We are certainly discussing the National Health Service. The letter concerns not just general practitioners but medical practitioners. I apologise to the House. The service that they give, and the confidence that we can give to them and to their professional body, which Parliament set up as a self-regulatory body, is part of the motion, which deals with the efficiency and competence of the NHS. We are talking about confidence. Confidence in a democratic country is the petrol of politics, and without confidence there can be no proper democracy. I see the Minister smile.

Mr. Whitney: Only at the cliché.

Mr. Spearing: I do not think that this is a cliché at all. The Bill that I wish to introduce fills a gap in the way that we can deal with these matters of professional conduct.

Mr. Deputy-Speaker (Mr. Ernest Armstrong): Order. The hon. Gentleman cannot refer to the Bill in detail, but he can refer to it generally.

Mr. Spearing: I shall do it in a sentence. I understand what you have said, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and the Minister does as well—that is why he is not very happy at the moment. Unfortunately, the current legislation dealing with these matters, the Medical Act 1983, does not provide powers for the General Medical Council to deal with conduct that it finds unacceptable. There is no sanction, nor remedy even, of conditional registration, and my Bill would provide the council with optional powers. If the public wish to have confidence in the way that the General Medical Council goes about its business of providing services to the Health Service, it is not for the Minister to say that the Bill must be blocked.

I conclude on a happier note, but one that challenges the Government. I have been talking about confidence in the Health Service. The Prime Minister claimed that the country could have confidence in her management of the Health Service. Our debate today shows, for the reasons that I have suggested, that those who are at the sharp end in the wards, the ancillary services and the nursing profession have no confidence in the way in which Government are dealing with the Griffiths report. They believe this because those who have experience and professional knowledge of these matters are not put in the right positions and are not an adequate part of the teams that make the decisions, and will not necessarily be required by the commissioned managers under whom they seek to serve.

2.3 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security (Mr. Ray Whitney): I am grateful to have this opportunity to contribute to the important debate introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Norris), in whose election I was able to play a very small part some years ago. I shall not repeat the congratulations any further, nor shall I respond to my hon. Friend's point, because my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State did so, as he did to the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, North-East (Mrs. Short).

A number of important points have been made more than once, and in particular I pick up the points made by the hon. Member representing the alliance, the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Meadowcroft), who said that he had to leave at midday, but was hoping to return. Unlike some who returned, the hon. Member has still not been able to join us. He gave an interesting performance, typical of the contributions that we have learned to know—I nearly said love—from both the Liberals and the Social Democrats. We listened carefully to the "on the one hand but then on the other" approach which is always a feature of alliance contributions. I agree with the hon. Member for Leeds, West that it is not a question of either general management or consensus. That is an artificial dichotomy. The Government are not saying, "On the one hand," and, "On the other hand." What is at issue is not an autocratic, general management versus a happy, Soviet-type democracy. A balance has to be struck. We are striving to achieve that balance.

Having complained, as usual, about the existing system, the hon. Member for Leeds, West then referred to his own solution. If the hon. Gentleman is, as I understand him to be, the Liberal party spokesman on health matters, this has been a very important morning. Far from the National Health Service being safe in the hands of the Liberal party, it transpires that the Liberal party intends to break up the National Health Service.

The hon. Gentleman said that the power to tax should not be separated from the power to spend, because that always creates problems. The hon. Gentleman's solution, therefore, is to create regional taxation and regional expenditure. The National Health Service disappears and regional health services appear. I do not know what that would mean for the national facilities that are provided in London. There is also the rate equalisation problem to be grappled with. We know all too painfully about that in terms of rate support grant. The London region would be able to fund its activities by means of taxes on its vast riches, but that would result in the deprived regions being provided with grossly inferior health services. That is an interesting concept. I shall follow its development by the Liberal party with great interest.

I agree with what my hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims) said about the nurses. He said that, although he has asked nurses to explain the problems and difficulties that have been referred to in the Royal College of Nursing campaign, he is still waiting for their replies. That is my experience, too, despite having prodded them again and again. On Monday morning I had the privilege of appearing on a television programme with Mr. Trevor Clay, general secretary to the Royal College of Nursing. I asked him to tell me about the problems, because we are anxious to resolve them. I was told that the Royal College of Nursing is still working on it and that it hopes to find

[Mr. Ray Whitney]

a few examples one of these days. That is not only my experience; it is the experience of most of my hon. Friends. I agree with my hon. Friend's injunction that the Government ought not to interfere unless it is necessary. The devolution of as much responsibility as possible is a fundamental part of the Government's approach.

The contribution of the hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. Hamilton) was not surprising. His interest in the Confederation of Health Service Employees is well known. We were told about hospitals that are crumbling, about hospitals that have been closed and about the rest of the panoply of woe that is a feature of the Pavlovian reaction of all Opposition Members. However, that has to be reconciled with the increase in capital spending while this Government have been in office, from £365 million a year to £900 million next year.

We were also told that the Government are being very hard about pay. We have a proud record on nurses' pay. Mr. Trevor Clay was good enough to admit on Monday morning during that television programme that last year's pay settlement was "a reasonable settlement." Basic pay rates for nurses have increased by 30 per cent. more than the rate of inflation since this Government took office. The number of nurses has increased by 11·9 per cent. and the working week of nurses has been reduced from 40 to 37·5 hours.

Mr. Pavitt *rose——*

Mr. Whitney: I apologise to the hon. Member for not giving way.

The hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) believes that the reduction in the working week for nurses is to be deplored. However, I do not think that many nurses would agree with him.

We have instituted the pay review body. We would love to do much more but, given the limitations of national finances, it is not possible to write blank cheques. We all know from the experience of the previous Labour Government where the writing of blank cheques brings the national finances. We can take considerable satisfaction from our record on pay, while recognising that we would continue to wish to do more within the limits of good sense and good housekeeping.

The hon. Member for Fife, Central talked about the tax burden. Let him consider what the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) said in the Adjournment debate at 8 am. After nine hours sitting here my memory is not what it was, but if I remember correctly the hon. Gentleman gave the example of a hospital worker with a gross pay of £130 and a take-home pay of about £80, with £43 in deductions. The damage to that is caused by the tax. If we fell into the trap, into which Labour Members would like to lead us, of continually increasing Government spending, not only on the NHS but on all sectors—the £24 billion spending spree that Labour Members are promising the country—what would that do to the taxes of the nurses and ancillary workers? That point was well made by my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie).

The hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Pavitt) talked about the problems of the hybrid post. We recognise the point that he was making but we also understand and accept that there are now new and different posts, not nursing posts. They widen the scope and area of responsibility. If a nurse were appointed to such a post, we would expect her to be adequately supported and the nursing role to take precedence over any competing priorities. But instead of looking on the bright side, some of the Opposition look on the gloomy side. The Griffiths proposals imply and represent not a contraction of nursing opportunities but an expansion. We now have 55 nurses who have moved by their own choice into general management. My right hon. Friend has said more than once, and it is our firm policy, that the more nurses who wish to take up management posts the better. But, as my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South said, many of them are happy to stick to their particular job.

My hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, East (Mr. Moynihan) voiced his concern about RAWP. I draw his attention to the answer of my right hon. Friend on 17 December 1985 in column 156 of the *Official Report*. That implies a review of that important point and I hope that that will allay some of my hon. Friend's concern.

The hon. Member for Islington, North, in his second appearance of the day, seemed to want to tear up RAWP altogether. I hope that he will be able to persuade those of his hon. Friends who represent areas where the funding for the Health Service is a fraction of the funding in Islington, North that they will be happy when abandoning the RAWP policy which has been a feature of Governments of both complexions.

The second proposition that the hon. Gentleman seemed to offer the House was to go one better, in a Dutch auction in reverse that we had from the hon. Member for Leeds, West. He was after the regional break-up of the health authority to which I have referred. But it appears that the hon. Member for Islington, North wants a local health service. He wants it to be the equivalent of the social services departments. My hon. Friends will readily appreciate the kind of funding row that that would create.

In our earlier exchanges, the hon. Member for Wrexham was disposed to refer more than once to my explanation of the increases in real resources for the Health Service as "claptrap". On this occasion, however, I congratulate the hon. Gentleman and welcome him to the fold as he now accepts the figure given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State of 24 per cent., including next year's increase. Clearly I had under-estimated the increase. I agree with the hon. Member for Wrexham that we would like even more. I agree that there are technical advances and clinical adventures as well as greater demands from the elderly, but where is the limit? We have increased the funding by 24 per cent.

Where would the Opposition draw the line? According to Aneurin Bevan, the language of Socialism is the language of priorities. The Government speak that language and we reckon that the funds that we have given are what the country can afford. If the Opposition think that they can afford more, they must consider the pressure of taxation, especially on the low paid.

The hon. Member for Wrexham referred to the sale of nurses' homes. This is part of the drive to ensure that resources in the NHS are well used for the benefit of patients. It is a question of patients first, not management for its own sake. The patients are the first and absolute priority. As part of that approach, we must consider the real estate held by the NHS. The Health Service is one of the biggest landlords in the country and there may be no good reason for that to be so. It has been estimated that the estate includes about 100,000 flats, bedsitters and

houses, 20 per cent. of which were unoccupied at the time of the study. Less than 50 per cent. of trainee nurses and less than 10 per cent. of graduate nurses were in that accommodation. The policy decision was therefore taken that much of that property should be disposed of and health authorities are being asked to proceed with that. In the future, we shall not expect health authorities to provide accommodation for staff other than for professional training or in particular local circumstances.

Dr. Marek *rose——*

Mr. Whitney: I will not give way, as the hon. Gentleman spoke for a long time.

There are two benefits from that policy. First, it will produce great resources—we do not yet know how great —for the NHS. Secondly, it will provide resources to refurbish and improve the standard of the remaining accommodation for the benefit of nurses and others in the Health Service. Nurses and others living in those properties, many of which are off site, will be given the opportunity to buy them at discounts as favourable as those for local authority properties. Moreover, no one will be required to move elsewhere until the end of 1987.

Mr. Pavitt: That is selling the furniture to pay the rent.

Mr. Whitney: No, it is selling property that is neither used nor needed, to put the resources back into the Health Service.

The general theme of the debate has been one of concern and I am sorry that much of what has been said by the Opposition may have exacerbated that concern. I am convinced that the concern which has been expressed is greatly exaggerated and not justified. In my travels around the country I have found a much greater understanding of what the Griffiths report is all about. There is certainly a clearer understanding than that which has been suggested during the debate.

We are not interested in management for management's sake. There must be management for the patients' sake, and it must embrace nurses and all the other professional disciplines as part of the team. As we all recognise, and as the Stanley Royd inquiry demonstrated, the previous management system was flawed, to put it mildly. We have introduced a better system, which depends on the co-operation of all who come within it. We recognise that everyone concerned has a valuable contribution to make, not least the nurses. The nurses' position is assured by all the procedures which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State set out in his contribution to the debate and I urge all nurses to understand that we are conscious of their concerns. I understand that all the chairmen and general managers of the authorities are concerned as well.

I believe that the debate will have helped to focus these worries and I am sure that the Health Service will respond. I look forward to continuing and developing fruitful co-operation within the Health Service, especially with that most important element, the nurses.

2.21 pm

Mr. Norris: With the leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I had a good run at the start of the debate and I do not want to delay the House, as I know that it wishes to move on to other business. Through you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I extend my gratitude to hon. Members on both sides of the House for a most stimulating debate on what I am glad has been seen as a most important subject.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House regards the Report of the National Health Service Management Inquiry of 6th October 1983 as an invaluable guide to the efficient management of National Health resources; welcomes the implementation of the major recommendations of the Report and in particular the appointment of general managers at regional, district and unit level within the National Health Service; recognises that there may now be the opportunity further to improve upon what has already been achieved in the light of practical experience; further recalls that the key objective of management restructuring was identified in guidance sent to health authorities in 1984 as the improvement in standards in service to patients; and resolves to continue to examine the consequences of, and to encourage further, management innovation so as to ensure that the maximum possible amount of National Health Service resources is targeted as effectively, efficiently and sympathetically as possible on the direct care of patients.

Neighbourhood Watch Schemes

2.22 pm

Mr. Tony Favell (Stockport): I beg to move,

That this House regards neighbourhood watch schemes as an excellent and cost-effective way for the community to help in the fight against crime; applauds the efforts of those police officers who already have helped to establish a network of such schemes; expresses gratitude to those public-spirited members of the public who are taking an active part in promoting neighbourhood watch for the benefit of their neighbours; takes note of the evidence that crime is being combated in those areas with schemes already established; and resolves to encourage those areas without schemes to establish them as quickly as possible.

This is the first time that neighbourhood watch schemes have been debated in the House, and it is unfortunate that they will be debated for only a short time. However, I shall get on as quickly as I can. It is particularly appropriate that, on the day following the publication of the annual crime figures, we should debate ways in which the public can help to combat crime. The incidence of crime, especially violent crime, has continued to rise and the public are alarmed.

The Opposition — we heard the Leader of the Opposition yesterday—demand that more money should be spent in an attempt to reduce the incidence of crime. That is fair enough, for our police must not be left short of resources. The Government have recognised that, and, since their coming to power, there has been a substantial increase in police pay and there are now 7,400 extra police officers. But, no matter how many extra policemen we have, there will never be enough to enable us to have a police officer standing on every street corner, and it will never be possible to solve all crime.

Crime prevention cannot be left to the police alone. If we are to win the battle against crime, we must all play our part. In the home, parents must be made far more aware of the influence that they have over their children. Fiddling the tax man or the DHSS is not the example to set. In the courts, magistrates and judges have a duty to show young people that crime does not pay, especially now that almost one third of serious crime is committed by those under the age of 17. I suggest to the Home Office that it is time to think about publishing the names of offenders over the age of 14 years. The publication of every offender's name over that age would lead to the derision of one's friends and neighbours and help to deter them from further crime.

For too long many members of the public have thought that the fight against crime is not for them. They have passed by on the other side of the road and failed to follow the good Samaritan's example. Good neighbourliness does have a great deal to offer. As my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary said yesterday, crime statistics show that neighourhood watch schemes do beat crime, especially the burglar. In London, burglaries from dwellings dropped by 11 per cent last year, and in England and Wales there was a 4 per cent. decrease. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has no doubt that neighbourhood watch schemes are making a dramatic contribution to that fall.

Stockport forms part of the Greater Manchester police authority. It is one of only three divisions out of the 14 in the Greater Manchester area that operate neighbourhood watch schemes. In 11 divisions neighourhood watch schemes are not operating. Last year, crime rose in Greater Manchester as a whole, but Stockport's crime rate fell. Chief Superintendent Tony Whittle, Stockport's divisional commander, has said that one of the greatest factors in producing that result is neighbourhood watch schemes.

Under the leadership of Inspector Peter Butters 73 schemes have been set up in a little over a year, and 1,760 families in Stockport are now safer than before. Overall, in Stockport, the number of burglaries dropped by 13 per cent. during 1985, and in those areas with established neighbourhood watch schemes the drop was far greater. It is estimated to be as high as 50 per cent.

How do we account for the success of the scheme? The answer lies in its simplicity. Anyone interested in setting up a scheme gets in touch with the local crime prevention officer who will assist the caller in arranging a meeting of interested neighbours. A police officer will attend that meeting. Indeed, there was a meeting in Stockport only last week, which more than 200 people attended in response to a call to set up a neighbourhood watch scheme.

A police officer explains how the system works. He will demonstrate how to mark property with invisible ink. That not only facilitates the recovery of stolen property, but deters criminals from taking it in the first place, as signs are displayed to show that there is a neighbourhood watch scheme in operation.

The officers also arrange visits to examine house protection. The co-ordinators of the scheme arrange for the reporting of unusual types of caller at unoccupied homes and, in particular, keeping an eye on the elderly. I am told by the Stockport police that assistance for the elderly not only helps to retain their confidence in the security of their homes, but engenders a spirit of good neighbourliness during the recent cold spell.

One thing that I was pleased to note in the speech yesterday of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary was that neighbourhood watch schemes are not confined to the leafier suburbs. Research shows that there is a greater incidence of crime in the poorer inner city areas, and that is where there is the greatest feeling of desperation. I am told by many people in one particular area of Stockport that they fear to go to work or on holiday in case their homes are burgled. That is a disgraceful situation. Neighbourhood watch schemes will help to deter such burglaries.

I have one word of warning. Once set up, it is important for the area constable to maintain contact, and, if anything unusual is reported to him, he must report back to the resident who provided the information. In Stockport, the police have arranged for newsletters to be sent to members of schemes. It is critical, when a community goes to the trouble of setting up a scheme, that its efforts are shown to be appreciated and that its interest is maintained.

There is one body of interested parties that could do much more — the insurance companies. They say that they are in favour of neighbourhood watch schemes, but they do little else. I urge them to tell anyone who is renewing his premium about the advantage of a neighbourhood watch scheme and to consider premium rebates as a matter of urgency. The insurance companies do a great job in sponsoring the arts and sport, but it is even more important that they should sponsor the fight against crime.

2.28 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Mellor): I had hoped to

treat the House to a long commendation of the merits of neighbourhood watch, but I fear that it will now have to be brief, though none the less heartfelt.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Stockport (Mr. Favell) on raising this issue, on the work that has been done in Stockport and on the example that he has given of the practical benefits that neighourhood watch brings to local communities. I am happy to say that there are now 9,256 neighbourhood watch schemes in England and Wales, which represents a 300 per cent. increase over the past 12 months.

The figures that my hon. Friend quoted for the reduction in the number of domestic burglaries nationwide, and for the particularly striking reduction in those areas where neighbourhood watch schemes exist, show only too clearly the potential of neighourhood watch as a major crime prevention initiative. I am sure that my hon. Friend echoed what we all feel when he said that the whole community must get involved in crime prevention. I hope that, as the success of neighbourhood watch becomes more clearly established, even the limited number of Left-wing local authorities which seem to regard it as some sort of threat to their communities will come into line behind what has to be an initiative taken by us all, not just part of the community, if it is to be a success.

It being half-past Two o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

ROAD TRAFFIC REGULATION (PARKING) BILL

Read a Second time.

Bill committed to a Standing Committee pursuant to Standing Order No. 40 (Committal of Bills).

PROTECTION OF ANIMALS ACT 1911 (AMENDMENT) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Ernest Armstrong): Second Reading what day? No day named.

TOBACCO PRODUCTS (SPORTS SPONSORSHIP) BILL

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Second Reading [21 February].

Hon. Members: Object.

Debate further adjourned till Friday 11 April.

CRUELTY TO ANIMALS (AMENDMENT) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Second Reading what day? No day named.

RIGHT TO BE SELF-EMPLOYED BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

MEDICAL ACT 1983 (AMENDMENT) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 21 March.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Tuesday 18th March, the Motion in the name of Mr. John Biffen relating to Privileges may be proceeded with, though opposed, until half-past Eleven o'clock or for one and a half hours after it has been entered upon, whichever is the later, and, if proceedings thereon have not been disposed of by that hour, Mr. Speaker shall put the Question on any Amendment which may have been moved, and shall then put forthwith the Question on any other Amendments selected by him which may then be moved, and on the Main Question or the Main Question, as amended.—*[Mr. Maude.]*

Crayford School

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Maude.]*

2.31 pm

Mr. David Evennett (Erith and Crayford): I am grateful for this opportunity to discuss the future of the special support unit at Crayford school.

The past year has been extremely difficult in education. All the bad news has hit the headlines and the recent teachers' dispute has caused problems for schools, parents and, most important of all, children. We must be concerned primarily with children, as education is about their future, their training for life and their ability to cope with the world of tomorrow. It is intended to help them to play their full part in society as decent citizens.

The Government have achieved much in education and are attempting much more. They have my full support. Without doubt, considerable progress has been made and I am pleased to be able to report a real success in education today—the special support unit at Crayford school. The school is in the southern part of my constituency, in the London borough of Bexley, which is the local education authority. It is a small school with about 560 pupils on its roll, all of whom are accommodated on one site. The school has had several difficulties recently, but they have been overcome by the combined efforts of the acting head, Miss Woollett, dedicated staff and a supportive parents association.

The school is an integral part of the local community and commands the wide respect of local citizens. With that local backing, the support of the governors and of the local education authority, the staff, who are extremely talented and highly motivated, have become pioneers in special education, with the establishment of a special unit. They are to be congratulated, as I am sure my hon. Friend the Minister agrees.

The Education Act 1981 paved the way for the integration, as far as is reasonable and practicable, of children with special educational needs and children without such needs. Opening the Second Reading debate on the Education Bill on 2 February 1981, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Warrington, South (Mr. Carlisle), who was then the Secretary of State for Education and Science, said:

"We have constantly stressed that we wish to see the largest possible number of children with special needs educated in ordinary schools . . . However, our aim is not simply integration for its own sake. It is the provision of appropriate education for individuals. For many children I believe that this can and should be done in ordinary schools." — [*Official Report,* 2 February 1981; Vol. 998, c. 30.]

Long before the 1981 Act, Crayford school possessed a special unit for children with impaired hearing to ease their path into mainstream classes. Today, there are three special units at the school — the unit for hearing-impaired pupils, the support group and the special needs centre. The special needs centre provides an in-school service, while the other two units are boroughwide.

The unit for hearing-impaired pupils was established in 1972 as a resource for secondary age pupils from all parts of the Bexley local education authority area. The facilities cover the range of hearing impairment from moderate to profound hearing loss. Since its formation, the unit has endeavoured to achieve the maximum integration for each pupil in social and academic areas, and many pupils spend almost all their time in mainstream classes. The unit has two full-time members of staff and 13 pupils, although it can cater for a maximum of 16 pupils. Each child in the unit has an individually tuned radio hearing aid which picks up and amplifies the teacher's voice via a radio microphone which the teacher wears around his neck. During my visits to the school I have seen the equipment in use; it was interesting to note the ease with which all members of staff wear the microphones and the fact that the system operates without comment from the other children.

At Crayford school, the use of radio equipment is part of everyday life. To children with hearing loss, school and much else in the world often seems hostile. In addition, their need for some special education provision often means that the school which they attend is not in the immediate area in which they live. For those reasons, it is important that they feel comfortable at school and that they are part of the school. The attitude of the staff and pupils at Crayford school ensures that the pupils in the unit for the hearing-impaired are not set apart, but belong to the school community in the widest sense.

The other boroughwide facility at the school is the support group, which was established in September 1984 to cater for secondary school pupils who are experiencing social, emotional and behavioural problems, and who have been statemented under the Education Act 1981. That unit is staffed by two full-time teachers and can deal with up to 10 pupils. The unit aims for the maximum social and academic integration and attempts to return all pupils to mainstream classes within a year. Pupils in the unit follow the school curriculum. Rules must be obeyed and good behaviour is rewarded. Incentives are also offered to encourage pupils to want to return to mainstream classes. Here, encouragement is the key.

The third unit at Crayford school is the special needs centre, which is a school-based facility for pupils with learning difficulties. One full-time member of staff co-ordinates the work of the centre and specialist subject teachers provide individual support in mainstream lessons.

Teachers have received much bad publicity of late, a great deal of which is completely undeserved. My hon. Friend the Minister will agree that most teachers are dedicated and hard-working professionals. At Crayford school, that is the case in the special unit and in the school in general. I have received many letters from parents praising the school, and especially the staff. The results from the children speak for themselves.

The heads of the three units all have the status of heads of department. From the point of view of sensible organisation, the three units have been placed together to allow the all-important co-operation between teachers which is so evident in the school. Teachers from the special units teach some mainstream classes, and last year the interchange was widened by a rearrangement of the school timetable to allow some mainstream teachers to take groups of special needs children for some subjects, such as physical education and art.

The staff at Crayford school have been willing to be pioneers and to look to the future. Those teaching mainstream classes have been happy and willing to have other members of staff in their classes to give additional help to children from those units. Extra resources have also been available to class teachers and, in addition, the presence of a special unit teacher in the classroom has often been of benefit to the other non-unit pupils.

In any debate on education, as I am sure my hon. Friend the Minister will agree, the children are of paramount importance. We must never overlook the welfare or understate the needs of children. At Crayford school, the pupils are all-important, and in my visits to the school I have been impressed by their behaviour and attitudes. I have been particularly impressed by the attitude of the staff and other pupils towards the children in the special units and can say without fear of contradiction that the pupils in those units are full members of the school in every sense. It is essential for the success of the units that the pupils are made to feel so. They wear school uniform; they register with the rest of their form each morning; they attend morning assembly. They play a full and active part in the life of the school, and that is important to their integration or reintegration into the main stream.

Teachers, parents and pupils have all commented that the size of the school is one of the main reasons why the special units have been integrated so successfully. I am a product of a good grammar school; I was fortunate to attend Buckhurst Hill county high school for boys, which had a school roll of around 600. The head and senior staff knew all the boys by sight, and the vast majority by name. Such a size of school was friendly and manageable, and allowed the individual child to feel part of the school community. That is how I believe the children of Crayford school feel.

I regret the trend in the 1970s towards larger schools with rolls of 1,500 or more. In such institutions, despite great efforts, I am sure, by the head, staff and pupils, the community spirit is often lost. Individuals feel lost and the head and deputy heads have difficulty knowing their pupils. I do not wish to be partisan, but I feel that that is the heritage of the Social Democrat-led Labour Government of the 1970s, who allowed education to decline so much. I would welcome a trend away from larger schools towards smaller schools, especially when, as in this debate, we are talking about special needs provision.

Children with special needs already have difficulties not experienced by others, and integrating them effectively in vast and impersonal schools is not possible or practical. They tend to be isolated in special units, which is as unfair as the old separate special schools. Not only is it unfair, but it is unwise, and harmful to their educational and personal development.

The present size of Crayford school enables pupils with special needs to be effectively monitored and integrated for the majority of their time in school—in most cases, for over 70 per cent. of the school day. The provision of the support units is almost unique, as there are few similar units in the country. A recent report in *The Times Educational Supplement* said:

"few schools can yet have had the same experience or success at integrating children with special needs as Crayford, an 11-16 school in the outer London Borough of Bexley".

Integrating special needs pupils is not simply about putting them into an ordinary school. The National Foundation for Educational Research report, entitled "Educating Pupils with Special Needs in the Ordinary School", published in 1981, set out the criteria that it believed would ensure successful integration. They are, first, the understanding and commitment of the head teacher; secondly, the prior existence of some sort of special facility; thirdly, mainstream staff with positive attitudes and the ability to deal with special needs pupils; fourthly, close liaison with external agencies, such as social services; fifthly, suitable accommodation for full integration to foster the sense of belonging; and, sixthly, the integration of both mainstream and special unit teaching staff.

Not only are those criteria met by Crayford school; it could almost be the model upon which the criteria are based. The attitude of all at Crayford school is one of care, compassion, co-operation and integration. Such rapport has been built up over the past few years and cannot be transported elsewhere easily or built up overnight.

I have to report that the future of the special unit at Crayford school is in jeopardy. As my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary is aware, Crayford school is currently under threat of closure. The proposals of the local education authority to cease to maintain Crayford school are now with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science for his consideration. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary has recently met a delegation from the school in his ministerial capacity. I realise that, as he is replying today in that same capacity, he is unable to comment on the closure proposals at this stage. However, I hope that he will take my comments on board and convey them to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

I feel that I must make clear my total opposition to the closure of Crayford school. I appreciate that the school rolls are falling and that, as a consequence, education authorities must look for savings, but I believe that savings can be achieved in alternative ways which will be more satisfactory on educational grounds.

Crayford school is part of the local community. It is the only local secondary school for the children in Crayford and its closure would mean long journeys to schools outside the area for the vast majority of mainstream local children. In addition, the rolls in that area are not falling as rapidly as in other parts of the borough; indeed, a great deal of house building is taking place in the area which will ultimately place a greater demand on the local schools.

The closure of the only local secondary school would be a bitter blow to the community, not only from the practical aspects which I have mentioned, such as the travelling which would be involved for local children to get to school, but from the social aspect. Children travelling to schools away from the area in which they live tend to have two groups of friends—those at school and those near home. That fact, together with the sensible attitude of parents that children who have to travel to school outside their local area may often have to go straight home after school in winter, weakens the community spirit of the school. We heard a debate earlier this afternoon on neighbourhood watch and crime rates in this country. In any event, the closure of Crayford school would be a severe blow.

The closure has a wider impact. It affects not just local children but those in the special units. For them, the impact on the local community is not so important because many of those children have to travel, regrettable though that may be. But the effect of closure on their education is vital. The closure proposals include a statement that the unit for the hearing-impaired will transfer to Bexleyheath school. That school has a public intake of 10 forms of entry and a capacity of over 1,800 pupils. That is also where it is envisaged that a large percentage of Crayford school

[Mr. David Evennett]

pupils would go. The support group would be transferred to alternative suitable provision in consultation with parents.

As I have already said, the effectiveness of the special unit at Crayford school is a result of their total integration with the rest of the school. The units are part of the school and cannot be looked at in isolation. The pupils are in the mainstream classes for the bulk of their time in school, which means that tranferring the units elsewhere, even if kept together, would not be enough. It is the positive contribution that mainstream staff make at Crayford school which makes the units so successful. I do not believe that that success will continue if the special units are moved elsewhere.

For the staff of the unit to build up the same relationship with a new group of mainstream staff would take time, during which the education of those in the units would undoubtedly suffer. The position will be even more difficult if the units are moved from a close-knit school of less than 600 pupils to a vast school of over 1,800.

For the children in the unit for the hearing-impaired and the support group, closure, and the disruption it would cause, would place their educational prospects seriously at risk. For many, yet another move of school would be necessary, and for some the third or fourth move in their secondary education. Pupils with hearing impairment would undoubtedly suffer the most.

In view of the time, I realise that I cannot say all that I would like to say about the school and the units in this short debate. I must draw my comments to a close. I hope that my hon. Friend and neighbour, the Under-Secretary, appreciates, after my few brief words, the tremendous work that has been done, and is being done, by the special units at Crayford school and their importance to the children with special educational needs. All that good work is under threat. The future of the units is bleak, because they are under sentence of death under the borough's proposals. So much good work has been done and so much has been achieved, yet the future is so uncertain.

Without doubt, the subject of this debate is a success story and all involved in this important work must be complimented. What will happen if Crayford school closes and the units are disbanded or moved elsewhere? How will the children fare in a much larger and perhaps less friendly environment? The safeguarding of the future of the special units is another reason why Crayford school should be retained.

Crayford school is an outstanding example of good practice with respect to special needs integration, with special needs pupils fully provided for while integrated as far as possible into mainstrean classes. To lose the units, which are so effective, would be educationally detrimental to many pupils. I hope that these points will be taken into consideration by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State when he looks at the proposals for Crayford school. I urge him to give full consideration to the educational arguments and hear my plea for a future for Crayford school and its special units, which are so important, effective and valuable.

2.51 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secratary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Bob Dunn): I congratulate my hon. Friend and neighbour the Member for Erith and Crayford (Mr. Evennett) on obtaining this Adjournment debate on the future of the special support unit at Crayford school. I am glad of the opportunity to reply. My hon. Friend has clearly shown today his concern for the educational welfare of the children of his constituents, and this is by no means the first time he has made his interest in the issues known to me. The active part he played in representing his constituents' interests in the matter of Crayford school has been noteworthy, and we shall consider carefully the issues he has raised.

As my hon. Friend has observed, Bexley local education authority has proposed the closure of Crayford school and those proposals are currently before my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for his decision. Because of the quasi-judicial nature of my hon. Friend's role in such cases, I am unable to comment on the closure issue beyond saying that my right hon. Friend will take into account all relevant facts in reaching his decision, which he hopes to announce shortly. My hon. Friend will therefore understand that it would be wrong for me to go further than that today.

As my hon. Friend has pointed out, Crayford school currently has attached to it two units for pupils with special educational needs. One is for hearing-impaired children and the other is a support group for pupils with emotional and associated learning difficulties. Both units are generally acknowledged to be doing excellent work.

Under the authority's proposals, the unit for hearing-impaired children would transfer to Bexleyheath school as from September this year, along with other pupils from Crayford school. The authority proposes that the support unit at Crayford should continue to function there during the transitional period in which the buildings of Crayford school would remain in use as an annex to Bexleyheath school. This period would end in 1988, and the authority proposes at that time to transfer the pupils attached to the support unit to suitable alternative provision. These transfers would, I gather, be carried out in consultation with the parents. It is the authority's hope that the majority of these pupils will remain in the company of their peer groups throughout their school careers. I understand also that the LEA has plans to establish more support groups of this kind with a view eventually to providing four such groups spread throughout the borough.

I should have liked to raise a number of other points, but I shall undertake to write to my hon. Friend stating clearly the legal position and the rights and responsibilities that attach to such proposals with regard to his constituents.

I fully understand my hon. Friend's concern and that of his constituents for the future welfare of the children who are receiving such valuable help from the special support group. I recognise that all proposals to alter the local pattern of education provision do, regrettably, have a disruptive effect on all those concerned. I further recognise that for Crayford school this period of uncertainty and disruption has been rather a long one.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Crayford for the trouble that he has taken to present the facts most clearly in this short debate. We undertake to give careful consideration to the points that have been made today and in the past before a decision is reached.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at five minutes to Three o'clock.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 3 March 1986

THE ARTS

Sadler's Wells Theatre

35. **Mr. Chapman** asked the Minister for the Arts if he will make a statement about the future of the Sadler's Wells theatre.

Mr. Luce: The Arts Council has announced that it will increase the funding of the three main dance companies using Sadler's Wells. Sadler's Wells has raised money by its own efforts. A new sponsor has also come forward. The immediate dangers have thus been overcome. I hope that those concerned will be able to build on this foundation to secure the future of the theatre.

Museums and Galleries, Merseyside

36. **Mr. Freud** asked the Minister for the Arts what political affiliations he took into account when appointing the trustees of the Merseyside museums and galleries.

Mr. Luce: I have appointed the trustees of the Merseyside museums and galleries on the basis of personal suitability and experience for the task. Two of the new trustees happen currently to be Merseyside county councillors, and will relinquish that office at abolition on 1 April. They have been particularly closely involved with work on the museums and galleries.

East Midlands

37. **Mr. Janner** asked the Minister for the Arts whether he will take steps to assist the promotion of arts in the east midlands.

Mr. Luce: It is for the Arts Council to determine its allocation of funds between art-forms and areas; but I am happy to say that there is a strong level of support for the performing arts in the east midlands.

Metropolitan County Areas (Funding)

38. **Mr. Wareing** asked the Minister for the Arts when he expects arts organisations in the metropolitan counties to learn of their grant allocations from the Arts Council for the financial year beginning 1 April 1986.

40. **Mr. Fisher** asked the Minister for the Arts when arts organisations, presently receiving grants from metropolitan counties, will be informed of their funding allocations from public sources for the financial year 1986-87.

Mr. Luce: Arts Council clients not affected by the abolition of the metropolitan counties have been informed of their allocations for 1986-87; the Arts Council will publish the figures this week. Those affected by abolition are being given interim assurances that their Arts Council funding will be no less than in the current year. Their final figures will depend upon the outcome of negotiations with the local authorities concerned. These are in progress. There are considerable anxieties over the unwillingness of Liverpool to accept a reasonable share of the responsibility. In all other cases in metropolitan areas, negotiations are going well. I understand that announcements can be expected in most cases over the next few weeks, and that it will then be seen that most local authorities have made a major contribution.

Arts Funding (GLC Area)

39. **Mr. Chris Smith** asked the Minister for the Arts when he expects arts organisations in the Greater London council area will be informed of their funding allocations from public sources for the financial year 1986-87.

Mr. Luce: Arts Council clients not affected by the abolition of the Greater London council have been informed of their allocations for 1986-87; the Arts Council will publish the figures this week. Those affected by abolition are being given interim assurances that their Arts Council funding will be no less than in the current year. Their final figures will depend upon the outcome of negotiations with the local authorities concerned. These are in progress. There are considerable anxieties over the unwillingness of Islington to accept a reasonable share of the responsibility. In all other cases in London, negotiations are going well. I understand that announcements can be expected in most cases over the next few weeks, and that it will then be seen that most local authorities have made a major contribution.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Merseyside (Estates)

26. **Mr. Wallace** asked the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he last visited the Duchy of Lancaster's estates on Merseyside.

Mr. Tebbit: There are no Duchy of Lancaster estates on Merseyside.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Sunday Trading

30. **Mr. Marlow** asked the hon. Member for Wokingham, as representing the Church Commissioners, how many companies in which the Church Commissioners own shares control shops which are open on Sunday.

Sir William van Straubenzee: The Commissioners invest in 20 retailing companies. It is possible that some of these companies may trade on Sundays, but the Commissioners have no information on this.

"Faith in the City"

31. **Mr. Chapman** asked the hon. Member for Wokingham, as representing the Church Commissioners, what representations the Commissioners have received following publication of the Archbishop of Canterbury's commission report, "Faith in the City."

Sir William van Straubenzee: None.

1-3 The Sanctuary, SW1

Mr. Frank Field asked the hon. Member for Wokingham, as representing the Church Commissioners,

if he will detail all expenditure by the Church Commissioners on 1-3 The Sanctuary, London, SW1, over the past 20 years.

Sir William van Straubenzee: The Church Commissioners have approved expenditure totalling £163,000 on 1-3 The Sanctuary, London, SW1 over the past 20 years.

TRANSPORT

Thames Crossing, Dartford

Mr. Evennett asked the Secretary of State for Transport when he will publish guidelines to prospective promoters of a third crossing of the Thames at Dartford.

Mr. Ridley: I did so today. Copies of the guidelines have been placed in the Library. I am both sorry that it has taken so long to complete this work, and that I have not yet had the benefit of the Select Committee on Transport's report on tolls.

This invitation to promoters is designed to give the Government a choice of engineering solutions and methods of finance in providing enhanced capacity for the Thames crossing at Dartford. Any engineering solution meeting the Department's standards, summarised in an annex to the guidelines, will be considered.

Promoters are invited to submit proposals on any of three alternative bases: to design, construct and finance a new crossing, recovering their investment from tolls; to design and finance during the construction period a new crossing for sale to the Government at a pre-determined price; or to design and build a new crossing with the Government financing the construction as it progresses. The guidelines contemplate that a promoter who chooses to construct and operate the new crossing would also assume responsibility for the existing tunnels—and their outstanding debt—at present owned and operated jointly by Essex and Kent county council.

Any proposal by a promoter to levy tolls must include a clear statement of the initial toll, the conditions governing toll revisions and the period over which tolls are proposed to be levied.

Proposals must be submitted by 31 May. I hope to make a decision before 1 August. I shall select the proposal which offers the best value for money. The starting date for construction will depend on the passage of legislation in Parliament.

British Airways Helicopters

Mr. Bruce asked the Secretary of State for Transport on what date the board of British Airways sought his consent for the disposal of British Airways Helicopters; and on what date that consent was given.

Mr. Michael Spicer: British Airways informed my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State of its intention to dispose of British Airways Helicopters Ltd. on 2 May 1985. The Secretary of State indicated that he was, in principle, content for this to happen on 10 May 1985.

Radio Officers

Mr. Chope asked the Secretary of State for Transport what information he has on the rules on manning of radio officers on small ships applying in other European countries; if he has any plans to alter the rules as they apply to British ships; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ridley: The requirements on radio stations and their operation on ships are specified in the Safety of Life at Sea Convention 1974 to which the United Kingdom and other European countries are signatories. Exemptions from the requirements of the convention are permitted and have to be notified to the International Maritime Organisation. From such notifications my Department is aware of exemptions issued by other European Administrations.

During the past year trials have been arranged on a number of United Kingdom ships in order to assess whether the regulations about radio officers might be relaxed, in the light of developing technology, without endangering safety at sea.

Two trials were involved. The first exempted deep-sea ships from the full requirements of the convention subject to certain conditions. The second exempted short-sea cargo ships from the requirement to carry a radiotelegraph (Morse) station and radio officer, again subject to certain conditions.

In the light of the results of those trials my Department will now be prepared to grant exemptions from the relevant regulations to cargo ships engaged in the short-sea trades and all ships in the unlimited trading area provided certain other conditions are met.

Cabotage

Mr. Chope asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will make a further statement on negotiations within the European Community to open closed cabotage trade to British vessels.

Mr. Ridley: There has been no Transport Council since my last statement on 13 January—Volume 89, column 764-65. The next Council will be on 14 March and shipping matters will be further discussed then.

Aircraft Noise

Mr. Onslow asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will add Woking borough council to the list of local authorities to be consulted in connection with his aircraft noise index study.

Mr. Ridley: I have arranged for Woking borough council to be included in the formal consulation process on the aircraft noise index study.

Motor Trade (Licensing)

Mr. Colin Shepherd asked the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to have completed his review of the question of trade licensing within the motor trade.

Mr. Michael Spicer: This review has now been completed and an announcement will be made shortly.

Commissioners of Irish Lights

Mr. John David Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Transport how many persons are employed by the commissioners of Irish lights around the coast of *(a)* Northern Ireland and *(b)* the Republic of Ireland.

Mr. Ridley: The commissioners at present employ 595 people. I understand that 29 are employed in Northern Ireland and 566 in the Republic of Ireland.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Johnson Matthey Bankers

Mr. Sedgemore asked the Attorney-General if he will make a statement on possible charges arising out of the Johnson Matthey Bankers frauds investigation.

The Attorney-General: The investigation continues to be vigorously pursued by the fraud investigation group. The question of charges in relation to any particular individual cannot be decided until the appropriate stage of the investigation has been concluded.

Fraud (Prosecution)

Mr. Sedgemore asked the Attorney-General if, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen), 25 February, *Official Report*, column *484*, there are any proposals to charge any persons in the four cases referred to which involve the misappropriation of public money; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: In each case the investigation is continuing and I understand that in one case an individual has been charged with a criminal offence. That decision and any future decisions as to charges are matters for the Director of Public Prosecutions and not Her Majesty's Government.

European Community (Budget)

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Attorney-General what progress has been made in the interim application made by the United Kingdom in the European Court of Justice relating to the use by the Commission of funds supplied under the illegal budget of the European Assembly; when he expects the issue to be heard by the European Court; and if he will make a further statement.

The Attorney-General: The application for interim relief has been lodged with the European Court of Justice and is due to be heard on 10 March.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Prison Population.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the size of the present prison population in Northern Ireland divided into terrorist type offenders and other offenders categorised by age and sex in the following groups: under 18 years old, 18 to 25 years, 25 to 30 years, 30 to 40 years, 40 to 50 years, 50 to 60 years and over 60 years; and if he will give a breakdown of the length of sentence being served by each age group.

Mr. Scott [*pursuant to his reply*, 28 February 1986, c. *728*.]: At 9 February 1986 there was a total of 1,653 sentenced prisoners in Northern Ireland prison establishments. This figure includes inmates in the young offenders centre.

The breakdown of the population is as follows:

Age	*Scheduled offences* *Males*	*Females*	*Total*	*Average sentence for determinate sentenced prisoners (years)*
Under 18	4	—	4	2·02
18-25	257	6	263	5·59
25-30	394	6	400	11·53
30-40	433	3	436	12·15
40-50	73	2	75	8·54
50-60	10	—	10	4·20
60+	3	—	3	1·00
Total	1,174	17	1,191	

Age	*Non-scheduled offences* *Males*	*Females*	*Total*	*Average sentence for determinate sentenced prisoners (years)*
Under 18	23	1	24	1·36
18-25	213	—	213	1·44
25-30	99	—	99	2·67
30-40	80	2	82	2·28
40-50	32	3	35	2·37
50-60	7	—	7	4·83
60+	2	—	2	2·50
Total	456	6	462	

EMPLOYMENT

Labour Statistics

Mr. Deakins asked the Paymaster General (1) if he will publish a table showing *(a)* the percentage unemployment rate for each month since May 1979 and *(b)* the rate recalculated to include the number of self-employed now to be taken into account;

(2) if the change in the basis of calculating the rate of unemployment by including the self-employed in the calculations was requested by the statisticians in his Department.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The more widely based unemployment rate which I announced on 19 February will be published together with the rate calculated on the previous basis.

It will provide a better indicator of the proportion of the total labour force out of work. I have been assured by our statisticians that there can be no statistical objection to expanding labour market data in this way.

The more narrowly defined rate remains relevant because it allows consistency between the national rate and the rates for individual travel-to-work areas. Information on self-employment is not available at the level of travel-to-work areas.

The results of the 1985 labour force survey are expected shortly. These, together with the results of the 1984 census of employment, will enable revisions to be made of the estimates of the employed labour force. They should provide the basis for the publication of the additional unemployment rate for the first time in June, but this timetable is provisional. At that time, comparable monthly rates back at least to May 1979 will be provided. The more narrowly defined rate for each month since May 1979 is given in the table.

Rates of claimant unemployment
United Kingdom

	1979	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*
January	5·6	5·6	9·4	12·0	13·4	13·2	13·8	14·1
February	5·6	5·7	9·5	11·9	13·3	13·2	13·7	—
March	5·4	5·6	9·6	11·7	13·2	13·0	13·5	—
April	5·2	5·8	9·8	11·7	13·2	12·8	13·5	—
May	5·0	5·8	9·9	11·6	12·7	12·8	13·4	—
June	5·1	6·2	9·9	11·5	12·4	12·5	13·1	—
July	5·5	7·1	10·4	11·8	12·6	12·8	13·4	—
August	5·5	7·6	10·7	12·0	12·5	12·9	13·4	—
September	5·3	7·8	11·3	12·7	13·2	13·6	13·8	—
October	5·2	7·9	11·4	12·6	12·9	13·3	13·5	—
November	5·2	8·3	11·4	12·7	12·8	13·3	13·5	—
December	5·2	8·6	11·4	12·8	12·8	13·3	13·5	—

Sir Frederic Bennett asked the Paymaster General if he will give the latest figures for the number of men aged 60 to 64 years who are currently in work.

Mr. Lang: It is estimated from the labour force survey conducted in the spring of 1984 that there were 768,000 men aged 60 to 64 years in paid employment in Great Britain.

Health and Safety Executive

Mr. Caborn asked the Paymaster General if an instruction has been issued to Health and Safety Executive inspectors preventing them, following a site visit, from writing to union representatives at the site with a copy of the advice given by the Health and Safety Executive to the site operator.

Mr. Trippier: No such instruction has been issued. There has been no change in the guidance on the provision of information by inspectors and other staff to employees or their representatives.

Mr. Caborn asked the Paymaster General how many grade 1B Health and Safety Executive inspectors he expects to leave the Health and Safety Executive in 1986 based on previous years; and how many Health and Safety Executive grade 1B inspectors are to be appointed in 1986.

Mr. Trippier: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Batley and Spen

Mrs. Peacock asked the Paymaster General if he will list the help being provided by his Department for *(a)* the young unemployed and *(b)* the long-term unemployed in Batley and Spen.

Mr. Lang: The numbers currently benefiting from our employment and training measures in Batley and Spen are set out below. Because of the various bases on which local statistics are collected an unknown proportion may fall outside the constituency. YTS and the young workers scheme are particularly designed for young people, and our principal measure for the long term unemployed is the community programme.

	Number
Community programme	256
Enterprise allowance scheme	1,135
Job release scheme	690
Youth training scheme	2,277
Young workers scheme	290

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Hormones

Mr. Dalyell asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on his policy towards the European Economic Community on the question of hormones.

Mr. Jopling: The possibility of proceedings in the European Court of Justice is under active consideration.

Co-responsibility Levy

Mr. Hicks asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will reconsider his decision to deduct the co-responsibility levy on an annual basis rather than every six months as at present; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: I am not aware of any proposal to change the current arrangements for monthly collection of co-responsibility levy. The Commission has, however, proposed six monthly collection of the supplementary levy, which is currently collected on an annual basis, as part of the 1986-87 price proposals. We are still considering the proposal in detail, but my initial view is that although it might cause some difficulties, it could well reduce the risk of exceeding quota in the Community as a whole.

EC (Food Prices)

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his reply of 20 February, *Official Report*, column *332*, why the price at which sugar was made available to eastern Europe from the EEC fell between 1984 and 1985 by the amount shown; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: The statistics given in my right hon. Friend's reply were extracted from Eurostat sources which in turn are collated from statistics provided by member states. The average unit value quoted for sugar exported in 1984 from the European Community to eastern Europe, excluding the USSR, related to exports of about 1,000 tonnes. The possible inclusion of special sugar products in this small quantity could explain the high average unit value. The larger volume of exports in 1985—January-October—includes a substantial proportion of raw sugar and the average unit value was more in line with the average world price.

Export Rebates

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if the information he presented on 20 February, *Official Report*, column *334*, on the price at which various foodstuffs were made available to the Soviet Union included special sales agreed by the management committee of the EEC; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: The information contained in my right hon. Friend's reply of 20 February was extracted from the Eurostat trade data base constructed by the Statistical Office of the European Community (SOEC) from information provided by the member states. The exports recorded represent all sales from the Community reported to SOEC as having taken place in the period shown. The figures shown for 1985 were provisional.

EC (Surplus Food)

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish a table showing the amounts spent by the EEC on the storage of surpluses, the provision of export rebates and for the withdrawal of perishable food-stuffs from the market, respectively, over the most recent annual period for which figures are available, expressed in pounds sterling per week of the year in question.

Mr. Gummer: The information requested is as follows:

1985 expenditure (provisional figures) converted to weekly basis

	£ million
Storage of products in public intervention	15
Export refunds	75
Withdrawals (fish, fruit and vegetables)	3

Source: EC Commission figures.

Opium Poppy

Sir Edward Gardner asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information he has as to how many acres of land in the United Kingdom during the next 12 months are to be used for the cultivation of the opium poppy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: Statistics are not available but reports indicate that up to about 200 acres of poppies of the type papaver somniferum may be grown in commercial trials in the United Kingdom this year. Imported poppy seed is currently used in the confectionery industry and the seed oil has potential uses both in food, medicine and other products.

EC (Butter Exports)

Mr. Richard Shepherd asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the most recent price per pound at which the EEC has agreed to sell butter to the Soviet Union; what subsidy that represents per pound of butter; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: The price at which butter is sold to the Soviet Union is a commercial matter to be decided by individual traders when negotiating export contracts. Such sales attract the normal third country export refund. this refund is currently equivalent to approximately 50p per pound for eighty per cent. fat butter. On 28 February the Commission proposed special arrangements for the sale of butter from intervention stores at reduced prices to certain destinations including India, pakistan and the USSR. The butter is question is at least 18 months old and the amount of the price reduction will be determined by competitive tender. Normal export refunds will also apply to sales under these arrangements.

Liquid Skimmed Milk

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much liquid skimmed milk was subsidised for use as stockfeed in 1985 to date in the United Kingdom; and what was the cost of the subsidies involved.

Mr. Gummer: I will reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Unfit Food

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what quantities of *(a)* beef, *(b)* butter and *(c)* skimmed milk have been made unfit for human

consumption under European Economic Community policies from 1984 to date; and, in each case, what was the ultimate use of the product.

Mr. Gummer: In 1984 3,739,000 tonnes of liquid skimmed milk and 3,198,000 tonnes of skimmed milk powder were made available for animal feed through EC schemes which provide for denaturing, although not all the milk was denatured before use. Figures are not yet available for later years. No beef or butter has been deliberately rendered unfit for human consumption.

Intervention Stocks

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will provide a list of United Kingdom and European Community agricultural produce in public intervention and assisted private storage in England and the United Kingdom, respectively, and the amount held at the latest available date.

Mr. Gummer: The quantities of agricultural produce held in intervention and assisted private storage at 31 January 1986 were:

'000 tonnes

	England	*United Kingdom*
Beef	*37	88
Butter	156	207
Skimmed milk powder	20	41
Feed wheat	3,800	3,891
Barley	1,465	2,065

* Excluding quantities held in assisted private storage which are not separately recorded for England.
Source: IBAP.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Spain

Mr. Yeo asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the latest arrangements for Spain's accession to the European Economic Community.

Mrs. Chalker: Spain and Portugal acceded to the European Community on 1 January 1986. The terms of their accession are contained in their treaty of accession, signed on 12 June 1985 and debated in this House on 4 and 10 December at columns *313-53, 859-91*.

Costa Rica

Mr. Tony Lloyd asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has held with Oscar Arias following the latter's election as President of Costa Rica.

Mr. Eggar: No opportunity for discussions has yet arisen. However, a message of congratulation was sent to Dr. Arias on his election and we look forward to continuing the very good relations which we enjoy with Costa Rica.

South Atlantic Islands Development Corporation Ltd.

Dr. Marek asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will seek to inform himself as to the nature and directors of the two European legal entities referred to in the reply of 27 January, *Official Report*, column 369.

Mr. Eggar: In response to our inquiries, the South Atlantic Islands Development Corporation Ltd. has informed us that it has no knowledge of these details.

Seismic Detection Stations

Mr. Strang asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if his Department has had any discussions with the Government of the Soviet Union on the stationing of tamper-proof seismic detection stations inside the Soviet Union; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: There have been no recent discussions.

Test Ban Treaty Negotiations

Mr. Strang asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether there are any reasons, other than concerns over verification, that prevent Her Majesty's Government from pursuing comprehensive test ban treaty negotiations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: In the event of a resumption of negotiations on a comprehensive test ban questions other than verification would no doubt have to be addressed, but, as the hon. Member is aware, our view remains that it would be premature to resume negotiations while outstanding verification issues remain unresolved.

El Salvador

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if any discussions have been held with the Contadora group on the proposed military training in the United Kingdom of members of the El Salvador armed forces; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: No.

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has any plans to discuss with the Government of El Salvador the arrangements for the training of members of the El Salvador armed forces in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: No. Our offer to train one or two Salvadorean officers still stands, but the arrangements have not yet been finalised.

ENERGY

National Coal Board

Mr. Yeo asked the Secretary of State for Energy when he last met the chairman of the National Coal Board; and what subjects were discussed.

Mr. Peter Walker: I meet the chairman of the National Coal Board frequently and discuss a wide range of subjects affecting the coal industry.

Mr. Mason asked the Secretary of State for Energy if, when next he meets the chairman of the National Coal Board, he will discuss the consequences of the new accounting procedures whereby the National Coal Board attributes interest charges on capital investment and the costs of subsidence damage to individual collieries and their particular consequences for coal mines situated close to built-up areas; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: The accounting procedures applied by the National Coal Board are matters for the board in consultation with its external auditors.

Mr. Mason asked the Secretary of State for Energy what assessment he makes of the effect of the downward turn in oil prices on the National Coal Board's break-even point and on the expected demand for coal; whether he will have to seek to extend the borrowing powers legislation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: It is too soon to make an assessment of the impact of lower oil prices on the NCB's finances in view of the many uncertainties involved.

Oil Statistics

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Energy what were United Kingdom oil production and oil exports, respectively, in million barrels per day in 1985; what were total export earnings; and what was the value of oil exports as a proportion of total United Kingdom exports.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: United Kingdom oil production in 1985 was 2·65 million barrels per day, and exports of crude oil and petroleum products are provisionally estimated at 2 million barrels per day. The total value of exports in 1985 was £78,072 million: exports of oil and oil products accounted for £16,050 million, or 21 per cent. of this total.

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Energy what information he has as to the total cost, including interest on capital, depreciation and all overheads, of producing each barrel of United Kingdom oil in 1985.

Mr. Buchanan-smith: The average cost before taxation of producing oil from fields in production in 1985 was £7 per barrel, equivalent to $9 per barrel at the average exchange rate for the year. This estimate includes all relevant development and overhead costs with capital costs annuitised at 10 per cent. in real terms over field life.

Details on the 1984 costs are given in chapter 6 of the Department of Energy's 1985 Brown Book.

Combined Heat and Power

Mr. Rost asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he has given any guidance to the Central Electricity Generating Board or area boards on how they may participate in combined heat and power consortia; what equity percentage they may inject; and what criteria on discounted rate of return on such investment is required.

Mr. Goodlad: In July 1983 my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State told the chairman of the Electricity Council to encourage electricity boards to adopt and support schemes for the combined production of heat and electricity, in accordance with the provisions of the Energy Act 1983. Boards are also expected to aim at maximising the involvement of private risk capital in areas of their operations wherever possible. CHP schemes should meet the financial criteria applied by boards in relation to their other expenditure.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

National Seed Development Organisation and Plant Breeding Institute

Mr. Tom Clarke asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what recent representations he has received opposed to the privatisation of plant breeding work at the National Seed Development Organisation and the Plant Breeding Institute.

Mr. Walden: None. However, I understand that my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has received four representations.

Educational Welfare Officers

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list in the *Official Report* the number of educational welfare officers in England in each of the last five years.

Mr. Chris Patten: This information is not collected by the Department.

Freedom of Speech

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's policy towards the maintenance of freedom of speech in universities, with special reference to the views expressed to his Department by the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals.

Mr. Walden: The Government have consistently made clear their view that the protection of freedom of speech at institutions of higher education should be of primary concern to all members of such institutions. They have therefore welcomed both the publication before Christmas by the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals of its guidance to universities on freedom of speech and lawful assembly, and the assurance that nothing in that guidance should be a pretext for an institution to cancel a meeting other than in extreme circumstances.

Creches

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has on which institutions of further or higher education have established creches for their students' and employees' children.

Mr. Walden: No record of such information is held centrally.

Student Grants

Mr. Marlow asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will introduce a system of student grants biased in value in favour of those subjects beneficial to manufacturing industry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Walden: The mandatory grant system does not distinguish between subjects of study, and there are no plans that it should do so. The regulations do, however, allow for students to benefit from an industrial scholarship of up to £1,600 without any reduction in basic grant; and from September 1986 new tax-free bursaries will be available in addition to maintenance grants for certain students training to teach craft, design and technology, mathematics or physics.

Secondary Education

Mr. Freud asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the average length of time taken by his Department to reach a decision on proposals for secondary school reorganisation submitted by local education authorities over the last three years.

Mr. Dunn [*pursuant to his reply*, 26 February 1986, c. *581*]: The average period between publication of secondary school reorganisation proposals and the final decision by the Secretary of State over the last three years was 8·8 months. This includes the two-month period during which statutory objections can be made and the further month allowed before a local education authority must submit these objections and their comments to the Secretary of State.

Overseas Students

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many students from *(a)* overseas and *(b)* the United States of America are currently studying in British universities and polytechnics (i) in total and (ii) by institutions; and what were the comparable figures for 1979, expressed in figures and as a percentage of all students.

Mr. Walden: [*pursuant to his reply*, 26 February 1986, c. *576*]: The available information is given in tables 1 and 2. The percentages shown relate to the total numbers of full-time and part-time students. Overseas students are defined as those whose permanent domicile is outside the United Kingdom. In 1984 the numbers of overseas university postgraduate students have been taken as those who paid the overseas rate of fees as the numbers with overseas domicile is not available for each individual university. The numbers of students from the USA at each individual university could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

TABLE 1

University Students : Great Britain

University or College	*1979*				*1984*			
	Students from the United States	*All overseas students*	*United States students as a percentage of all students*	*all overseas students as a percentage of all students*	*Students from the United States*	*All overseas students*	*United States students as a percentage of all students*	*All overseas students as a percentage of all students*
Aston	*	989	*	16·4	*	306	*	7·6
Bath	*	324	*	8·8	*	310	*	7·8
Birmingham	*	1,260	*	13·0	*	808	*	8·4
Bradford	*	703	*	13·1	*	440	*	8·8
Bristol	*	287	*	3·9	*	378	*	5·1
Brunel	*	329	*	8·7	*	265	*	7·4
Cambridge	*	975	*	7·9	*	1,258	*	10·0
City	*	583	*	19·1	*	624	*	17·1
Durham	*	233	*	4·7	*	235	*	4·5
East Anglia	*	398	*	9·4	*	477	*	10·6
Essex	*	708	*	23·0	*	719	*	23·2
Exeter	*	310	*	5·5	*	319	*	5·6
Hull	*	427	*	7·4	*	321	*	6·0
Keele	*	155	*	4·8	*	305	*	9·7
Kent	*	456	*	11·0	*	779	*	16·9
Lancaster	*	1,004	*	20·3	*	339	*	7·2
Leeds	*	1,396	*	12·1	*	1,170	*	10·3
Leicester	*	218	*	4·2	*	200	*	3·8
Liverpool	*	518	*	6·4	*	446	*	5·5
London Graduate School of Business Studies	*	66	*	28·1	*	51	*	13·4
London University	*	7,331	*	15·1	*	7,173	*	14·7
Loughborough	*	564	*	9·7	*	579	*	10·3
Manchester Business School	*	34	*	22·4	*	46	*	16·9
Manchester	*	1,253	*	10·3	*	993	*	8·3
University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology	*	1,136	*	27·4	*	954	*	22·6
Newcastle	*	939	*	11·4	*	844	*	10·3
Nottingham	*	522	*	7·0	*	428	*	5·5
Oxford	*	1,261	*	9·3	*	1,346	*	9·8
Reading	*	743	*	12·3	*	775	*	12·8
Salford	*	685	*	13·7	*	754	*	16·7
Sheffield	*	897	*	11·1	*	508	*	6·1
Southampton	*	580	*	8·8	*	524	*	7·6
Surrey	*	445	*	12·2	*	423	*	11·2
Sussex	*	631	*	13·5	*	662	*	14·3
Warwick	*	346	*	6·6	*	441	*	7·6
York	*	168	*	4·9	*	196	*	5·6
Total England	2,232	28,360	0·9	11·1	2,564	26,396	1·0	10·3

University or College	1979 Students from the United States	1979 All overseas students	1979 United States students as a percentage of all students	1979 all overseas students as a percentage of all students	1984 Students from the United States	1984 All overseas students	1984 United States students as a percentage of all students	1984 All overseas students as a percentage of all students
Aberystwyth U.C.	*	206	*	6·5	*	184	*	5·8
Bangor U.C.	*	319	*	10·6	*	166	*	5·8
Cardiff U.C.	*	829	*	13·8	*	751	*	13·0
St. Davids Lampeter	*	11	*	1·5	*	25	*	3·1
Swansea U.C.	*	591	*	14·2	*	406	*	9·6
Welsh National School of Medicine	*	51	*	6·5	*	62	*	7·4
University of Wales Institute of Science and Technology	*	479	*	16·4	*	548	*	19·5
Total Wales	100	2,486	0·5	12·0	39	2,142	0·2	10·5
Total England and Wales	2,332	30,846	0·8	11·2	2,603	28,538	0·9	10·3
Aberdeen	*	407	*	7·2	*	401	*	6·9
Dundee	*	330	*	10·9	*	239	*	7·2
Edinburgh	*	774	*	7·5	*	693	*	6·5
Glasgow	*	702	*	6·4	*	924	*	7·5
Heriot-Watt	*	397	*	11·6	*	519	*	14·4
St. Andrews	*	330	*	9·4	*	343	*	9·5
Stirling	*	240	*	8·2	*	241	*	8·3
Strathclyde	*	834	*	11·9	*	1,063	*	12·8
Total Scotland	471	4,014	1·0	8·6	584	4,423	1·2	8·7
Total Great Britain	2,803	34,860	0·9	10·8	3,187	32,961	1·0	10·1

* Figures not available.

Table 2 Polytechnic Students: England

	1979 US Students	1979 Total Overseas	1979 per cent. US	1979 per cent. Overseas	1984 US Students	1984 Total Overseas	1984 per cent. US	1984 per cent. Overseas
Polytechnics								
NE London	8	927	0·11	12·92	8	1,360	0·09	16·45
Middlesex	20	1,147	0·26	15·35	18	953	0·20	10·70
Kingston	*	383	0·07	6·95	*	170	0·03	2·58
City of Birmingham	5	243	0·05	2·80	0	128	0·00	1·45
Coventry	0	211	0·00	3·58	*	93	0·03	1·40
Wolverhampton	0	283	0·00	4·66	0	112	0·00	1·56
Liverpool	0	384	0·00	5·26	0	287	0·00	2·92
Manchester	16	608	0·13	5·06	*	222	0·00	1·59
Sheffield	*	240	0·02	2·56	0	93	0·00	0·82
Huddersfield	0	524	0·00	8·48	0	179	0·00	2·93
Leeds	5	698	0·05	7·35	0	325	0·00	3·57
Newcastle/Tyne	*	271	0·02	3·14	0	113	0·00	1·17
Sunderland	*	465	0·02	11·12	0	453	0·00	8·56
North London	58	874	0·99	14·94	*	404	0·01	6·01
Southbank	8	648	0·11	9·00	0	302	0·00	3·66
City of London	62	459	0·57	4·28	*	278	0·03	3·63
Central London	9	695	0·11	8·95	*	486	0·04	6·70
Thames	*	343	0·05	8·71	*	340	0·02	7·02
Bristol	*	235	0·01	2·93	0	119	0·00	1·28
Teesside	10	573	0·29	16·75	0	211	0·00	4·32
Plymouth	*	353	0·08	10·00	*	178	0·01	3·53
Brighton	26	759	0·45	13·23	12	253	0·19	4·07
Portsmouth	0	582	0·00	9·42	0	242	0·00	3·37
Hatfield	*	352	0·02	7·88	0	167	0·00	3·03
Lancashire	0	103	0·00	2·15	0	75	0·00	1·22
Leicester	0	242	0·00	3·53	*	173	0·04	2·11
Trent	0	189	0·00	2·10	*	144	0·00	1·37
Oxford	0	0	0·00	0·00	12	170	0·22	3·17
North Staffs	*	151	0·02	3·08	0	142	0·00	2·31
Total	244	12,942	0·125	6·647	69	8,172	0·031	3·709

* 1-4 Students. Precise numbers are not shown in order to preserve confidentiality for individual students.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

India (Westland Helicopters)

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what criteria he used in deciding whether the grant of aid to India to finance the purchase of Westland helicopters represented value for money; what steps he took to satisfy himself that those criteria had been fulfilled; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Raison: I am satisfied that the usual procedures were followed before the decision was reached to offer grant aid to finance the purchase of Westland helicopters for India.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether any arrangements have been made or discussed with Westland plc with a view to reducing the cost of the aid project for the supply of helicopters to India by any payment by or on behalf of Westland to the Exchequer, or by any other means; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Raison: It would not be appropriate to disclose discussions relating to commercial negotiations. However, I can confirm that no such payment has been or will be made.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the aid contracts for the supply of helicopters to India are expected to be signed; who are the parties to the contract; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Raison: The contract for the supply of helicopters to India will be signed by the Indian Helicopter Corporation and Westland plc. The grant aid agreement providing finance for the purchase of the helicopters will be signed by the Governments of the United Kingdom and India. Both agreements are expected to be signed shortly.

Nicaragua

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has altered his instructions to the German executive director of the Inter-American Development Bank in view of Nicaragua's decision to permit a technical review in respect of the proposed loan for agriculture; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Raison: This project is still under discussion between the bank's management and the Nicaraguan Government. Instructions will be sent to the executive director of the constituency containing the United Kingdom before the matter comes to the board.

WALES

Tourism

10. **Mr. Gregory** asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will state the level of Government support for tourism in Wales for the current year.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: For 1985-86 the Wales Tourist Board has been allocated £7·696 million. of which £2·5 million is for section 4 projects. Tourism support also comes from the Welsh Development Agency, the Development Board for Rural Wales and CADW; from expenditure on the urban programme, roads, museums and art galleries; and from certain MSC schemes.

Labour Statistics

12. **Mr. Rogers** asked the Secretary of State for Wales what was the percentage unemployment in 1979 for the Rhondda valleys; and what is the present percentage based on the 1979 criteria.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: The February 1979 rate of unemployment in the Pontypridd travel-to-work area, which included the Rhondda valleys, was 8·1 per cent. A percentage for February 1986 is not available on the 1979 criteria.

15. **Mr. Barry Jones** asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many people were unemployed shown in unadjusted figures in 1979 and at the latest available date in 1986 in *(a)* Wales and *(b)* Clwyd; and if he will express the increase both as totals and as percentages.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: The unadjusted February 1986 unemployment figures for Wales and Clwyd are 188,405 and 25,549 respectively. Unadjusted figures for 1979 were produced on a different basis and cannot properly be compared with this year's.

European Regional Development Fund

16. **Mr. Knox** asked the Secretary of State for Wales what is the total value of grants which Wales has received from the European regional development fund in each of the past three years and in the current year to date.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: Net commitments for the European Commission's financial years of 1983, 1984 and 1985 now stand at £41·7 million, £58·2 million and £56·9 million respectively. No allocations have yet been made for 1986.

17. **Mr. Wigley** asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many people are unemployed in Wales; what percentage of the population of working age they represent; and how these figures compare with the figures for corresponding months in the last six years.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: The seasonally adjusted number of people unemployed in Wales on 6 February 1986 was 176,900. Estimates of the population of working age are only published annually by the Registrar General and the latest figure relates to June 1984, when the unemployed in Wales represented 9·8 per cent. of the population of working age. The equivalent percentage for the years 1979 to 1983 were 4·3 per cent., 5·2 per cent., 8·1 per cent., 8·9 per cent. and 9·6 per cent. respectively.

18. **Mr. Roy Hughes** asked the Secretary of state for Wales what are the latest unadjusted figures for unemployment in *(a)* Newport, *(b)* Gwent and *(c)* Wales; what were the equivalent figures in May 1979; and what was the percentage increase in each case.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: The unadjusted February 1986 figures for Newport, Gwent and Wales are 13,288, 30,602 and 188,405. Unadjusted figures for 1979 were produced on a different basis and cannot properly be compared with this year's.

20. **Sir Raymond Gower** asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many new jobs have been created since

1979 up to the latest convenient date in Wales, in the county of South Glamorgan and in the area of the Vale of Glamorgan borough council; and how many new jobs are in prospect in each case.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: As I have made clear in my answer to an earlier question from my hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Mon (Mr. Best), it is impossible to say how many new jobs have been created since 1979. However, projects for which offers of regional selective assistance or, where applicable, regional development grants were accepted, or which were allocated Government-financed factories have promised to provide over 90,000 jobs in Wales, over 8,000 jobs in the county of South Glamorgan and 1,300 jobs in the area of the Vale of Glamorgan borough council. Other jobs will have been created without Government assistance, particularly in the service sector and among the self-employed.

Sir Raymond Gower asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many grants, giving their total value, have now been received from the European regional development fund in Wales, in South Glamorgan and in the area of the Vale of Glamorgan borough council, respectively.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: Since the fund's establishment, 1,050 grants to the value of £322·8 million have been committed to schemes in Wales, of which 108 grants to the value of £65·7 million in commitment have been in respect of schemes in south Glamorgan and 18, totalling £21·5 million in respect of schemes in the Vale of Glamorgan.

Welsh Water Authority

13. **Dr. Marek** asked the Secretary of State for Wales, consequent upon privatisation of the Welsh water authority, what conditions he will impose to ensure all domestic water in Wales is fit to drink.

Mr. Mark Robinson: The Welsh water authority is currently under a statutory duty, and takes all appropriate precautions, to supply wholesome water. That duty will continue, as is indicated in paragraph 66 of Cmnd. 9734 — "Privatisation of the Water Authorities in England and Wales."

Cynon Valley (Unemployment)

14. **Mrs. Clwyd** asked the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received on the current unemployment situation in the Cynon Valley; and what action he proposes to take in consequence.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: The hon. Lady knows of the representations which she herself made to me at our meeting on 10 February, and I have of course received other approaches on this question from time to time. The Government will continue to deploy the full range of available measures to create new jobs in the Cynon valley.

"Better Schools"

19. **Mr. Gwilym Jones** asked the Secretary of State for Wales what progress has been made towards the objectives set out in "Better Schools."

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The Bill to reform the government of schools, to provide for the appraisal of teachers, and for new financial arrangements for the training of teachers, is now before Parliament. Discussions with the education partners on size of schools and targets for the removal of surplus places are under way; preparations for the introduction of the GCSE are in train; the preparation and evaluation of a national formula for records of achievement for school leavers is proceeding; and steady progress is being made towards agreement on the form and content of the curriculum.

Welsh Development Agency

21. **Sir Peter Emery** asked the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has had about the practice of the Welsh Development Agency in seeking to entice firms to move their factories from East Devon to Wales; and whether he will issue a direction to the authorities to desist from seeking to entice firms in this way.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: I have had no such representations. The role of the joint Welsh Development Agency/Welsh Office inward investment body, WINvest, is not to entice firms to move but to encourage companies seeking a new location to consider Wales.

South-West Wales (Cancer Treatment)

22. **Dr. Roger Thomas** asked the Secretary of State for Wales whether there are any plans to extend and improve the radio therapeutic and allied cancer treatments provided for the south-west Wales area.

Mr. Mark Robinson: The Welsh medical committee has been asked to investigate and report on the adequacy of cancer services throughout Wales. Its report is expected shortly.

Agriculture

23. **Mr. Geraint Howells** asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he is satisfied with the present state of the agriculture industry in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: Poor weather in 1985 contributed to a decline in Welsh farming incomes in that year. However, the worst-affected sectors have benefited from recent increases in hill livestock compensatory allowances and the exceptional weather aid scheme. Support measures for the livestock sector are currently being considered in the CAP price negotiations for 1986-87. While we will seek to ensure that United Kingdom and Welsh producer interests are not discriminated against, pressure on farming incomes will continue as long as there remains the need to contain the cost of agricultural support and to reduce surpluses.

Housing Repairs

Mr. Gwilym Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many former council houses in *(a)* Cardiff North and *(b)* Wales come within the provisions of the Housing Defects Act in total and under each type of design.

Mr. Mark Robinson: According to Cardiff city council, the number of former council houses in Cardiff, North of the types designated under the Housing Defects Act 1984 is as follows:

	Number
Airey	8
Cornish Unit	6
Woolaway	72

According to local authorities in their 1986-87 HSIP submissions there were 2,079 dwellings in Wales which came within the provisions of the Housing Defects Act 1984. Reliable information on the exact numbers of the various types is not available, but the following types are known to exist in Wales: Airey; Cornish; Gregory; Hawksley Schindler; SGS; Orlit; Reema; Wates and Woolaway.

Mr. Gwilym Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with home owners, their representatives and agents and local councils regarding the implementation of the Housing Defects Act in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mark Robinson: Implementation of the Housing Defects Act has been discussed several times at meetings of the Welsh Housing Consultative Committee which is chaired by a Welsh Office Minister. Last year Welsh Office officials held two seminars for local authorities to discuss the operation of the Act and there have been a number of meetings between officials and individual district councils.

On 6 February a meeting was held between officials and representatives of five PRC home owner associations and the consultant which they have engaged to discuss a number of issues of concern to the associations.

South Glamorgan County Council

Mr. Gwilym Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of South Glamorgan county council's likely rate increase if it acceded to his proposal, made at his meeting with representatives of Welsh county councils on 17 February, for a reduction in its planned increase in spending from 9 per cent. to 7·5 per cent.; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Raymond Gower asked the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with South Glamorgan county council concerning its rate precept for 1986-87; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: When I met representatives of all Welsh county councils on 17 February they refused to consider making any reduction in their planned spending for 1986-87 and were on course to press ahead with unjustifiable rate increase without regard for their ratepayers. I was not prepared for the interest of ratepayers to be disregarded in this way. I have therefore decided, in their interests, to recycle £13 million of the grant that would have been unclaimed as a result of county council overspending. As a result of this decision South Glamorgan county council has reduced its proposed precept increase by 5p to 183·2p—24·3 per cent. above the precept for 1985-86. Had the county also reduced the increase in its planned expenditure by 1½ per cent., the precept could have been reduced by a further 8·3p to 174·9p. If the council had budgeted to spend in line with the 1986-87 RSG settlement, the best for Wales for many years, its precept could have been et at 156·5p—a result which would have been to the clear advantage of ratepayers. In fact, spending is set to increase by 9·4 per cent., over 1985-86 budgets or more than twice the rate of inflation. This decision will place an intolerable burden on ratepayers. I hope that, like Dyfed, South Glamorgan and other overspending councils will think again. They can and should reduce the burden they have now placed on their ratepayers.

Roads

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish in the *Official Report* a list of those roads in Wales for which his Department has responsibility.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The Welsh Office has responsibility for the following trunk roads where they are within Wales.

M4, A5, A40, A44, A48, A55, A449, A458, A465, A470, A477, A479, A483, A487, A489, A494, A550, A4042, A4060, A4076, A4232, A4080.

Cervical Carcinoma

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish in the *Official Report* for each of the last five years, for Singleton hospital, Swansea, the number of patients who died while waiting to receive treatment for a cervical carcinoma.

Mr. Mark Robinson: The information is not available centrally.

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will publish in the *Official Report* for each of the last five years for Singleton hospital, Swansea *(a)* the average waiting time in days for a patient to receive radiotherapy treatment for a cervical carcinoma and *(b)* the longest waiting time in days for any patient before receiving radiotherapy treatment for a cervical carcinoma;

(2) if he will publish in the *Official Report* for each of the last five years the longest period that a patient waited for radiotherapy treatment for a cervical carcinoma in each hospital providing that facility in Wales.

Mr. Mark Robinson: The available information is given in the following two tables, the first of which shows, for each of the years 1980 to 1984, the total number of deaths and discharges of in-patients who received radiotherapy treatment for a cervical carcinoma at Singleton and Velindre hospitals, respectively, analysed by type of admission—immediate, waiting list, booked and other. The second table shows, for each of these years, the median waiting time and the maximum waiting time before admission to hospital for waiting list and booked cases.

Numbers of deaths and discharges of in-patients who received radiotherapy treatment for a cervical carcinoma

	1980	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*
Singleton hospital					
Total deaths and discharges of which:	121	114	106	84	102

	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984
Number of immediate cases	16	14	27	18	20
Number of waiting list cases	2	4	0	2	0
Number of booked (planned) cases*	101	89	78	59	82
Others	2	7	1	5	0
Velindre hospital					
Total deaths and discharges of which:	132	171	92	215	246
Number of immediate cases	20	10	11	32	32
Number of waiting list cases	112	151	62	76	73
Number of booked (planned) cases*	0	0	11	93	129
Others	0	10	8	14	12

* A booked or planned case is a patient for whom the admission date to hospital is fixed at the same time as the decision is made to provide in-patient treatment.

Waiting times for waiting list and booked cases who receive radiotherapy treatment for a cervical carcinoma

	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984
	Median waiting time (days)				
Singleton hospital	6	6	5	6	6
Velindre hospital*	13	16	13	11	12
	Maximum waiting time (days)				
Singleton hospital	41	83	41	23	52
Velindre hospital*	83	54	40	33	41

* Waiting list cases only.

Noxious Substances (Disposal)

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton asked the Secretary of State for Wales whether he will make it his policy to impose on local authorities a duty to assist pharmacists with the disposal of arsenic and other noxious substances.

Mr. Mark Robinson: No. Waste disposal authorities are already able to advise waste producers, including pharmacists, on the most suitable methods of disposal.

Public Woodland

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many acres of public woodland exist in Wales; how many Forestry Commission employees there are in Wales; and what is the estimated value of public woodland in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: On 31 March 1985 the Forestry Commission managed 136,004 hectares of woodland in Wales. This woodland was valued at approximately £293 million.

At 31 December 1985 there were 1,000 Forestry Commission employees based in Wales.

Breast Cancer

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Wales whether it is the practice of health authorities in Wales, in cases where breast cancer has at any time been suspected, to recall that patient at regular intervals for further screening.

Mr. Mark Robinson: It is a matter for the clinical judgement of the consultant concerned with an individual case to determine what further monitoring or treatment is necessary.

Intervention Stocks

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will provide a list of United Kingdom and European Community agricultural produce in public intervention and assisted private storage in Wales, the amount held and the value of produce in public intervention at the last available date.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: The quantities of agricultural produce held in intervention stores and assisted private storage in Wales on 31 January 1986 is as follows:

Intervention Stores	*Tonnes*
Beef	736
Butter	16,948
Skimmed milk powder	4,202
Feedwheat	19,786

The value of the intervention stocks was £41 million calculated at the buying price applicable at that date.

Assisted private storage	*Tonnes*
Butter	150

The value of this is not known as it is in commercial ownership.

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give the location of all the EEC warehouses and private stores used in the storage of United Kingdom and European Community agricultural produce in Wales at the latest available date; and what amount of each product is being stored in each place.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: On 31 January 1986 the locations and amounts of agricultural produce in intervention stores and assisted private storage in Wales are as follows:

Location and commodity	*Tonnes*
Cardiff	
Beef	626

Location and commodity	Tonnes
Butter	10,649
Rhyl	
Beef	110
Butter	1,275
Lampeter	
Butter	150
Milford Haven	
Butter	480
Newport	
Butter	1,040
Swansea	
Butter	3,222
Whitland	
Butter	280
Bedwas	
Skimmed milk powder	2,263
Llandyssul	
Skimmed milk powder	973
St. Clears	
Skimmed milk powder	966
Monmouth	
Feedwheat	19,786

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Staff Inspector

Mr. Maxton asked the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed as representing the House of Commons Commission, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart on Monday 17 February, *Official Report*, column 6, whether the post of staff inspector was advertised among staff at present employed in the House of Commons before being advertised elsewhere; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Beith: Among the requirements of candidates for the post of staff inspector is experience of staff inspection and comparable investigatory work, including a knowledge of Civil Service job classification and grading. For this reason, exceptionally, it was not considered appropriate for this vacancy to be advertised among staff employed in the House of Commons.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Business Expansion Scheme

Mr. Rowe asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what information he has on the money which has been raised under the business expansion scheme in each year since the scheme began, including his best estimate for 1985-86; and if he will divide the sums between *(a)* funds provided directly by individuals and *(b)* funds raised indirectly from individuals through institutions;

(2) how many applications under the business expansion scheme have been successful; how much money has been raised; and what is the proportion of successful applications as a percentage of the total number of applications.

Mr. Moore: The table gives the final estimates for companies receiving investments and the amounts invested under the scheme in 1983-84. Information for 1984-85 is not yet complete and it is too early to provide estimates for 1985-86. Information is not available on the number of companies unable to raise money under the scheme.

Business expansion scheme investments

£ million

Year	Total		AIF* only		AIF* and direct jointly			Direct only	
	Companies	Amount	Companies	Amount	Companies	AIF amount	Direct amount	Companies	Amount
1983-84	715	105·0	140	29·9	47	9·3	30·8	528	34·9
1984-85†	583	125·9	161	43·0	23	2·9	19·4	399	60·6

*Approved investment funds.
†Incomplete.

Living Standards

Sir Adam Butler asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the amount by which the person currently on average earnings has changed his standard of living, measured by the percentage increase in take-home pay over the increase in retail prices, since May 1979.

Mr. Lawson: For a married man on average full-time earnings, income net of income tax and national insurance contributions has increased by 12·8 per cent. in real terms since 1978-79. The corresponding increase for a single person is 13·0 per cent.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is *(a)* the total figure for United Kingdom public sector employment, *(b)* the figure for each principal Government Department and *(c)* the estimate for *(a)* and *(b)* for 1985; and what percentage of the total employed labour force was represented by the public sector in mid-1979, 1980, 1981, 1982, 1983, 1984 and 1985, respectively.

Mr. MacGregor: Total public sector employment in relation to the total employed labour force is shown in the article on public and private sector employment on page 90 of *Economic Trends*, December 1985.

Employment in Government Departments is shown in table 2.22 of "The Government's Expenditure Plans, 1986-87 to 1988-89."

Manpower Statistics

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was *(a)* the total number of civil servants employed in the United Kingdom in central Government Departments, and staff employed in local government in 1985, *(b)* the percentage of total population and total work force these figures represent, *(c)* the value of the total salaries paid to these two groups for the year and *(d)* the percentage of gross domestic product these salaries represent; and if he will give any information he may have as to equivalent figures in France, West Germany, the United States of America and Japan, respectively.

Mr. MacGregor: At mid-1985, the Civil Service employed 585,000 full-time staff and 23,000 part-time staff, in total 1·1 per cent. of the home population and 2·5 per cent. of the employed labour force. Total pay excluding national insurance contributions in 1985-86 is estimated to be £5·25 billion, about 1·5 per cent. of gross domestic product.

Local authorities employed 1·88 million full-time staff and 1·01 million part-timers, in total 5·1 per cent. of the home population and 11·9 per cent. of the employed labour force. No estimate is yet available of the local authority pay bill.

No comparable information is available for other countries.

Public Expenditure

Mr. Chope asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish in the *Official Report* the details of the calculations of the cost of Her Majesty's Opposition's spending proposals which he undertook to provide during the debate on the public expenditure White Paper on 20 February, *Official Report*, column 513.

Mr. MacGregor: The details of the Opposition spending commitments with an annual cost of £24 billion to which I referred in the debate on the public expenditure White Paper are set out in the table. The notes to the table give the relevant references to Opposition speeches and publications.

Labour's Spending Plans: Principal Components

		Notes
Aid	900	1
Industry	11,33	2
National Investment Bank	48	3
Employment		
Training for unemployed	900	4
Community programme uprating	200	5
Educational maintenance award	965	6
35 hour week	3,000	7
Minimum wage	1,000	8
Regional employment subsidy	500	9
Energy	750	10
Arts	140	11
Transport		
Roads	706	12
Rail	248	12
Airports and Ports	154	12
Housing		
New build	3,000	13
Rehabilitation	250	14
Urban Programme	500	15
Sewerage	250	15
Education		
Under 5s	400	16
Teachers	235	17
Buildings and equipment	871	18
Close private schools	300	19
Student grants	125	20
Health NHS	780	21
Social Security		
TV licence for pensioners	325	22
Maternity and death grants	220	23
Child Benefit	1,450	24
Pensions	1,650	25
Early Retirement	2,600	26
Unemployment Benefits	500	27
Minor Measures	60	28
Total	24,160	

Notes:

1. Commitment to double aid within 2-3 years of taking office. Phasing of +900, +2000, +31000 assumed. (Neil Kinnock in *The Guardian* of 30 July 1985).
2. 86-87 cost of commitment to increase industrial support by 50 per cent. (John Smith in *Tribune* 8 November 1985).
3. Based on assumed lending of £2 billion in year one and interest subsidy of 4%. on 60%. of loans. *No* allowance for bad debts. (NIB described by Roy Hattersley, in a speech in London on 16 May 1985.)
4. Estimated cost (in 1986-87 prices) of commitment to 5-fold increase in training for adult unemployed. (Charter for Young People, June 1985).
5. Adjusted pay rates—in line with Local Authority workers—and more training. (Charter for Young People, June 1985).
6. £27 per week for over 16s in full time education. (Charter for Young People, June 1985).
7. Cost in *public services* only. ("Working Together", April 1985).
8. *Public services* cost only of minimum wage set at two thirds of average earnings. (Conference motion 1983).
9. Interpretation of uncosted commitment, based on 1976 subsidy of £2 a head per week, uprated in line with inflation and applied to manufacturing industries only. ("A New Partnership, A new Britain" —TUC/Labour document, August 1985).
10. Mid-point estimate of cost of conservation measures only — mainly a public sector conservation programme. *No* allowance for increased investment in non-nuclear capacity which would fall mainly on the industry and on prices ("A New Partneship").
11. Doubled funding of performing and creative arts and zero rating for VAT. (Norman Buchan, *Financial Times*, 6 August 1985).
12. 1986 Update of commitments in "Reconstruction of Britain" (TUC 1981) Supported in "A New Partnership".
13. 125,000 new starts a year at £24,000 each. ("A New Partnership").
14. 25,000 renovations a year at £10,000 each. ("A New Partnership").
15. First year of a five-year programme to increase Urban Programme by £2·5bn over 5 years, and sewerage investment by £1·25bn over 5 years ("Public Investment in the Economy"—TUC, October 1984, endorsed in "A New Partnership, A New Britain")
16. 200,000 new places in nursery schools. The Charter for the under 5s (April 1985) recommended a right to pre-school education for all 3 and 4 years olds. Assumes 80 per cent. take-up.
17. 14,000 more teachers and £60m on training. Labour's own estimates, quoted by Giles Radice in *The Guardian*, 17 April 1985.
18. £781m on school buildings, £90m on books (as Note 17).
19. Assumes 500,000 extra pupils in the state sector. (Charter for pupils and parents).
20. Restoration of mandatory award to 78-9 levels. (Charter for Young People, June 1985).
21. £475 million for phasing out of charges, remainder real increases in pay and capital expenditure and end to competitive tendering. ("NHS in Danger"—NEC statement, October 1983).
22. Hansard 27 March 1985—Mr. Gerald Kaufmann.
23. £120 million maternity grant, £100 million death grant (1984 conference motion).
24. £3 a week increase. (Roy Hattersley, *Hansard* 20 March 1985). *But note* new proposal by Michael Meacher to double child benefit. Would cost another £1·95 billion.
25. Pensions increased by £5 per week (single) and £8 (couple). (Hattersley, *Hansard*, 20 March 1985).
26. Reduction in retirement age to 60 for men. (Neil Kinnock, 24 June 1985, at TGWU conference).

27. Long term rate of supplementary benefit to unemployed after a year on benefit (Hattersley, *Hansard*, 20 March 1985).
28. Concessionary fares, strengthening NEDC, more grants to other bodies.

European Community (Budget)

Mr. Gerald Bowden asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his latest estimate of the United Kingdom's net contribution to the Community budget in 1985.

Mr. Brooke: A final figure is not yet available, but the latest estimate of the United Kingdom's net contribution to the Community budget in calendar 1985 is £1,870 million.

This estimate compares with that of £1,212 million in the statement on the 1985 Community budget (Cmnd. 9633). The reasons for the abnormally high level of our net contribution during 1985 were set out in that White Paper. The latest estimate is larger than that in Cmnd. 9633 for two main reasons. First, most (£439 million) of the 1,000 mecu (£605 million) abatement payable in respect of our excessive net contribution to the 1984 Community budget was received in the first few days of 1986 rather than in 1985 as assumed in Cmnd. 9633. Secondly, our share of Community expeniture (particularly FEOGA guarantee expenditure) in 1985 was lower than expcted. In 1984, for example, our share of FEOGA guarantee receipts was about 11½ per cent.; in 1985, it was about 9½ per cent.

The United Kingdom's net contribution to the Community budget in 1986 should be very much lower than in 1985. Not only will the 1986 figure reflect the £439 million abatement received in the first few days of 1986, it will also be reduced by abatements payable in 1986 under the Fontainebleau system (and worth at least 1,400 mecu, some £900 million).

The Government's latest estimate of the United Kingdom's net payments to Community institution in 1985-86 remains at £800 million, the figure published in the latest public expenditure White Paper (Cmnd. 9702).

Taxpayers

Dr. McDonald asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will publish and update the table on the number of taxpayers for 1984-85 and 1985-86 on the same basis as the answer given on 25 January 1984, *Official Report*, columns *607-608*.

Mr. Moore [*pursuant to his reply*, 20 January 1986, c. *85*.]: The latest estimates are as follows:

Thousands

	1982-83	*1983-84*	*1984-85**	*1985-86†*
Number of Taxpayers	24,600	24,300	24,050	24,000
Number of taxpayers* if allowances had remained at the level of the previous year	25,800	25,600	25,050	24,850
Difference	1,200	1,300	1,000	850

* Including taxpaying wives.
† Provisional.

Budget Documents

Mr. Tim Smith asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many copies of the Budget documents were printed in 1985; how many were sent to the Vote Office; how many were made available to commercial organisations and at what charge for each; what happened to the remainder; what was the cost to the Exchequer of producing the Budget documents; and what was the total amount recovered from commercial organisations.

Mr. Lawson: [*pursuant to his reply*, 26 February 1986, c. *594*.]: In 1985, Her Majesty's Treasury printed 800 copies of the Budget speech, 2,000 copies of a summary of the Budget and 2,072 copies of a press notice. In addition, 1,662 copies were produced of press notices from other Government Departments. One thousand copies of the Budget summary and press notices went to the Vote Office and 150 to the Printed Paper Office. Commercial organisations were sent 180 copies of the speech, summary and press notices. They were charged £2·00, plus the HMSO charge for the financial statement and Budget report. Unused Budget documents (excluding HMSO publications) were kept in stock for a few weeks and then destroyed.

The costs to the Treasury of producing the Budget documents are not readily indentifiable from the other printing costs of the Department, but are estimated to be in the region of £3,000. All moneys received by the Treasury from the sale of publications are brought to account as appropriations in aid of the Treasury vote, class XIII, vote 4. Receipts from the sale of Budget documents are not accounted for separately and cannot be identified except at disproportionate cost.

In addition to the Treasury publications, Her Majesty's Stationery Office printed and published 9,000 copies of the 1985 financial statement and Budget report. Two thousand were sent to the Vote Office, 150 to the Printed Paper Office, and 150 to the Sale Office; 1,603 were sold to Government Departments and 4,691 were sold to other customers, including members of the public and commercial organisations; 406 copies remain in stock. The price to all customers was £5·35 per copy.

The cost of printing and publishing is borne by the HMSO trading fund which recovers its costs from net sales revenue. The Exchequer, therefore, incurs none of the costs of printing, publishing and selling—other than the purchase from HMSO of copies for the use of the Treasury and other Exchequer departments.

ENVIRONMENT

Communal Heating System

Mr. Wheeler asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will report on the progress of his consultations with the local authorities and other interested

bodies on the supply of heat to tenants from a communal system and state when he proposes to introduce regulations giving secure tenants who are supplied heat from a communal system a right to information about the cost of their heating.

Mr. John Patten: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave him on 25 November 1985, at column *380*. Preparation of the consultation paper has proved more time-consuming than expected, but I hope that it will be ready soon.

Sewerage and Water Supply

Mr. Harrison asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what percentage of industrial consumers are connected to the public sewerage system; and what is the overall figure of those industrial consumers.

Mr. John Patten: The total number of non-household consumers connected to the public sewerage system in English water authority areas is approximately 1·85 million. Of these, some 597,000 pay on the basis of a measured supply. The proportion of these consumers classed as "industrial" as opposed to "commercial" or other is not available; neither is the proportion of all industrial and/or commercial concerns connected.

Mr. Harrison asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what percentage of industrial consumers are connected to a public water supply; and what is the overall figure of those consumers so connected.

Mr. John Patten: The total number of non-household consumers connected to a public water supply in English water authority areas is approximately 1·64 million (including some 345,000 supplied by the statutory water companies). Of these, just under 850,000 receive a measured supply. The proportion of these consumers classed as "industrial" as opposed to "commercial" or other is not available; neither is the proportion of all industrial and/or commercial concerns connected.

Mr. Harrison asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the overall figure of households connected to a public water supply.

Mr. John Patten: The total number of households in English water authority areas connected to a public water supply (including customers of statutory water companies) is approximately 17·5 million (99 per cent. of all households).

Direct Labour Organisations

Mr. Michael Morris asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he is proposing to take to seek to safeguard the right of companies to tender against direct labour organisations.

Mrs. Rumbold: Local authorities are already required to invite tenders for all major new construction work and most minor construction and maintenance works. The Government will extend compulsory competition to a wider range of local authority services as soon as a legislative opportunity becomes available. We also remain committed to providing stronger powers to prevent authorities from frustrating the intentions of the legislation.

Water Companies

Mr. Michael Morris asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the water companies operating in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, respectively.

Mr. John Patten: The information requested by my hon. Friend is provided for England and Wales. There are no water companies in Scotland or Northern Ireland.

England and Wales (30)
- Bournemouth and District
- Bristol Waterworks
- Cambridge
- Chester
- Cholderton and District
- Colne Valley
- Corby (Northants) and District
- East Anglian
- Eastbourne
- East Surrey
- East Worcestershire
- Essex
- Folkestone and District
- Hartlepool
- Lee Valley
- Mid Kent
- Mid Southern
- Mid Sussex
- Newcastle and Gateshead
- North Surrey
- Portsmouth
- Rickmansworth
- South Staffordshire
- Sunderland and South Shields
- Sutton District
- Tendring Hundred
- West Hampshire
- West Kent
- Wrexham and East Denbighshire
- York

Urban Housing Renewal

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list those local authorities which have applied for additional housing investment programme allocations for the next financial year under the proportion of total allocations reserved for projects recommended by his Departments' urban housing renewal unit; and if he will list the projects involved.

Sir George Young: The local authorities which have bid so far for additional housing investment programme allocations related to packages of improvements developed in discussion with the urban housing renewal unit, and the projects involved, are as follows:

Local Authority and Estate

Birmingham
- Central Ladywood
- Leach Green

Blackburn
- Green Lane

Bolton
- Wilkinson Gardens
- New Bury

Bradford
- Gilstead
- Newby Square

Calderdale
- Abbey Park

Cannock
Rawnsley

Coventry
Willenhall
Wood End
Wood End/Monkswood
Stoke Heath
Hillfields
Stoke Aldemoor

Derby
Brook Street

Ealing
Elton Road
Golf Links

Gateshead
St. Cuthberts
St. Oswalds/Crowhall Tower

Greenwich
Barnfield

Hammersmith and Fulham
Robert Owen House
Margravine
Townmead
White City

Hartlepool
St. Abbs Walk
Redworth Walk
Flamborough Walk

Hyndburn
Huncoat

Kingston-upon-Hull
Newton Court
Orchard Park
Bransholme

Langbaurgh
Spencerbeck
Grangetown
The Closes
Redcar Road East

Leeds
Chapeltown
Newhalls
Gipton South
Halton Moor
South Seacroft/Belle Isle

Liverpool
Radcliffe
Falkner

Manchester
Palm Steet, Longsight
Groome Walk
Queensbury Parade
Audlem Walk
Farnborough Road
Halmore Road
Charnley Walk
Cranfield Walk

Mansfield
Pleasley

Middlesbrough
Corringham Walk
Langridge Crescent
Homerton Road
Hemlington Hall Farm
Coulby Newham

Newcastle-upon-Tyne
North Kenton
McCutcheon's Court

North Tyneside
Wallsend
Wallsend/Willington Square
George St, North Shields
Longbenton
Hunter's Close
Portland Close
Perth Gardens
Purley Close

Norwich
Catton

Pendle
Glenroy

Rochdale
Kirkholt
Hollin

Salford
Trinity

Solihull
Kingshurst Hall

South Tyneside
Grange Court/North Court

Sunderland
Barclay Court
Cato Square
Downhill
Ascot Court

Walsall
Rosehill

Waltham Forest
Beaumont Road
Chingford Hall

Radioactive Pollution

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the terms of reference of the joint committee set up between his Department and the Irish Government to study the effects of radioactive pollution from Sellafield in the Irish Sea; and if he will give the names of the members of the committee, the dates on which it has met and any conclusions that have so far emerged from its work.

Mr. Waldegrave: As I announced on 24 May 1984, at columns *462-63*, in answer to the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume), officials of the United Kingdom and of the Irish Republic meet regularly under the auspices of a contact group to exchange information on matters of mutual interest concerned with radioactivity of the environment. Since 1984 the group has met five times. The personnel involved at any time are selected for their knowledge and expertise in relation to the specific issues under consideration. The group does not undertake or commission studies, but on marine science more generally officials of both Governments take part in bilateral and international discussions from time to time.

Local Government

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table showing the total number of people employed by local authorities during each year since 1960, and the estimated total for 1984-85.

Mrs. Rumbold: The information is as follows:

Local Authority Manpower: England 1960-1985
June Figures (Thousands).

Year	Total Staff* (Full-time & Part-time)	Total Staff† (Full-time & Part-time)
1960	1,440	
1961	1,483	
1962	1,543	
1963	1,600	
1964	1,668	
1965	1,719	
1966	1,808	
1967	1,887	
1968	1,948	
1969	1,999	
1970	2,037	
1971	2,103	
1972	2,205	
1973	2,310	
1974	2,229	
1975	2,406	2,470
1976	2,418	2,482
1977	2,397	2,459
1978	2,408	2,469
1979	2,451	2,512
1980	2,411	2,475
1981	2,354	2,421
1982	2,327	2,393
1983	2,338	2,406
1984	2,342	2,409
1985	2,347	2,418

* Figures do not include police civilians, cadets, traffic wardens, magistrates courts, probation service and agency staff. This data was not available until the introduction of the Joint Manpower Watch in 1979 (See †).

† Figures include those listed in (*)—i.e. they are for all services.

Northamptonshire County Council

Mr. Michael Morris asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has as to the number of full-time and part-time persons employed by Northamptonshire county council at the following dates: the quarter ended March 1985, the quarter ended March 1983, the quarter ended March 1981, the quarter ended March 1979, the quarter ended March 1977, the quarter ended March 1974 and the quarter ended March 1973.

Mrs. Rumbold: The available information is as follows:

March figures

	Full time	Part time
1980	10,342	9,714
1981	9,572	9,354
1983	10,339	9,876
1985	10,381	10,405

Source: Joint Manpower Watch.

Figures relating to Northamptonshire are not available before March 1980.

Nuclear Waste

Mr. Frank Cook asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if any contingency plans exist for the management of radioactive wastes once the existing storage facilities at nuclear installations are filled, and in the event that no permanent disposal sites have been approved.

Mr. Waldegrave: As my right hon. Friend announced on 25 February, at columns 812-25, Government policy is that disposal facilities for low and intermediate level wastes will be provided. It is for the waste producers to ensure that adequate storage facilities are available in the interim.

Local Government Reform

Mr. Mason asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will state the reasons for the differences in compensation payments being made to employees of the metropolitan councils on abolition, especially those between Greater Manchester, West Yorkshire and South Yorkshire; if he will give examples of redundancy payments and pensions entitlements for similar jobs in each area; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Tracey: The reasons for the differences in compensation entitlements stem from decisions taken by individual metropolitan county councils after the Government had announced their intention to abolish those councils and the timetable for the necessary legislation.

The Government stated in the White Paper (Cmnd. 9063) their intention to set nationally-applicable compensation terms, and subsequently announced on 1 March 1984 that the legislation would disallow any local compensation schemes introduced after that date. Despite this, three of the councils introduced local schemes before that date, and the others — West Midlands, South Yorkshire, and Tyne and Wear — introduced them afterwards.

In enacting section 53 of the Local Government Act 1985, Parliament duly disapplied the schemes introduced after 1 March 1984. The Act, however, preserves contractual rights to compensation terms obtained before that date, and therefore most Greater Manchester council, West Yorkshire county council and Merseyside county council staff in post at that date seem likely to have entitlements under the local schemes introduced by those councils.

The compensation terms under the local schemes are not identical, and it is not for my right hon. Friend to say what, if any, entitlements individual officers might have under those schemes. The Government's terms, which will apply nationally to all staff of the affected authorities who have no preserved contractual entitlements, or who opt to release them, are set out in the Local Government Reorganisation (Compensation) Regulations 1986 (S.I. 1986/151) laid before the House on 7 February. An explanatory memorandum giving guidance on these was placed in the Library on 11 February.

Mr. Jessel asked the Secretary of State for the Environment in what form he proposes to give information to members of the public affected by the abolition of the Greater London council and the metropolitan county councils about the new structure of local government in those areas after 1 April.

Mr. Tracey: We have produced short factual leaflets outlining the new structure of local government in London

and each of the metropolitan counties. The leaflets will be distributed to all households in the seven metropolitan areas in the next two weeks.

The leaflets, copies of which have been placed in the Library, are similar to those produced to give members of the public information about the 1974 reorganisation of local government. They describe briefly what the post-abolition structure will be, and answer some of the questions members of the public may be asking. The leaflets do not, however, attempt to provide details of the arrangements successor authorities are making for particular services. Members of the public are invited to ask their local councils for such details.

London Residuary Body

Mr. Charles Morrison asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many people are now employed by the London Residuary Body; and what further recruitment he expects to be undertaken.

Mr. Tracey: These are matters for the London Residuary Body.

Nature Conservation

Dr. David Clark asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will withdraw circular 108/77; if he will issue a new circular to local authorities giving guidance on their role on nature conservation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: Work is currently in hand to prepare a new circular, replacing circular 108/77. We expect to publish it in the spring.

Noxious Substances (Disposal)

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will make it his policy to impose on local authorities a duty to assist pharmacists with the disposal of arsenic and other noxious substances.

Mrs. Rumbold: My right hon. Friend at present sees no need for this. Waste disposal authorities can and do already advise individual waste producers on the most suitable method of disposal of their wastes.

PRC Homes Ltd.

Mr. Chope asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects PRC Homes Ltd. to approve a repair method under the Housing Defects Act for Reema houses.

Sir George Young: I understand that a method of repair for Reema houses has been submitted to PRC Homes Ltd. for its appraisal. It is hoped this will be completed by April; I cannot, of course, prejudge the outcome.

Yorkshire Water Authority

Mr. O'Brien asked the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what representations he has received from the Yorkshire water authority to increase the level of borrowing for the purposes of improving the water supply and the disposal of sewage in the region;

(2) what response he has now made to the request by the Yorkshire water authority to be allowed to spend more capital money.

Mr. John Patten: I have received no specific representations for the extra finance above the level of £30 million for DOE services agreed for the authority for 1985-86, but it has made a case for more in its 1985 corporate plan. In correspondence with the chairman of the authority last November, I was able to agree an increased external financing limit of £32 million for 1986-87, which I confirmed on 21 November 1985.

Council House Sales

Mr. Marlow asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the annualised revenue effect on local authorities of the sale of council houses since 3 May 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: The effect depends on a number of factors, including the rent which would have been payable if a house had not been sold and the amount the local authority would have spent on its management and maintenance. Information about a number of these factors is not available centrally.

Cornish Houses

Mr. Corbett asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will provide extra funding to local authorities wishing to purchase Cornish houses in the ownership of the National Coal Board and which have been designated under the Housing Defects Act 1984.

Sir George Young [*pursuant to his answer*, 27 February 1986, c. *678*]: No. The Housing Defects Act imposes obligations on local authorities only in relation to private owners of defective PRC houses and these obligations have been taken into consideration in the distribution of housing investment programme allocations.

Housing Defects Act

Mr. Chope asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will hold an early meeting with the officers of the National Federation of Prefabricated Reinforced Concrete Home Owners to discuss the implementation of the Housing Defects Act; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten [*pursuant to his answer*, 28 February 1986, c. *735*]: I have received a letter on this subject from the chairman of the National Federation of PRC Home Owners and I appreciate their concerns. I shall be replying to that letter shortly.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Company Mergers

Mr. Michael Morris asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is his policy in reviewing mergers where over 80 per cent. of the market for the combining groups is overseas; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Howard: In evaluating the competitive situation in individual cases my right hon. Friend has regard to the international context, to the extent of

competition in the home market and to the competitive position of the United Kingdom companies in overseas markets.

Ship Propulsion

Sir David Price asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what support he is giving to new applications of the use of wind in ship propulsion; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Butcher: Over £200,000 has been provided to industry since 1983 under the support for innovation scheme towards the cost of projects relating to wind assisted ship propulsion. A United Kingdom device which has received such support is expected to commence sea trials shortly. Wind assistance is one of the areas under consideration in the fuel efficiency part of the efficient ship programme and support for further projects will be considered if appropriate proposals are presented to the Department.

BL (Privatisation)

Mr. Hoyle asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if, pursuant to the reply of 24 February, *Official Report*, columns *421-22*, he will list the people, together with their position in the company, who are conducting negotiations with General Motors on behalf of BL; what specific assurances Government officials are seeking from General Motors regarding the future of the relevant Land Rover-Leyland business under General Motors ownership; if he will undertake to meet trade union delegations prior to any agreement with General Motors being ratified; and if he will now say what role General Motors World Truck is playing in the talks.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Under the direction of the BL board, commercial negotiations with GM are being conducted principally by Mr. N. J. Carver, Director of Business Strategy, BL plc, Mr. C. R. Lyddon, Director, Finance and Audit, BL plc, and Mr. H. A. Rose, Director Finance and Planning, Land Rover-Leyland Ltd.

As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry told the House on 3 February, General Motors are being asked to give undertakings that the majority of the products sold by the businesses involved would be manufactured in the Unied Kingdom, that the products would continue to have a high local content, that there would be a substantial level of exports, that research and development facilities would be maintained and developed in the United Kingdom, that Land Rover would retain its distinct British identity, and that an appropriate level of investment would be injected into the business to achieve competitive future models and facilities.

I have myself met a number of trade union delegations to explain the current position. I remain very willing to meet further trade union delegations from BL and GM at any time.

Should an agreement with General Motors be concluded, it would, of course, be for the management to determine its product range. The R & D resources of GM, including their work on a world truck for the next decade would be available to the combined business.

Wine Sales

Mr. Mason asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if he will list the options he has under consideration relating to securing the sale of wine in prescribed quantities following his recent survey of the level of compliance with the code of conduct agreed by his Department and the trade; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what steps he has taken to inform all leading representatives of the licensed trade of the low compliance with the code of conduct on the sales of wine by measured glass, agreed with them two years ago; and if notice has been given that legislation on this matter is now being considered.

Mr. Howard: In the light of the results of the surveys carried out by local authorities to ascertain levels of compliance with the trade's voluntary code of practice for sales of wine by the glass, the Department will shortly be inviting the trade sponsors of the code to discuss the difficulties which their members have experienced in adopting its provisions and the ways in which observance of the code could be made more widespread.

The other options under consideration include legislation to introduce a range of prescribed standard sizes or to require wine to be sold by reference to volume without the restriction of a prescribed range.

However, legislation would not be justified until the possibility of a voluntary solution has been exhausted.

Daya Nuclear Power Plant

Mr. Gould asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, further to his written answer of 12 February, *Official Report*, column *487*, on what occasions since 1979 bank officials involved in financing export projects have been required to sign declarations under the Official Secrets Act; and what aspects of the Daya project were thought to be so confidential as to require this form of protection.

Mr. Butcher: As far as my Department is aware, there have been no such previous occasions since 1979. As I said on 12 February, this project entails an exceptional degree of direct involvement by the British, French and Chinese Governments in complex negotiations.

Tractors

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what percentage of British tractor requirements have been fulfilled by imports from overseas countries over the last 15 years on a year to year basis.

Mr. Alan Clark: The information available is shown in the table.

Import Penetration of the Products of the Wheeled Tractor Industry (Activity Heading 3212 of the Standard Industrial Classification)

	Percentage
1978	45½
1979	43
1980	51
1981	45½
1982	49
1983	48½
1984	48½

Source: Business Monitor MQ 12.

Cammell Laird

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the original deadline for bids for Vickers Cammell Laird yard; on what basis and on what terms an extension was granted and to whom; what steps he took to satisfy himself that such an extension would enable commercial confidentiality to be maintained for other bids; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Morrison: I will reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Prison Officers

Mr. Tom Cox asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) why new prison officers are being issued with different articles of uniform than those used by existing staff;

(2) what is the present waiting time for prison officers to be supplied with replacements for worn items of uniform;

(3) what is the present waiting time for the replacement of boots and shoes issued to prison officers.

Mr. Mellor: I will write to the hon. Member.

Immigration

Mr. Dubs asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the nature of the immigration service and police investigation at Liberty's in Regent street on 30 January 1985; and what was the immigration status of those interviewed or detained as a result.

Mr. Waddington: The visit to Liberty's department store on 30 January 1986 was initiated by the Metropolitan police to investigate suspected offences of theft. It was believed that certain of those whom the police intended to interview were subject to immigration control and it was therefore agreed that two members of the immigration service should attend to assist if questions of identity or immigration status arose.

A total of 19 persons were arrested. Five were subsequently charged with working in breach of conditions of leave to enter or remain, three were found to be illegal entrants and one was charged with overstaying. The others, though subject to immigration control, were not prohibited from taking employment and were accepted as lawfully present in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Dubs asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what were the dates and places since 30 March 1984 where major joint immigration-police operations were carried out in the whole of the United Kingdom; how many police officers and immigration officers, and of what rank, were involved for each operation; how many people, and of what nationalities, were *(a)* interviewed and *(b)* detained in each operation, for how long and where; and with regard to what breaches of immigration law these people were interviewed or charged.

Mr. Waddington: There have been no major joint operations specifically planned to investigate illegal entrants and overstayers since 30 March 1984.

Mr. Thurnham asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many immigrants from India, refused full entry to the United Kingdom, but admitted temporarily, apply on return to India to enter the United Kingdom as a fiancé or husband.

Mr. Waddington: The information requested is not available centrally.

Prisoners (Legal Aid)

Mr. Tom Cox asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the number of adjudications heard in prisons in the United Kingdom for which legal advice had been granted to prisoners in the presentation of their case during 1985.

Mr. Mellor: Approximately 70 prisoners were legally represented at adjudications completed by boards of visitors in 1985. A prisoner may request legal advice about an adjudication at any stage and such requests are routinely granted, but are not centrally recorded.

Prison Employees (Security Clearance)

Mr. Tom Cox asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average time taken for security clearance for a person seeking to obtain employment within Her Majesty's prisons.

Mr. Hurd: A number of inquiries into health, previous employment and other matters need to be made simultaneously before anyone is offered a post in Her Majesty's prisons. Timescales vary so much that to give an average would be meaningless.

Suicides

Mr. Tom Cox asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the number of suicides in prisons in the United Kingdom during each of the last five years.

Mr. Mellor: The number of prisoners adjudged by inquests as having committed suicide in prison custody is as follows:

	Number
1981	16
1982	18
1983	*21
1984	*23
1985	†21

* Including in each year one prisoner who died in an outside hospital as a result of a suicide attempt before his reception into prison custody.

† Inquest verdicts on 16 prisoners who died in custody during 1985 are still awaited; some of these are likely to be verdicts of suicide.

Prisoners (AIDS)

Mr. Tom Cox asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the number of inmates at present in prison in the United Kingdom who have been diagnosed as having acquired immune deficiency syndrome.

Mr. Mellor: We have received no report of a current case of diagnosed AIDS in the prison population of England and Wales. The position in Scotland and Northern Ireland is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Police (Disciplinary Action)

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what disciplinary action is taken by the Metropolitan police in the case of police officers who are successfully sued for assault.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Police officers convicted of any criminal offence are liable to then be charged with the police disciplinary offence of criminal conduct. It may occasionally happen that civil proceedings are successfully brought against the police in respect of events which have not previously been the subject of criminal or disciplinary proceedings. In such circumstances, it is the practice of the Metropolitan police to review the case to see whether it is right for further investigation to take place, having regard to the evidence given in the civil proceedings, the lapse of time since the incident and the different standards of proof in civil proceedings on the one hand, and in criminal or disciplinary proceedings on the other.

Satellite Broadcasting

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will require the Independent Broadcasting Authority to ensure compatibility in dish receivers and television sets between contractors granted licences for direct broadcasting by satellite; and what other measures he has in mind to promote standardisation in these areas.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The IBA will be the broadcaster of the services and will therefore be responsible for control of the transmissions in accordance with the terms of the world broadcasting-satellite administrative radio conference of 1977. Other matters such as hardware compatibility will not be the responsibility of the IBA. It is, however, envisaged that all three channels will be broadcast on the same transmission standard. It will be in the interests of the television set and antennae manufacturing industries to reach common standards in order to secure a wide market for their products and we believe that this will be achieved through the normal channels of cooperation within the industries.

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has had any proposals from the British Broadcasting Corporation for direct broadcasting by satellite; what is his assessment of the implications for the British Broadcasting Corporation of his announcement on 21 February about direct broadcasting by satellite and the Independent Broadcasting Authority; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: In 1982 the Government approved plans for the British Broadcasting Corporation to provide direct broadcasting by satellite service on two of the five channels allocated to the United Kingdom under international agreement. Later it became clear that the cost and risk of such a project were too high to be borne by the BBC alone, and in May 1984 the Government approved arrangements for the BBC to take a 50 per cent. share in a wider consortium which included the independent television companies and other companies in the electronics and entertainment field, with a view to providing three DBS channels under the terms of sections 42 to 44 of the Cable and Broadcasting Act 1984. In June 1985 the consortium concluded that the proposed arrangements would not create a viable commercial proposition and the project was abandoned.

If the IBA proposals prove successful, the new service is unlikely to become operational in less than three to four years. Since consumers will need to buy or rent additional equipment in order to receive the service, the audience is expected to build up only gradually. We do not, therefore, expect the service to make an impact on the existing pattern of broadcasting for some years. When the new service has been operational for at least three years, we shall consider the assignment of the two remaining channels which are available to the United Kingdom, and in doing so, we shall, of course, take account of the views of the BBC.

Prisoners (Discharge Grants)

Mr. Kilroy-Silk asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many, and what proportion of, prisoners leaving Liverpool, Birmingham, Pentonville, Manchester, Holloway, Bullwood Hall and Rochester prisons in any recent convenient period received discharge grants; how many of these were male and female, respectively; how many were aged 21 years and over and how many were under 21 years; how many in each category received the higher rate of discharge grant given to homeless offenders; and for what reasons some prisoners were ineligible for a discharge grant.

Mr. Mellor: The statistical information is not available centrally and could not be obtained without disproportionate cost.

The discharge grant replaces the supplementary benefit which a prisoner could otherwise have claimed from the DHSS for the first week after release and the criteria for eligibility are broadly similar. In addition, discharge grants are not paid to the following:

(i) those serving sentences of 14 days imprisonment or less;
(ii) fine defaulters;
(iii) civil prisoners;
(iv) unconvicted and unsentenced prisoners;
(v) those prisoners remanded in custody who are later dealt with and discharged from magistrates courts.

M25 (Surrey)

Mr. Onslow asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether, in the light of the established traffic flows, he will now reconsider the classification of the M25 in Surrey, as a rural motorway for policing purposes.

Mr. Giles Shaw: We do not use such a classification for the purpose of assessing police manpower needs.

Leeds Prison

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any plans to visit Leeds prison.

Mr. Mellor: My right hon. Friend has no present plans to do so. My right hon. Friend last visited Her Majesty's prison Leeds on 11 January 1984 when he was Minister of State and my noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State visited on 28 August 1985.

Animal Experiments

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make available in the Library of the

House the form or forms which will have to be completed with *(a)* a project and *(b)* a personal licence application in respect of animal experimentation.

Mr. Mellor: Application forms for both personal and project licences are in preparation, and will in due course be published in an appendix to the Home Office guidance note which has already been made available in draft form.

Mr. Cohen asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what checks will be carried out upon the details contained in all application forms for *(a)* a project licence and *(b)* a personal licence in respect of animal experimentation.

Mr. Mellor: Under clause 9(1) of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Bill, my right hon. Friend, before granting an application for a personal or project licence, must consult an inspector, and may also consult an assessor or the Animal Procedures Committee, or both. All applications will be closely scrutinised.

Mr. R (Reference No. R266303/2(S))

Mr. Tony Lloyd asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if, pursuant to the letter from the Minister of State, Home Office to the hon. Member for Stretford dated 20 February concerning the refusal of leave to enter the United Kingdom of Mr. R. reference No. R266303/2(S), he will explain Government policy towards visitors who arrive for no particular family or other reason.

Mr. Waddington: The policy towards persons who seek leave to enter the United Kingdom as visitors is set out in paragraph 17 of the Immigration Rules (H.C. 169 as amended). I will write further to the hon. Member about the case to which his question refers.

Fraud

Dr. McDonald asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) of the cases of fraud reported to the Metropolitan police company fraud department since 1979, (i) how many in each year were subsequently reported to the Department of Trade and Industry and (ii) of the cases subsequently reported to the Department of Trade and Industry how many in each year resulted in prosecutions by the relevant prosecuting solicitor's department; and how many were successful in each instance;

(2) of the cases of fraud reported to the Metropolitan police company fraud department since 1979, (i) how many cases in each year were subsequently reported to the relevant prosecuting solicitor's department and (ii) of the cases subsequently reported to the relevant prosecuting solicitor's department, how many in each year resulted in prosecutions conducted by that department; and how many were successful in each instance;

(3) of the cases of fraud reported to the Metropolitan police company fraud department in each year since 1979, (i) how many cases in each year were subsequently reported to the Director of Public Prosecutions and (ii) of the cases subsequently reported to the Director of Public Prosecutions how many in each year resulted in prosecutions conducted by the Director of Public Prosecutions; and how many were successful in each instance;

(4) of the cases of fraud reported to the Metropolitan police company fraud department since 1979, (i) how many cases were referred to them by the Department of Trade and Industry and (ii) how many cases in each year were referred to them by the Director of Public Prosecutions;

(5) how many cases of fraud were reported to the Metropolitan police company fraud department in each year since 1979;

(6) of the cases of fraud reported to the City of London police fraud squad in each year since 1979, (i) how many in each year were subsequently reported to the Director of Public Prosecutions and (ii) of the cases subsequently reported to the Director of Public Prosecutions how many in each year resulted in prosecutions conducted by the Director of Public Prosecutions; and how many were successful;

(7) of the cases of fraud reported to the City of London police fraud squad since 1979, (i) how many cases in each year were referred to it by the Department of Trade and Industry and (ii) how many cases in each year were referred to it by the Director of Public Prosecutions;

(8) how many cases of fraud were reported to the City of London police fraud squad in each year since 1979;

(9) of the cases of fraud reported to the City of London police fraud squad in each year since 1979, *(a)* how many in each year were subsequently reported to the relevant prosecuting solicitor's department and *(b)* of the cases so reported to the relevant prosecuting solicitor's department, how many in each year resulted in prosecutions conducted by the relevant prosecuting solicitor's department; and how many were successful in each instance;

(10) of the cases of fraud reported to the City of London police fraud squad in each year since 1979, how many in each year were subsequently reported to the Department of Trade and Industry and of the cases subsequently reported to the Department of Trade and Industry how many in each year resulted in prosecutions conducted by the relevant prosecuting solicitor's department; and how many were successful in each instance.

Mr. Mellor: I will reply as soon as possible.

Crime

Mr. Freeson asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will give a breakdown for each borough or police district in London of the numbers of *(a)* sexual offences broken down into (i) rape, (ii) assault on females and (iii) assault on males, *(b)* burglary broken down into (i) residential property, (ii) commercial property and (iii) motor vehicles, *(c)* motor vehicle crime broken down into (i) theft, (ii) damage and (iii) theft from vehicles and *(d)* theft broken down into (i) from the person, (ii) from domestic property and (iii) other thefts;

(2) if he will call for a report from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis on the number of reported crimes of *(a)* murder, *(b)* manslaughter, *(c)* death by dangerous driving, *(d)* wounding, *(e)* assault, *(f)* mugging and *(g)* robbery with a firearm in each borough or police district in London; and if he will give details of the number of each of the crimes cleared up;

(3) if he will give a breakdown for each borough or police district in London of the numbers of victims of *(a)* robbery, *(b)* woundings and *(c)* serious assault by (i) age and (ii) sex.

Mr. Mellor: I would refer the right hon. Member to the replies given to questions from my hon. Friend the Member for Westminster, North (Mr. Wheeler) on 7 February at columns 295-300.

Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will establish an acquired immune deficiency syndrome wing within one particular prison, to which all prisoners who have, or who are believed to have, acquired immune deficiency symdrome may be sent.

Mr. Mellor: It is planned to convert part of the hospital complex at Brixton prison to use as an isolation unit for the care of patients suffering from infectious disease including AIDS. Prisoners who are diagnosed as HTLV III antibody positive but who have no AIDS symptoms will not be considered for transfer to the unit.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received concerning the arrangements for the custody of a prisoner at Leicester prison whose blood contains acquired immune deficiency syndrome antibodies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: Representations have been received from the Prison Officers' Association about aspects of the management of prisoners who are diagnosed as HTLV III antibody positive or who are undergoing tests for viral infectivity. Guidance on this subject has been issued to governors and medical officers of all Prison Department establishments after consultation with the association at national level. Decisions in individual cases are taken by local management in the light of that guidance. For reasons of medical confidentiality I am unable to comment on specific cases.

Print Dispute (Wapping)

Mr. Nellist asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many further arrests were made at Wapping in connection with the print dispute in the period 24 February to 2 March.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I understand from the Commissioner of the Metropolis a further 51 arrests were made in the period from 2 pm on 24 February to 11 am on 3 March.

West Yorkshire Fire Service

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will increase the Government's contribution to the budget of the West Yorkshire fire service.

Mr. Giles Shaw: No. It is not open to my right hon. Friend to vary the block grant contribution made to the authority.

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make further finance available to enable West Yorkshire fire service to update its equipment.

Mr. Giles Shaw: No. The precept limit prescribed for 1986-87 for the West Yorkshire fire and civil defence authority took account of the normal requirement for a fire brigade to replace equipment.

Fire Brigade Officers

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department at what date fire brigade officers can expect to be equipped with new fireproof clothing and equipment.

Mr. Giles Shaw: A committee of the Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council keeps specifications of clothing and equipment under continuing review to ensure that recommended standards, including fire resistance, provide the maximum possible safety to firefighters.

Prisons (Yorkshire and Humberside)

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what improvements the redsignation of prisons in Yorkshire and Humberside will bring for young offenders;

(2) what representations he has had from the Prison Officers' Association, Thorp Arch branch, on the redesignation of prisons in Yorkshire and Humberside; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what alternatives he has considered to the reallocation of juvenile offenders away from Thorp Arch remand centre;

(4) if young offenders will be held in the same prisons as adult offenders as a result of the redesignation of prisons in Yorkshire and Humberside.

Mr. Mellor: The under-21-year-old population previously accommodated in Her Majesty's remand centre Thorp Arch will now be divided between Her Majesty's prison Leeds and Her Majesty's prison and remand centre Hull. Those in Hull will be in a discrete unit holding all those aged under 17 previously in Thorp Arch. Those in Leeds will be held in exactly the same conditions as those previously held there for lack of places in Thorp Arch, every effort being made to keep them separate from adults though it cannot be guaranteed that they will be kept apart at all times.

These changes form part of a package designed to relieve the acute overcrowding at Leeds by converting Hull from a dispersal prison to a local prison and remand centre and Thorp Arch from a remand centre to an adult training prison. Various other options, including one proposal by the Prison Officers' Association at Thorp Arch, were considered but were unsuitable because they would have left the north region with insufficient places for long-term category C prisoners, thus preventing the conversion of Hull and the relief of overcrowding at Leeds.

Many of the prisoners aged under 21 who are being relocated will benefit from being in establishments which are easier for their families and legal advisers to visit.

Mr. Norman Davis

Mr. Terry Davis asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to reply to the letter of 23 January from the hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill, about the delay in informing Mr. Norman Davis about the results of his parole board hearing in 1984.

Mr. Mellor: I wrote to the hon. Member on 28 February.

Immigration Control

Mr. Dubs asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what response he has made to the Commission for Racial Equality's report on immigration control procedures; and if he will place a copy of his response in the Library.

Mr. Waddington: I have sent a detailed response to the chairman of the Commission for Racial Equality. I am arranging for copies to be placed in the Library.

Afan Valley

Mr. John Morris asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he is proposing to take any steps to seek to improve television reception in the Afan valley; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw: There are some localities in the Afan valley where, because of the terrain, television reception is non-existent or poor. The BBC/IBA joint UHF engineering programme is designed to extend television coverage to unserved communities of 200 persons or more; and I understand that the IBA, which takes the lead on engineering matters in this area, is considering the case for additional relays under that programme.

PRIME MINISTER

Working Population (Statistics)

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Prime Minister what is *(a)* the average cost of social security payments in the United Kingdom per head of the working population and *(b)* the average amount of income tax paid in the United Kingdom per head of the working population.

The Prime Minister: In 1985-86 the cost of social security payments is expected to be £40·6 billion and the working population is 27·5 million. The cost of social security is met from a mixture of taxation and contribution income; if this was ascribed exclusively to the working population, their average share of the cost would be £1,480.

The total amount of income tax to be paid in 1985-86 by taxpayers under the age of 65 is estimated to be £31·2 billion. Divided amongst the working population, this gives an average payment of £1,130.

Civil Service and Local Government

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Prime Minister what was the number of persons full and part time *(a)* in the Civil Service and *(b)* in local government in the United Kingdom in June 1979 and June 1985 and, in each case, showing the reduction of persons employed in percentage terms and numerically.

The Prime Minister: The figures are as follows:

thousands

	*Civil Service**	*Local authorities†*
1979		
Full time	709	1,980
Part time	30	1,020
Total	739	3,000
1985		
Full time	585	1,880
Part time	23	1,010
Total	608	2,890
Change	−131	−110
(per cent)	(−18)	(−4)

* At 1 July; part-time staff are counted as ½ units in the Civil Service Manpower counts.

† To nearest 10,000.

Managers (Qualifications)

Dr. Marek asked the Prime Minister what measures Her Majesty's Government are taking to increase the percentage of managers in British industry who have graduate qualifications and, in particular, business or management qualifications.

The Prime Minister: The Government recognise the importance of increasing the proportion of managers with appropriate further and higher education qualifications. Between 1979 and 1984 the number of graduates going into industry and commerce increased by over 25 per cent. Over the same period the number of higher education students taking courses in management and business studies, including accountancy, rose from over 22,000 to over 31,000, an increase of over 40 per cent.

The Government's Green Paper "The Development of Higher Education into the 1990s"—May 1985—declared the intention of shifting the balance of qualifications and courses in favour of those with a relevance to industry and commerce.

Particular importance is attached to the updating and development of existing managers, through such means as the Department of Education and Science's PICKUP programme and part-time qualifications offered by universities, polytechnics, colleges and private sector institutions.

Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme

Mr. Meacher asked the Prime Minister what changes she plans to make in and relating to the principal Civil Service pension scheme consequent upon enactment of the Social Security Bill.

The Prime Minister: The principal civil service pension scheme (PCSPS) will be amended as necessary to comply with the requirements introduced by the Bill that relate to occupational pension schemes. These requirements will not apply to schemes until 1 April 1988, and the detailed implications for the PCSPS will be considered in due course in consultation with the Civil Service trade unions.

State Retirement Pension

Sir David Price asked the Prime Minister whether, in view of the judgment of the European Court of Justice in the case of Miss Helen Marshall, she will introduce legislation to reform the rules of age eligibility for the basic state retirement pension so that they are flexible between 60 and 65 years and equal between men and women.

The Prime Minister: The judgment of the European Court of Justice in the case of Miss Helen Marshall, a public servant, was concerned with the age at which she must leave work rather than eligibility for retirement pensions. The Government's stated aim is for greater flexibility in pension age, which would allow individual choice, and the recent Green Paper on Reform of Social Security (Cmnd. 9518) sought views on possible ways of achieving this. However, none of the responses to the Green Paper suggested solutions which would not place an unacceptable burden on the economy. As stated in the White Paper on Reform of Social Security (Cmnd. 9691), the Government will continue to examine possible ways in which greater flexibility might be achieved.

Cabinet Office Staff

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Prime Minister if she will list in the *Official Report* the name and rank of all Cabinet Office staff in all Departments at the level of senior principal and above.

The Prime Minister: The names and ranks of all Cabinet Office staff at grade 6—equivalent to senior principal—and above serving in the Department are listed in the Civil Service Year Book, a copy of which is in the Library. Four members of the staff of the Cabinet Office (Management and Personnel Office) at grade 6 or above are on loan to other Departments—one each to Her Majesty's Customs and Excise, Her Majesty's Treasury, the Ministry of Defence and the Registry of Friendly Societies.

Sunday Trading

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Prime Minister, pursuant to the answer of 28 January, *Official Report*, column *438*, to the hon. Member for Leicester, East, how many representations have been received by her office and by other Government Departments *(a)* in favour of and *(b)* against the proposed legislation on Sunday trading.

The Prime Minister: The Government have received about 800 representations in favour of our proposals and about 40,000 against since the debate on the Auld report in the House of Commons in May last year.

Medical Equipment Industry (Report)

Mr. Wainwright asked the Prime Minister by what date the Advisory Council for Applied Research and Develpment's working group on the medical equipment industry has been asked to make its report.

The Prime Minister: The working group is expected to report in April. Its report will be to the council in the first instance.

Overseas Aid

Mr. Tom Clarke asked the Prime Minister if she will publish in the *Official Report* the letter to her from the hon. Member for Monklands, West of 11 February and her reply to him of 27 February relating to figures for overseas aid.

The Prime Minister: Yes.

11 February 1986

Dear Prime Minister,

I am concerned about an apparent discrepancy between your reply to me in the House of Commons last October and published material from the Overseas Development Administration. Perhaps you could clarify the position for me.

After your statement on the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting on 29 October, I asked about Britain's plans to meet the UN target for aid spending of 0·7 per cent. of GNP (*Hansard*, col. 821). You replied as follows:

> 'The United Kingdom aid programme, at 0·33 per cent. of GDP, is close to the OECD average, which is 0·36 per cent. of GDP. To that has to be added the considerable private flows. Taking the official and private flows together, the United Kingdom figure is 1·25 per cent. of GNP, which is well above the United Nations target of 1 per cent.'

However, the ODA annual review, *British Overseas Aid 1984* which was published in July, said that total flows had now fallen to 0·89 per cent., incidentally the first time that I can remember them dropping below the 1 per cent. target.

I would be glad to know which of these figures is, in fact, correct.

Yours sincerely,
Tom Clarke.

27 February 1986

Dear Mr. Clarke,

Thank you for your letter of 11 February about overseas aid. You are of course quite right to point out that the 1984 figure for total flows, both official and private, from this country were 0·89 per cent. of GNP. The figure of 1·25 per cent. to which I referred reflected the approximate position in 1982 and 1983. The point I was seeking to make is that when one looks at private flows as well as official flows this country has a particularly good record.

Your sincerely,
Margaret Thatcher,

SCOTLAND

Highlands and Islands Development Board

Mr. Kennedy asked the Secretary of State for Scotland whether, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye, 17 February, *Official Report*, column *17*, he will give a breakdown of the real terms change by 13 per cent. of the proposed level of grant-in-aid provisions for the Highlands and Islands Development Board in 1986-87 compared with the total for 1985-86, indicating the cash and percentage reduction due to *(a)* the impending completion of the integrated development programme for the Western Isles, *(b)* any special payments to the board associated with the Invergordon enterprise zone, *(c)* any anticipation for profits which the board was anticipating to receive from the realisation of any shareholdings and *(d)* the net real term reduction in proposed grant-in-aid provision compared with 1985-86.

Mr. John MacKay: *(a)* the reduction in grant-in-aid between 1985-86 and 1986-87 is £1,529,000 at estimated 1985-86 prices: this represents 5 per cent. of the total grant in aid provision for 1985-86. The statement in my previous answer to the hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye that the reduction was mainly due to the impending completion of the Western Isles integrated development programme related to the reductions in cash terms which represents 4·9 per cent. of the total reduction of 9·7 per cent.

(b) none; the last of the special payments associated with the Invergordon enterprise zone was paid to the board in 1984-85.

(c) none; estimated receipts are taken into account in setting the level of grant-in-aid but it is the cash proceeds from the sale of shares and not the profits which count for this purpose.

(d) the net reduction at estimated 1985-86 prices is £4,076,000 which represents 13 per cent. of the total grant-in-aid provision for 1985-86.

Community Service

Mr. Dewar asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will commission a study to establish the number and proportion of cases in which a community service order has been recommended by a court but in which no place has been available on a community service order scheme.

Mr. Rifkind: Since 1979 steady progress has been naintained in developing community service schemes which now exist in all regions covering most of the densely populated areas. I hope that, subject to compliance with aggregrate expenditure planning figures, local authorities will continue to develop community service with the assistance of the specific grant paid by the Government. Authorities may find it helpful to undertake local assessments but I see no need at present for a national study of the kind proposed by the hon. Member.

Mr. Dewar asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the total cost of the community service order scheme in each year for which records are available; and what proportion of that cost has been met by Exchequer contribution in each of these years.

Mr. Rifkind: The costs of community service by offender schemes operated by local authorities in terms of the Community Service by Offenders (Scotland) Act 1978, giving the total and proportional costs between the Exchequer and local authorities, are detailed below. The rate of Exchequer grant is 80 per cent.

Years	*Local Authority* £	*Exchequer* £	*Total* £
1980-81	*64,000	257,238	*321,238
1981-82	*157,000	630,588	*788,588
1982-83	195,506	782,022	977,528
1983-84	252,412	1,009,649	1,262,061
1984-85	324,428	1,297,712	1,622,140

* Estimated.

Mr. Dewar asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many community service orders have been made by sheriff courts in each of the last four years for which records are available.

Mr. Rifkind: The information is set out in the table below:

Year	*Community Service Orders*	*Community Service as a Condition of Probation*
1981	1,070	141
1982	1,910	110
1983	1,958	90
1984	2,354	129

Mr. Dewar asked the Secretary of State for Scotland which sheriff courts are not able to make community service orders.

Mr. Rifkind: Community service schemes are drawn up and operated by local authority social work departments. Schemes exist in all sheriff court districts with the exception of the following: Dumfries, Kirkcudbright, Stranraer, Oban, Rothesay, Dunnoon and Campbeltown.

The making of orders relating to individual offenders depends on a number of factors, including the nature of the offence and the availability of a suitable placement and supervising staff.

College Closures and Mergers

Mr. Wilson asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will specify what savings were made by closing *(a)* Callendar Park college of education, *(b)* Hamilton college of education and by the merger of Notre Dame and Craiglockhart colleges into one college.

Mr. Allan Stewart [*pursuant to his answer*, 13 February, c. *504-5*.]: Capital receipts of £270,000 in 1982-83 and £410,000 in 1983-84 accrued from the sale of the former Hamilton college of education and £1·4 million will be realised in 1986-87 as the Exchequer's share of the proceeds from the sale of the former Craiglockhart college of education. Part of the former Callendar Park college of education is at present occupied by the Forth Valley health board it is expected that this accommodation will be vacated early in 1987, after which it is intended to dispose of the property.

In 1983-84, the first complete year following the closures and merger in question, an estimated overall saving of £2·3 million on grant-aided expenditure accured from the reduction in the number of colleges of education.

In the same financial year, offsetting expenditure of £1·5 million was incurred on compensation payments to staff made redundant at the colleges affected.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Disabled People (Representations)

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services why no consultation concerning the provisions of the Disabled Persons (Services Consultation and Representation) Bill has been initiated with the National Federation of the Blind; and if he will make a statement on the criteria for selection used by his Department for these consultations.

Mr. Hayhoe: I refer the hon. Member to my replies to the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) on 14 February at columns *596-97* and to the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing) on 26 February at column *623*.

Limited List Prescribing

Mr. Michael Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) why, in relation to the limited list, general practitioners are required to prescribe by a generic name in cases where there is only a branded drug available;

(2) why, in relation to the limited list, general practitioners are required to prescribe by generic name only, when there are clinically similar branded products at the same or lower price.

Mr. Hayhoe: On 18 March 1985 during the debate in the House on the regulations introducing the selected list scheme, my right hon. Friend explained that, wherever possible, the generic rather than the branded name of a particular drug should be used on prescription forms. The purpose was to encourage other manufacturers to market their own generic versions of branded drugs; and to introduce an element of price competition into the supply of medicines for which the promotion of brand names was the main determinant.

Pharmacists (Remuneration)

Mr. Michael Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what action is being taken to seek to ensure that individual chemists are not being remunerated at National Health Service list prices when they have bought products at substantial discounts on this price;

(2) what action is being taken to prevent chemists forming their own limited companies to import products at below list price and then invoice themselves at full National Health Service list price to comply with clause 4(1) of the Drug Tariff.

Mr. Hayhoe: Retail pharmacists receive the actual wholesale cost of the drugs used in dispensing National Health Service prescriptions, less a stratified average discount which they are deemed to be able to obtain from their own source of supply, which can be through the normal wholesale distribution network, their own limited companies or direct from a manufacturer.

The amount of the discount deduction is established by periodic statistical inquiries. The last such inquiry took place in 1981. My Department has already initiated discussions with the pharmacists' representatives, the Pharmaceutical Services Negotiating Committee, on the early conduct of a further inquiry which would identify all the various forms of discount available in the market. This will include both domestic and imported drugs.

Child Benefit

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will introduce an augmented level of child benefit to recompense parents whose children take sizes of clothing or shoes which attract value added tax liability.

Mr. Newton: Child benefit has always been regarded as a general contribution towards the cost of bringing up a child. There are no plans to change this approach.

Cambridge and Huntingdon Health Authorities

Sir Anthony Grant asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the amount in real terms allocated to Cambridge health authority and Huntingdon health authority in 1985; and how this compares with that allocated in 1979.

Mr. Hayhoe: I regret that this information is not collected centrally. My hon. Friend may care to contact the chairman of the East Anglian regional health authority.

Severe Weather Allowance Claims

Mr. Bruce asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many claims for additionally exceptional severe weather allowance were made from individuals within Scotland during the period 31 December 1985 to 5 January 1986; and if he will provide a geographical breakdown by region.

Mr. Newton: Separate information is not collected on the number of claims. Information on payments awarded is not yet available, as I explained in my reply to the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) on 24 February at column *470*.

Pensioner Households

Mr. Andrew Bowden asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many pensioners in receipt of supplementary benefit are classified as householders, and how many as non-householders.

Mr. Major: I refer my hon. Friend to table 5.1 of the "Annual Statistical Enquiry 1983", a copy of which is in the Library.

Hip Replacement Operations

Mr. Speller asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the average delay in hip replacement operations in the south-west region of England.

Mr. Whitney: The estimated median interval between a date a patient was placed on the waiting list and the time of admission to National Health Service hospitals in the South Western regional health authority for operations for total hip replacement and other arthroplasty of hip in 1983, the latest year for which information is held centrally, was 31 weeks.

Special Heating Allowance

Mr. Tom Cox asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what representations he has had from Age Concern about granting a special heating allowance to elderly and disabled people; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: We received a representation from the director of Age Concern on 26 February asking the Government to declare that exceptionally severe weather had occurred nationally and to instruct local DHSS offices to make payments to those eligible. Ministers have no power to do this: the decision whether, for the purposes of the relevant single payments regulation, there has been a period of exceptionally severe weather in any particular area is one for the local adjudication officer, in the light of local weather conditions. I am glad to say, however, that adjudication officers in the majority of local offices have now decided that the weather in their areas has been exceptionally severe.

Private Health Services

Mr. Tom Cox asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what is the involvement of his Department in checking services and standards in private hospitals that are run by overseas companies operating in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what is the present number of private hospitals in the United Kingdom which are owned and run by foreign companies; and if he will list them;

(3) what are the requirements of his Department for any foreign company wishing to set up private health services in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hayhoe: In England, my right hon. Friend's responsibility for registering and inspecting private hospitals to ensure that standards are maintained is delegated to district health authorities. My Department's role is limited to informing authorities of changes to legislation and giving guidance on the provisions. For certain types of hospital development, authorisation from my Department must be sought, and for others notification must be given to my Department. Private hospitals approved under the Abortion Act 1967 are subject to control and inspection by my Department. There are no special requirements of my Department for foreign companies. Information on ownership and nationality of companies is not collected.

In Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, private hospitals are matters for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State.

Smoking

Sir Peter Mills asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he has any further plans for funds to be made available for health education on smoking.

Mr. Whitney: I hope additional funds will be provided for this purpose in 1986-87.

Tobacco Advertising

Sir Peter Mills asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he has any future plans for further restrictions on tobaccco advertising, promotion and sponsorship.

Mr. Whitney: The voluntary agreements with the tobacco industry governing these matters are currently under discussion.

Heating Allowances (South-West England)

Sir Peter Mills asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what guidance is given to the area office in the south-west in dealing with heating allowances in districts in the region with different climatic characteristics; and if, in particular, he will indicate guidance given in respect of *(a)* Plymouth and *(b)* Dartmoor.

Mr. Newton: The main guidance on determining entitlement to regular weekly heating additions under the supplementary benefit scheme is contained in the "S Manual", a copy of which is in the Library.

Revised guidance on assessing entitlement to single payments to meet the cost of extra fuel used because of a period of exceptionally severe weather was issued by the Chief Adjudication Officer on 6 December 1985.

On 27 February the Chief Adjudication Officer issued new guidance which highlights recent weather conditions and was expected to assist adjudication officers still considering their decision. The December guidance is already in the Library and I have placed a copy of this new advice there also. A period of exceptionally severe weather has now been designated in the great majority of local office areas, paving the way for help to be given to claimants with their extra fuel costs. Local offices have been asked to give this work priority.

Guidance is issued on a national basis, and does not vary between regions or individual local offices.

Supplementary Benefit Claimants

Mr. Frank Field asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if he will state the average value of work expenses currently disregarded when calculating the resources of supplementary benefit claimants; and if he will list the maximum and minimum values of such expenses;

(2) if he has any plans to discontinue the work expenses disregard when calculating the resources of income support claimants.

Mr. Newton: As the White Paper, "Reform of Social Security: Programme for Action" (Cmnd. 9691) makes clear at paragraphs 3.37 to 3.39, it is proposed to adopt a more standard approach to the assessment of earnings for income-related benefits. This approach is consistent with the objective of aligning the rules for help in income support, housing benefit and family credit and will mean that earnings will be assessed on a net basis, without allowing deductions for work expenses. In recognition of this, it is proposed that the present supplementary benefit £4 earnings disregard be increased to £5 a week under income support. In addition, an improved disregard of £15 a week will be introduced for lone parents, disabled people and couples who have been unemployed for two years.

Information is not collected on what amounts or types of expenses are deducted for work expenses at present but I would expect most such part-time work to be undertaken locally. Some information on the average work expenses of lone parents is contained in a study* carried out by the social policy research unit of the University of York in 1982. It showed that the average weekly costs of travel to

work and child care for the minority of lone parents on supplementary benefit who had part-time work were £1·18 and £0·94 respectively.

* Lone Mothers Paid Work and Social Security; Occasional Papers on Social Administration 77.

Maternal Deaths

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services, pursuant to the reply to the hon. Member for Caernarfon on 27 January, *Official Report*, columns *388-9*, when he expects the triennial report on maternal deaths for 1979 to 1981 to be published; and if it will include data on maternal deaths following caesarian sections.

Mr. Whitney: It is expected that this report will be published at the end of April. It will include data on deaths associated with Caesarian sections which occurred during the three-year period 1979 to 1981.

Blindness (Disability Premium)

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what are his plans on the entitlement in Scotland to the disability premium for blindness for the planned income support scheme and housing benefit schemes.

Mr. Newton: Blindness will entitle a claimant to the proposed disability premium for income support in Scotland as in England and Wales. Blind people will similarly receive a higher entitlement for help with their housing costs under the new housing benefit scheme.

Cost Improvement Programmes

Mr. Freeson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if it remains his policy that each individual health district, including inner city districts, will retain the full benefit of its cost improvement programme.

Mr. Whitney: It remains our policy that the benefit of cost improvement programmes should be retained locally. The detailed application of this policy is a matter for regional and district heath authorities. In some cases individual districts retain the full benefit of their cost improvements; in others, for example, regions may require districts to contribute an agreed level of cash-releasing cost improvements to a regional development fund for redistribution, but allow them to retain all cost improvements achieved over and above this level.

Hospital Closures

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list all hospitals currently under threat of closure or where closure is under consideration and the number of beds each contains.

Mr. Whitney: I am sorry I cannot give the hon. Member the information he seeks. Information is not collected centrally about changes and improvements in services which might lead to closures, which are under consideration by health authorities.

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list all hospitals closed since May 1979 and the number of beds each contained.

Mr. Hayhoe: For the latest information available, I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him by my predecessor on 20 May 1985 at columns *317-29* and also to my reply to the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, North-East (Mrs. Short) on 20 February at columns *309-10*.

Details of the number of beds not shown in the two replies to which I have referred are as follows:

Number of beds in hospitals approved for complete closure 1 April 1985—30 June 1985

Region	*District*	*Hospital*	*Number of Beds*
Yorkshire	Leeds Eastern	Marguerite Hepton	47
	Leeds Western	Grassington	234
	York	Naburn	258
NW Thames	South Bedfordshire	Priory	36
SW Thames	Richmond, Twickenham and Roehampton	Westmoor House	10
Wessex	Isle of Wight	Longford	25
West Midlands	South Warwickshire	Monroe Devis Maternity Home	21

Correspondence

Mr. Mason asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he is going to answer the letters from the right hon. Member for Barnsley, Central dated 25 November 1985 and 22 January 1986 asking him to conduct an inquiry into the dismissal of Mr. J. Brown from the social security appeal tribunals.

Mr. Major: I wrote to the right hon. Member on 7 January in reply to his letter of 25 November. I regret that we have no record of having received his letter of 22 January, but if he would like to write to me again I will see that his letter receives immediate attention.

Departmental Office, Barnsley

Mr. Patchett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish in the *Official Report*, the staffing levels of his Department's offices in the Barnsley, East constituency over the years *(a)* 1981, *(b)* 1982, *(c)* 1983, *(d)* 1984 and *(e)* 1985 to date; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Major: Following is the information for the staffing levels on 1 February for each year:

	1981	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*
Barnsley (East) ILO	170	166	142	125	136	132·5
Goldthorpe NIO	33	30	25	20	17	18·0
Wath on Dearne AO	51	54	57	61	65	63·0

Abbreviations: ILO—Integrated Local Office: NIO—National Insurance Office; AO—Area Office (dealing with supplementary benefit only).

The staff reductions reflect falls in work load mainly due to changes in procedure on contributory benefits, such as the introduction of statutory sick pay.

Mr. Patchett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how much money has been paid in overtime payments in the local Department of Health and Social Security offices in the Barnsley, East constituency over the years 1981, 1982, 1983, 1984 and 1985 to date; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Major: Records on overtime are available only from 27 October 1981. The annual cost in constant terms of overtime worked in social security local offices in the Barnsley, East constituency for the period 27 October 1981 to 16 January 1982 and subsequent years is as follows:

	October 1981 to January 1982	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*
	£	£	£	£	£
Barnsley (East) ILO	7,710	34,296	12,097	87,468	64,471
Goldthorpe NIO	0	0	0	14,091	16,085
Wath on Dearne AO	2,792	23,396	6,912	54,501	31,504

Abbreviations: ILO—Integrated Local Office; NIO—National Insurance Office; AO—Area Office (dealing with supplementary benefit only).

These figures are based on 1984-85 average costs of overtime in the Department.

The increase in overtime from 1984-85 was due to the miners' strike and the industrial dispute at Newcastle central office.

Drug RU 486

Mr. Campbell-Savours asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) pursuant to the answer of 26 February, what is the nature of the two clinical trials being conducted on the use of the drug RU 486;

(2) pursuant to the answer of 26 February, when he expects the clinical trials involving RU 486 to be completed;

(3) pursuant to the answer of 26 February, whether he will state what quality of RU 486 is being used during the course of the current clinical trials that are taking place.

Mr. Hayhoe: All information provided to the licensing authority in support of applications made or exemptions applied for under the Medicines Act 1968 is treated as confidential under that Act.

The quality of all drugs undergoing clinical trials is always carefully considered prior to the licensing authority indicating that it has no objection to the trials proceeding.

Mr. Campbell-Savours asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) pursuant to the answer of 26 February, what steps he intends to take to ensure that the clinical trials involving RU 486, are conducted in compliance with the requirements of the Abortion Act;

(2) whether he will carry out inquiries as to the use of the drug RU 486 in the procuring of an abortion;

(3) whether he has received information as to the use of the drug RU 486 in the procuring of abortion;

(4) what is his policy on the prosecution of those who procure abortion other than under the terms of the Abortion Act 1967.

Mr. Hayhoe: This drug has been approved for use in abortion only in the clinical trial to which I referred in my reply to the hon. Member on 26 February at column *606*. The trial is still continuing, and the doctor responsible has given an undertaking that the requirements of the Abortion Act will be met. Any alleged breaches of the Act are investigated and, where appropriate, referred to the police or prosecution authorities.

Hypothermia

Mr. Wilson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list, for the United Kingdom, and for England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland separately, the number of deaths with any mention of hypothermia on the death certificate for the year 1985; and if he will break down the figures by *(a)* month of the year and *(b)* by age groups (i) under 25, (ii) 25 to 34, (iii) 35 to 44, (iv) 45 to 54, (v) 55 to 64, (vi) 65 to 74, (vii) 75 to 84 and (viii) 85 years and over.

Mr. Whitney: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

North-West Thames Regional Health Authority (Sales)

Mr. Pavitt asked the Secretary of State Social Services if the sums received by the North-West Thames regional health authority from the sale of Leamington park hospital and the land of Neasden hospital will be allocated in their entirety to the Brent district health authority in addition to the allocation already announced for 1986-87; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Whitney: I regret that this information is not available centrally. Regional health authorities are responsible for land disposals. They operate within central guidance that the proceeds of sale should normally accrue to the district concerned.

State Retirement Pension

Sir Frederic Bennett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will estimate the cost of all men aged over 60 years and presently in work retiring and receiving a retirement pension.

Mr. Newton: The latest available estimate of the likely net cost to public funds is about £2,600 million, based on 1983-84 benefit rates. I hope shortly to be able to produce costs based on 1985-86 benefit rates.

NHS Expenditure

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what has been the percentage cumulative growth

of National Health Service expenditure each year since 1979 *(a)* in retail prices index terms, *(b)* in terms of National Health Service pay and prices and *(c)* after taking account of the annually growing demand for health services; if he will give actual expenditure figures each year both in current and constant price terms in accordance with each of these three criteria; and if he will state the level of planned expenditure savings each year, both in current and constant price terms, together with the evidence on which these expenditure savings claims are based.

Mr. Hayhoe [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 February 1986, c. *205-7*]: I regret that my earlier reply contained an error.

In the table headed "Health and Community Health Services Cost Improvements £Million"; line 4 (1984-85), all columns should read "105" and not "107".

Health Authorities (Efficiency Savings)

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will set out the efficiency savings in expenditure achieved by each district health authority for each year since 1979.

Mr. Hayhoe [*pursuant to his reply*, 14 February 1986, c. *596*]: I regret that my earlier reply contained an error.

In line 13 of the table provided (ie the figures relating to Mersey region); column 4 (1984-85) should read 6·0 and 7·6. The total of column 4 (1984-85) should therefore read 105·2 and not 106·8.

Maternity Units

Dr. McDonald asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish in the *Official Report* the number of live births in each maternity unit in 1983, 1984 and 1985, respectively, indicating which of those units are located in teaching hospitals.

Mr. Whitney [*pursuant to his reply*, 6 February 1986, c. *218*]: I am sorry I cannot give the hon. Member all the information she seeks. Information for 1985 is not yet available centrally. A table giving the available information has been placed in the Library.

Health Authorities (Departmental Advice)

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the difference in status and authority between a departmental circular to health authorities and advice such as that offered in December 1985.

Mr. Whitney [*pursuant to his reply*, 10 February 1986, c. *367*]: In so far as both circulars and letters can be used to convey advice on or amplification of policies already promulgated on his behalf, the Secretary of State would expect both to carry similar weight in influencing action by health authorities. Letters are a more personal and informal means of communication and, as such, would remain subject to the Secretary of State's discretion as to whether, in any individual case, they may be released more widely.

Hospitals

Dr. McDonald asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish in the *Official Report* for the years 1983, 1984 and 1985 *(a)* the number of hospitals with maternity and gynaecological services without a special care baby unit and *(b)* the number of hospitals with maternity and gynaecological services without paediatric cover.

Mr. Whitney [*pursuant to his reply*, 10 February 1986, c. *370*]: The available information is given in the table. Information for 1985 if not yet available.

NHS hospitals in England

	1983	*1984*
Hospitals with maternity and gynaecology departments:		
Total number of hospitals	233	234
Number without special care baby unit	51	49
Number without consultant paediatric department	82	76

Social Security Reform

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) whether he will publish tables comparable to tables P5 and P6 of the technical annex to "Reform of Social Security", showing pension projections for widows on the assumption that their husbands die at the age of 60 years;

(2) whether he will publish tables similar to tables P5 and P6 of the technical annex to the White Paper, "Reform of Social Security", Cmnd. 9691, but assuming that the husband died at the age of 64 years.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his replies*, 13 February 1986, c. *525-26* and 17 February 1986, c. *69-70*]: The information requested is given in the tables. Tables P5B and P5C correspond to table P5 of the technical annex to the White Paper, and tables P6B and P6C correspond to table P6. The rates of personal pensions and occupational money purchase pensions in the tables are higher than those in the corresponding tables in the technical annex. This is because the figures in the technical annex are based on the assumption that the husband takes his pension at age 65 and that the widow's pension from his scheme is worth half of his pension. But the figures in the tables following assume that the husband dies before drawing his pension from the scheme and that the widow's pension is equivalent in value to a pension or annuity resulting from the total sum accumulated in his individual pension savings account.

Table P5B
*Widows Retiring in 2008 Onwards**
Pension projections (£ per week at November 1985 prices)

Age in 1988	Earner	Modified SERPS	Personal Pensions						Occupational money purchase pension schemes					
			Rebate only			Rebate + 2 per cent.			Rebate + 2 per cent.			Rebate + 4 per cent.		
		†rrr=3 per cent.	rrr=3·5 per cent.	rrr=4 per cent.	rrr=3 per cent.	rrr=3·5 per cent.	rrr=4 per cent.	rrr=3 per cent.	rrr=3·5 per cent.	rrr=4 per cent.	rrr=3 per cent.	rrr=3·5 per cent.	rrr=4 per cent.	
20	Low	61	70	73	76	83	87	91	84	88	92	97	102	108
	Middle	85	102	107	114	130	138	147	132	140	150	160	172	184
	High	112	134	142	152	175	188	202	179	191	206	222	238	257
30	Low	59	62	63	64	69	71	73	70	72	73	78	80	82
	Middle	82	88	91	94	106	110	114	108	112	116	126	131	137
	High	106	113	117	121	139	145	150	141	147	153	168	175	183
40	Low	56	55	56	56	60	60	61	60	61	62	65	65	66
	Middle	80	79	80	81	89	90	92	90	91	93	100	102	104
	High	102	99	100	102	115	117	120	116	119	121	133	136	140

Table P6B
*Widows Retiring in 2008 Onwards**
Pension projections (£ per week at November 1985 prices)

Age in 1988	Earner	Modified SERPS	Personal Pensions						Occupational money purchase pension schemes					
			Rebate only			Rebate + 2 per cent.			Rebate + 2 per cent.			Rebate + 4 per cent.		
		†rrr=3 per cent.	rrr=3·5 per cent.	rrr=4 per cent.	rrr=3 per cent.	rrr=3·5 per cent.	rrr=4 per cent.	rrr=3 per cent.	rrr=3·5 per cent.	rrr=4 per cent.	rrr=3 per cent.	rrr=3·5 per cent.	rrr=4 per cent.	
20	Low	59	68	70	73	79	83	87	80	84	88	91	96	102
	Middle	84	100	105	111	125	132	140	127	134	142	152	161	172
	High	110	132	140	148	169	180	192	172	183	195	209	224	240
30	Low	56	58	59	60	65	66	67	65	66	68	71	73	75
	Middle	77	84	86	88	99	102	106	101	104	107	117	121	125
	High	99	105	108	111	128	132	136	129	134	138	152	158	164
40	Low	53	52	52	52	55	56	56	56	56	56	59	60	60
	Middle	75	74	75	76	82	84	85	83	84	86	92	94	95
	High	93	90	91	92	104	106	108	105	107	109	120	122	125

* Husband died aged 60 when widow was 55.
† 'rrr' is the real rate of investment return.

Table P5C
*Widows retiring in 2008 Onwards**
Pension projections (£ per week at November 1985 prices)

Age in 1988	Earner	Modified SERPS	Personal Pensions						Occupational money purchase pension schemes					
			Rebate only			Rebate + 2 per cent.			Rebate + 2 per cent.			Rebate + 4 per cent.		
		†rrr=3 per cent.	rrr=3·5 per cent.	rrr=4 per cent.	rrr=3 per cent.	rrr=3·5 per cent.	rrr=4 per cent.	rrr=3 per cent.	rrr=3·5 per cent.	rrr=4 per cent.	rrr=3 per cent.	rrr=3·5 per cent.	rrr=4 per cent.	
20	Low	62	74	78	82	90	96	102	91	97	104	108	115	124
	Middle	86	111	118	127	145	157	169	148	160	173	184	199	216
	High	115	147	158	171	199	215	234	203	220	239	257	279	304
30	Low	60	64	66	68	74	76	79	75	77	79	84	87	91
	Middle	83	94	98	102	117	122	128	118	124	130	141	149	157
	High	108	120	125	131	154	161	169	156	164	172	190	200	211
40	Low	56	56	57	57	61	62	63	62	63	64	67	69	70
	Middle	80	80	82	83	93	95	97	94	96	99	107	110	113
	High	102	102	104	107	123	126	130	124	128	132	146	150	155

Table P6C
*Widows Retiring in 2008 Onwards**
Pension projections (£ per week at November 1985 prices)

Age in 1988	Earner	Modified SERPS	Personal Pensions						Occupational money purchase pension schemes					
			Rebate only			Rebate + 2 per cent.			Rebate + 2 per cent.			Rebate + 4 per cent.		
		†rrr=3 per cent.	rrr=3·5 per cent.	rrr=4 per cent.	rrr=3 per cent.	rrr=3·5 per cent.	rrr=4 per cent.	rrr=3 per cent.	rrr=3·5 per cent.	rrr=4 per cent.	rrr=3 per cent.	rrr=3·5 per cent.	rrr=4 per cent.	
20	Low	60	72	75	79	86	91	97	87	92	98	102	108	116
	Middle	85	109	116	123	140	150	161	142	153	164	174	188	203
	High	113	146	156	168	193	207	224	196	211	229	244	264	287
30	Low	56	61	62	63	68	70	72	69	71	73	77	80	82

Age in 1988	Earner	Modified SERPS	Personal Pensions						Occupational money purchase pension schemes					
			Rebate only			Rebate + 2 per cent.			Rebate + 2 per cent.			Rebate + 4 per cent.		
			†rrr=3 per cent.	rrr=3·5 per cent.	rrr=4 per cent.	rrr=3 per cent.	rrr=3·5 per cent.	rrr=4 per cent.	rrr=3 per cent.	rrr=3·5 per cent.	rrr=4 per cent.	rrr=3 per cent.	rrr=3·5 per cent.	rrr=4 per cent.
	Middle	78	90	93	97	110	115	120	111	116	122	132	139	146
	High	101	112	116	121	142	148	154	144	150	157	174	183	192
40	Low	53	52	53	53	57	57	58	57	58	58	62	62	63
	Middle	74	75	76	78	86	88	90	87	89	91	99	101	104
	High	93	93	95	97	112	115	118	113	116	120	133	137	141

* Husband died aged 64 when widow was 59.
† 'rrr' is the real rate of investment return.

DEFENCE

RAF Personnel

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence, further to the answers of 21 November and 13 January, whether a decision has been made yet on the future of SAC Alan Lightowler, SAC Wayne Kirehn, SAC Gwynfor Owen and SAC Geoffrey Jones.

Mr. Lee: Senior Aircraftman Lightowler has applied for and been granted premature voluntary release from the Royal Air Force with effect from 1 April 1986. No decision on the future of the remaining three airmen has yet been taken.

ROF, Radway Green

Mrs. Dunwoody asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether he is satisfied that the royal ordnance factory, Radway Green has the ability to supply ammunition; and whether he intends to place any orders at Radway Green before 31 March.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The royal ordnance factory at Radway Green has a proven ability to supply ammunition. One order for 7·62 mm ammunition has been placed for the financial year starting 1 April 1986, and others are under consideration. A substantial contract for the 1986-87 requirement for 5·56 mm ammunition was offered to Radway Green in October last but has not been accepted. Alternative proposals have since been received from the company and detailed supporting information is still expected from it.

Plastic Bullets

Mrs. Dunwoody asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether plastic bullets or practice rounds were purchased from the firm Hirtenberger Patronen in the years 1982-83 and 1983-84.

Mr. Norman Lamont: No.

Ammunition Purchases

Mrs. Dunwoody asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the dates in 1983-84 and 1984-85 on which contracts for 5·56 ball, tracer, and blank ammunition with the firms Dynamit Nobel, Hirtenberger Patronen, and Fabrique Nationale were signed; and if he will list the dates in 1981-82, 1982-83, 1983-84 and 1984-85 on which contracts for 9 mm ball and blank and 7·62 mm ball and tracer ammunition were signed with the firms Dynamit Nobel, Raufoss and Metallwerk Elisenhutte.

Mr. Norman Lamont: In the financial years specified, orders were placed on the listed companies for the relevant natures of small arms ammunition as follows:

Description	Company	Date placed
5·56 tracer	Fabrique Nationale	11 January 1985
9 mm ball	Dynamit Nobel	4 February 1985
7·62 tracer	Raufoss	19 July 1984
7·62 ball	Raufoss	5 October 1984

Mrs. Dunwoody asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether he is satisfied that there is no element of dumping in the prices quoted by the nationally-owned firms Hirtenberger Patronen and the Fabrique Nationale for the supply of ammunition to Her Majesty's Government; and whether he will investigate the state subsidies involved.

Mr. Norman Lamont: There is no evidence that prices quoted by Hirtenberger Patronen and Fabrique Nationale for the supply of ammunition to Her Majesty's Government have been artificially low. The basis of such quotations is a matter for the companies concerned.

RAF Upper Heyford

Mr. Baldry asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether, following recent representations, he is prepared to extend the noise insulation scheme at RAF Upper Heyford to include the village of Fritwell; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lee: No. Noise levels in the village of Fritwell are below the limit for inclusion in the scheme. However, the boundary of the scheme will be kept under review if noise levels change.

Mr. Baldry asked the Secretary of State for Defence by what percentage the noise level in the village of Fritwell was outside the limit whereby it would have been entitled to a noise insulation grant following the recent tests at RAF Upper Heyford.

Mr. Lee: Average noise levels in the village of Fritwell are estimated to be no higher than 65dB(A) following the noise survey undertaken in 1985 in the vicinity of RAF Upper Heyford.

The qualifying level for inclusion in the Ministry's noise insulation grant scheme is an average of 70dB(A).

Civil Defence

Mr. Strang asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give a further breakdown of the item "local administration communications etc. in United Kingdom" under other support functions in table 2.3 in the "Statement on the Defence Estimates 1985", Vol. 2.

Mr. Stanley: I shall answer shortly.

Nuclear Explosions (Monitoring)

Mr. Strang asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether the seismologists working for his Department at Blanknest are investigating the use of high frequency monitoring of nuclear explosions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The seismologists in my Department are investigating the use of high frequency seismic waves as part of their programme to develop methods and techniques to detect, locate and identify underground nuclear explosions.

Strategic Defence Initiative

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Defence if, pursuant to the answer of 24 February, *Official Report*, column *466*, concerning strategic defence initiative research, he will elucidate the nature of the contractual arrangements which may render the contracts subject to United Kingdom or United States law; and if he will give examples of contractual terms in each case.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Contracts let by the United States Government or a United States company to a United Kingdom firm or university will be subject to United States law. Contracts let by Her Majesty's Government, flowing from an arrangement for specific research work with the United States Government, will be subject to United Kingdom law. Contractual terms will be consistent in each case with the respective national laws, where applicable, and with the inter-Governmental arrangements for United Kingdom participation in SDI research.

Helicopter Pilots

Mr. Soames asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what is the cost of training an Army helicopter pilot;

(2) what is the cost of training a Royal Air Force helicopter pilot.

Mr. Lee: I shall answer shortly.

Queen's Flight

Mr. Jim Spicer asked the Secretary of State for Defence what helicopters are currently in use with the Queen's Flight; and when they went into service.

Mr. Lee: Two Wessex helicopters are in service with The Queen's Flight. They entered service in June and July 1969.

RIMPAC Exercise

Mr. Campbell-Savours asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will make it his policy not to participate in future RIMPAC exercises.

Mr. Stanley: No.

Mr. Campbell-Savours asked the Secretary of State for Defence what benefits Her Majesty's Government expect the Royal Navy to gain from participation in the RIMPAC exercise.

Mr. Stanley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) on 21 February, at columns 377.

Mr. Campbell-Savours asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will now withdraw United Kingdom forces from participation in RIMPAC 1986.

Mr. Stanley: No.

Mr. Campbell-Savours asked the Secretary of State for Defence what recent discussions he has had with representatives of foreign Governments about British participation in the RIMPAC exercises 1986.

Mr. Stanley: My right hon. Friend has had no such discussions.

Finance Office (Transfer)

Mr. O'Brien asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he has assessed the costs of the transfer of his Department's finance department including the contracts organisation from Leeds to Glasgow in the form of *(a)* loss of jobs, *(b)* transfer of office and *(c)* loss of efficiency, and so on.

Mr. Lee: I must ask the hon. Member to await the release of the formal consultative document on this proposal, which will be issued to all interested parties in the next few days.

Mr. O'Brien asked the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received from people employed by his Department in the finance office in Leeds over the proposals to transfer the contracts organisation, and so on, from Leeds to Glasgow.

Mr. Lee: Although it is too early to forecast accurately the leval of representations, a number have already been received.

Ulster Defence Regiment

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give details of the costs of the Ulster Defence Regiment, and its Reserve, divided between wages and salaries, other personnel costs, costs of construction and buildings, investment in military equipment and other costs for the fiscal year 1984-85.

Mr. Lee: Estimated costs for the financial year 1984-85 are in the following form:

	£ million
Wages and salaries	38·1
Support costs	3·5
Capital expenditure on equipment	0·5
Total	42·1

The figures for works costs are not readily available.

Royal Air Force (Clothing)

Mr. Michael McNair-Wilson asked the Secretary of State for Defence what are *(a)* the value and *(b)* the quantities of clothing for personnel in the Royal Air Force currently in store.

Mr. Lee: The value at replacement cost of clothing held in store by the RAF as at 1 October 1985 was £43·454 million. The number of different clothing items held was 5,682. Clothing is held in support of all RAF regular, reserve and cadet forces; in addition, the protective

clothing held includes a range of flying clothing stocked to meet the requirements of all three services and the PE. Estimates of the quantities held of each item could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Nuclear Waste

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Secretary of State for Defence what special protection he proposes for nuclear dump sites in the event of *(a)* terrorist threats and *(b)* war.

Mr. Waldegrave: I have been asked to reply.

I assume that the hon. Member is referring to the potential sites announced by my right hon. Friend and NIREX on 25 February. Given the nature of the wastes concerned, no special precautions are likely to be needed beyond those currently envisaged for safe containment.

Service Personnel

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many service personnel submitted applications for discharge after six months had elapsed since enlistment and were turned down for any reason other than failure to follow the correct application procedure during 1983-84 and 1984-85;

(2) how many requests for discharge turned down due to failure to follow the correct procedure or submit correct documentation, were made prior and subsequent to the first six months of enlistment during 1983-84 and 1984-85;

(3) how many service personnel requested information regarding discharge during 1983-84 and 1984-85;

(4) how many personnel were detained at Colchester for offences which are not punishable under civilian law during 1983-84 and 1984-85;

(5) how many service personnel cases whose alleged offences were triable under civilian law were dealt with by any form of military hearing during 1983-84 and 1984-85;

(6) how many service personnel were charged with an offence during 1983-84 and 1984-85;

(7) how many service personnel were detained for periods exceeding 24 hours during investigations conducted by the Special Investigations Branch during 1983-84 and 1984-85.

Mr. Lee [*pursuant to his reply*, 10 February 1986, c. *388*]: This information is not held centrally.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what record is kept of applications for discharge which are incorrectly submitted;

(2) what record is kept of requests for information both formal and informal, regarding discharge procedure and regulations.

Mr. Lee [*pursuant to his reply*, 10 February 1986, c. *388*]: No records are held centrally on these matters.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many investigations were conducted by the special investigations branch into cases of alleged homosexuality during 1983-84 and 1984-85.

Mr. Lee [*pursuant to his reply*, 10 February 1986, c. *388*]: The information requested on calendar year basis, is as follows:

	Royal Navy	*Army*	*Royal Air Force*
1983	25	52	44
1984	38	56	34
1985	35	50	36

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many service personnel requested discharge *(a)* on reaching the age of 18 years having enlisted below the age of 18 years and *(b)* before their contract was due to expire, but after six months from enlistment during 1983-84 and 1984-85.

Mr. Lee [*pursuant to his reply*, 10 February 1986, c. *388*]: Details of the numbers requesting discharge of reaching the age of 18 having enlisted below the age of 18 are not held centrally. The number of service men requesting discharge before expiry of their contract but after six months service from enlistment are as follows:

	Number
1983-84	6,668
1984-85	8,079

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many service personnel applied for and were granted a discharge within six months of enlistment during the years 1983-84 and 1984-85.

Mr. Lee [*pursuant to his reply*, 10 February 1986, c. *388*]: The number of service men who were discharged having exercised their right to claim discharge within six months of enlistment were as follows:

	Number
1983-84	3,655
1984-85	4,009

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many service personnel requested that their contract of engagement be shortened during 1983-84 and 1984-85.

Mr. Lee [*pursuant to his reply*, 10 February 1986, c. *388*]: Young entrants (those aged less than 17 years and 6 months at enlistment) may shorten the terms of their regular engagement on or within 28 days of their 18th birthday. The numbers who exercised this option were:

	Number
1983-84	2,111
1984-85	2,114

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many service women were interviewed or interrogated my male investigating officers during the course of homosexual investigations during 1983-84 and 1984-85.

Mr. Lee [*pursuant to his reply*, 10 February 1986, c. *388*]: This information is not held centrally. All such interviews would, however, have been conducted in the presence of a female member of staff.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 4 March 1986

WALES

Trunk Roads

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list those trunk roads major improvement schemes in Wales which have, during the past 10 years, appeared in the Welsh Office preparation pool, but which no longer are listed in this pool, and which have not yet been undertaken.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: I have written to the hon. Gentleman today and placed a copy of my letter in the Library.

Sunday Trading

Mr. Roy Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many representations he has received from bodies representing industry, local government, religious organisations, voluntary bodies or private individuals concerning the Government's proposals to abolish restrictions on Sunday trading in Wales; how many were in favour; and how many against.

Mr. Mark Robinson: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply to his earlier question on this subject given by my right hon. Friend on 13 February, at column *508*. Since then my right hon. Friend has received two more representations from religious organisations and five more from private individuals. All 83 representations received and both petitions opposed the Government's proposals. Records of representations sent to individual hon. Members are not kept by the Department.

MSC (School Courses)

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Wales how much the Manpower Services Commission will be spending in 1986 on courses in schools in Wales.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: I am advised by the MSC that, under the technical and vocational education initiative, it is estimated that £3·468 million will be available for the financial year 1986-87 for school and college-based TVEI projects in Wales.

National Garden Festival

Mr. Gwilym Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales whether he has decided upon a short list of sites for the 1992 National Garden Festival to be held in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: I have decided that the following four sites should be the subject of further detailed appraisal and planning prior to the final site selection.

Cardiff	—proposed by South Glamorgan County Council
Deeside	—proposed jointly by Alyn and Deeside District Council and Clwyd County Council
Ebbw Vale	—proposed by Blaenau Gwent Borough Council
Swansea (Llansamlet)	—proposed by Swansea City Council

I shall be engaging consultants to advise me and to work as appropriate with the local authorities in the next stage of this exercise.

CIVIL SERVICE

Unified Grading

Mr. Iain Mills asked the Minister for the Civil Service what progress has been made to extend unified grading in the Civil Service to principal level; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Luce: I am pleased to say that following the announcement made by my right hon. Friend the then Minister of State, Treasury on 26 July 1985, arrangements are now being made with effect from 1 January 1986 to bring a further 11,000 staff in a wide variety of grades at principal level into a new unified grade in the open structure. This change removes formal barriers between different occupational groups and classes at this level, making it easier for management to select people for jobs on the basis of merit alone irrespective of their background or method of entry into the service.

The necessary cost of assimilating staff to the new structure, including appropriate transitional arrangements, will be met from within Departments' planned running costs limits.

PRIME MINISTER

Bulphan

Q12. **Mr. Proctor** asked the Prime Minister if she will pay an official visit to Bulphan.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

State School Education

Q38. **Mr. Hardy** asked the Prime Minister if she will make a statement on the present condition of state school education throughout the United Kingdom.

The Prime Minister: While there have been marked improvements in both primary and secondary education, the Government believe that the standards now generally attained by our pupils are neither as good as they can be, or as good as they will need to be for the 21st century. The Government's education policies, such as those set out for England and Wales in the White paper "Better Schools" (Cmnd. 9469), aim at improving standards for all levels of ability and securing the best possible return from the national resources invested in our schools.

European Council

Q48. **Mr. Teddy Taylor** asked the Prime Minister what issues she intends to raise at the next meeting of the European Council.

The Prime Minister: The next European Council is not due to be held until 26-27 June. It is not yet possible to say what issues will need to be discussed.

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Prime Minister if she is satisfied with the preparations which have been made for the next meeting of the European Council.

The Prime Minister: The next European Council will be held on 26-27 June. It will be for the Dutch presidency to make the necessary arrangements.

Leith

Q65. **Mr. Ron Brown** asked the Prime Minister if she will make an official visit to Leith.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

USA (President)

Q80. **Mr. Latham** asked the Prime Minister when she next expects to meet the President of the United States of America.

The Prime Minister: I hope to meet President Reagan when we both attend the economic summit in Tokyo early in May.

Peterhead

Q82. **Mr. McQuarrie** asked the Prime Minister if she will pay an official visit to Peterhead.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

Research and Development

Q99. **Mr. Madel** asked the Prime Minister what discussions she has initiated in the light of the Cabinet Office's annual review of Government-funded research and development about the level of total Government spending on research and development; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: Ministers have discussed the findings of the 1985 annual review and are continuing to consider the issues raised.

Wales

Q112. **Mr. Wigley** asked the Prime Minister, when she next plans to visit Wales.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

European Community (Food Sales)

Q113. **Sir David Price** asked the Prime Minister whether she will initiate early measures at the Council of Ministers of the European Community to withdraw from the Commission the discretion given it to dispose of agricultural products to the Soviet Union at very low prices.

The Prime Minister: So long as there are substantial surpluses of agricultural produce in the Community one of the most economic ways of disposing of them is by sales to third countries. These take place at prices which reflect the competition on world markets. It would increase the cost of disposal to limit sales to particular markets. In the medium term the best way to reduce the need for sales of agricultural surpluses is to reduce production. A more realistic prices policy under the CAP would reduce the incentive to over-produce, would encourage greater consumption within the Community and put the CAP onto a more stable financial foundation. This remains a central element of our approach to improving the operation of the CAP.

Countryside (Preservation)

Sir Dudley Smith asked the Prime Minister if she will appoint a Minister to have special responsibility for co-ordination between the Department of the Environment and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food of Her Majesty's Government's policy towards the preservation of prime agricultural land and other attractive countryside sites; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: No. I am satisfied that the present arrangements for co-ordination work well.

Planning Decisions

Sir Dudley Smith asked the Prime Minister if she will make a statement on the current arrangements for co-ordination between the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Department of the Environment in the consideration of planning decisions affecting agricultural land or country areas of environmental amenity.

The Prime Minister: Individual applications are, in the first instance, for individual local authorities to deal with, but there are well-established arrangements whereby local authorities consult MAFF, as well as many other bodies, in drawing up their development plans. There are also statutory requirements for consulting MAFF on applications for non-agricultural development on agricultural land.

If the application is called in there is a full opportunity for MAFF's case to be heard at a public inquiry, although the general policy is not to call in cases unless they raise planning issues of more than local importance.

Engagements

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 4 March.

Mr. Marlow asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 4 March.

Mr. Pike asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 4 March.

Mr. Greenway asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 4 March.

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House I shall be having further meetings later today.

Ammunition Factory, Radway Green

Mrs. Dunwoody asked the Prime Minister if she will make an official visit to the royal ordnance small arms ammunition factory at Radway green, Cheshire.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

ENVIRONMENT

Urban Housing Renewal

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 30 January, *Official Report*, column *605*, why Portsmouth was not listed among those authorities which have been sent copies of the list compiled by his Department's urban housing renewal unit of developers interested in refurbishing local authority housing estates for sale; and whether any other local authorities have been sent copies of this list who have not specifically requested copies of it.

Sir George Young: Portsmouth is one of four authorities which were inadvertently omitted from my answer of 30 January. The others are Cleethorpes, High Peak and Woking. They were sent the list because of their expressed interest in the possibility of private sector involvement in the redevelopment of estates, rather than in response to a specific request. Since 30 January, Dudley, Hillingdon, Preston and Sevenoaks have also been sent the list, at their request.

Big Ben

Mr. Key asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when the chimes from the Big Ben Clock Tower will be restored to proper working order; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young [*pursuant to his reply*, 28 February 1986, c. *735*]: There is nothing technically wrong with the chimes. Examination has revealed that a rubber bush, which absorbs the strike of the hammer on the largest quarter bell, has gradually become frozen hard over the current extended period of severe weather and has lost its usual resilience. The effect of this is to curtail the sound of the last strike. The expected onset of warmer weather will return the chimes to their former familiar sound.

This problem has not occurred since the harsh winter of 1947.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Prison Doctors

Mr. Tom Cox asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the number of vacancies for full-time doctors within prisons in the United Kingdom; what action he is taking to fill such posts; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: There are eight vacancies for full-time medical officers of all grades in prisons in England and Wales and arrangements are being made to fill them by internal promotion and open competition.

Policemen (Statistics)

Sir Nicholas Bonsor asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers were dismissed, reduced in rank, or fined in the last full year for which figures are exist.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The information for 1984 is as follows:

	Number
Dismissed or required to resign	*115
Reduction in rank	26
Reduction in pay	35
Fine	292

* Of the 115 officers dismissed or required to resign, 57 had been found guilty of criminal conduct. The information is published in the annual reports of the Her Majesty's Chief Inpector of Constabulary and the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis.

Rape Crisis Centres

Mrs. Dunwoody asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will issue guidelines on liaison between rape crisis centres and police forces outside the Metropolitan area; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw: As my right hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State stated in his reply to a question from the hon. Member on 23 January at column 270, we are considering with the police the scope for action on the issues raised by the recent report by the Women's National Commission on Violence Against Women. This will include the question of liaison between the police and victim support organisations.

School Attendance

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many parents have been *(a)* prosecuted and *(b)* convicted for failure to ensure their child's school attendance in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Mellor: The available information, which may be incomplete, relates to defendants proceeded against for offences against the Education Act 1944 and is published annually in "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales"—offence classification 112 of table S1.S (A) of volume 1 of the supplementary tables for 1984. This information does not distinguish offences of failure to secure regular school attendance from other offences under this Act; nor is it possible to distinguish defendants who are parents from those who are guardians.

Airport Security

Mr. Tony Lloyd asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if, pursuant to the letter from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport to the hon. Member for Stretford of 5 February concerning airport security, he will explain the exceptional nature of the overt carriage of sub-machine guns by Metropolitan police officers at Heathrow from 9 January.

Mr. Giles Shaw: My right hon. Friend's agreement to the overt carriage of sub-machine guns by police officers at Heathrow was exceptional in the sense that such weapons had not previously been deployed for such purposes; and the authority related solely to Heathrow and is being kept under review. The weapons now deployed are capable of firing only in the single shot mode.

National Association of Victims Support Schemes

Mr. Alex Carlile asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any proposals to provide extra funds to the National Association of Victims Support Schemes to make up the shortfall in the association's

funding for 1986-87 as a result of the abolition of the Greater London council and the metropolitan counties; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: The National Association of Victims Support Schemes receives no funding from the GLC or the metropolitan counties. I understand, however, that a number of local victims support schemes receive financial assistance from such authorities. The Government have ensured that successor authorities will have access in 1986-87 to all the resources that the GLC and the metropolitan counties would have received. Additional arrangements for voluntary bodies include powers for local authorities collectively to make grants, and transitional grant support from central Government on projects to the value of £20 million a year.

On the general question of funding for victims support schemes and their National Association, I refer the hon. and learned Member to the answer given to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) on 14 January at column *545*.

Firearms

Mr. Hickmet asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions *(a)* handguns, *(b)* shotguns have been discharged at (i) the police and (ii) third parties in each year since 1979, showing on how many occasions a police officer or third person was *(a)* injured and *(b)* killed, and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 February 1986, c. *177*]: The available information is given in the table.

Notifiable offences recorded by the police in which firearms are reported to have been discharged by principal victim, degree of injury and type of weapon*

England and Wales *Number of offences*

		Principal victim							
		Police†				*Other persons*			
Year	*Type of weapon*	*Fatal injury*	*Non-fatal injury‡*	*No injury‡*	*Total discharges‖*	*Fatal injury*	*Non-fatal injury‡*	*No injury‡*	*Total discharges*
1979	Shotgun	—	2	2	4	41	72	96	209
	Pistol	—	—	1	1	8	24	11	43
	Other firearm	—	7	6	13	4	2,816	2,167	4,987
1980	Shotgun	—	2	7	9	12	66	88	166
	Pistol	—	2	—	2	8	35	16	59
	Other firearm	—	9	6	15	2	2,389	2,592	4,983
1981	Shotgun	—	—	3	3	20	90	122	232
	Pistol	—	1	1	2	11	56	38	105
	Other firearm	—	8	4	12	1	2,587	3,042	5,630
1982	Shotgun	—	1	3	4	35	98	118	251
	Pistol	3	1	—	4	6	44	21	71
	Other firearm	—	5	7	12	2	2,290	2,979	5,271
1983	Shotgun	—	—	1	1	32	80	104	216
	Pistol	—	1	2	3	9	41	22	72
	Other firearm	—	9	7	16	—	2,325	3,127	5,452
1984	Shotgun	1	2	1	4	40	82	71	193
	Pistol	2	5	1	8	19	40	29	88
	Other firearm	1	5	6	12	4	2,250	3,380	5,634

* Includes cases where the discharge was not directed at the victim or where the victim was not present (eg some criminal damage offences).
† These figures may not include cases in which police officers were fired at while investigating offences against other persons.
‡ In some of the cases where a non-fatal injury or no injury occurred the principal victim was not recorded; these cases have been included under "other persons" but some of the victims may have been police officers.
‖ The figures on total discharges for 1979 and 1981 have been revised slightly from those given in the *Official Report* for 3 February 1983, vol. 36 column 168.

TRANSPORT

River Wandle (Plough Lane Bridge)

Mr. Tom Cox asked the Secretary of State for Transport why he has turned down an application for special funding for the reconstruction of the Plough Lane bridge over the river Wandle; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I will write to the hon. Member about this case as soon as I can.

Disabled Drivers (Orange Badge Scheme)

Mr. McCrindle asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he proposes to change the conditions of the orange badge scheme for disabled drivers when it expires shortly.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: This valuable scheme for disabled people is not due to expire. Its current conditions were brought in with parliamentary approval during 1983 to tackle some damaging abuses that had crept in. We are about to review with local authorities and others concerned how the scheme has been working since then.

Highways

Mr. Wrigglesworth asked the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will provide resources to local authorities to enable them to introduce new methods to co-ordinate work on public highways by public utilities;

(2) what plans he has to implement the recommendations of the Horne committee report on the Public Utilities Street Works Act 1950;

(3) if he will seek to give further powers to local authorities to control the quality of reinstatement of public highways by public utilities after they have dug them up.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The Horne committee's report was published in November last year and comments invited by the end of next month. Before decisions can be taken we will need to consider the report in the light of these comments, not all of which have yet been received. We must consider carefully the proposals made for strengthening control over the quality of reinstatements. We will also consider the resource implications for local authorities of introducing new methods to co-ordinate works on highways, but I cannot undertake that special aid will be provided for this purpose.

Roads (Reinstatement)

Mr. Wrigglesworth asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he is satisfied with the standard of reinstatement of roads after they have been dug up by public utilities.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Not entirely. This was one of the principal reasons for setting up the review of the Public Utilities Street Works Act 1950 chaired by Professor Horne. We are now considering the report of the review in the light of comments made on it.

Chemicals (Conveyance)

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for Transport if phoscatim has been *(a)* approved as a dangerous substance that is permitted for conveyance by road and *(b)* classified for the purpose of assigning a hazard warning sign on transporting vehicles.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: This substance is a solid organophosphorus pesticide. It is listed by the World Health Organisation as "obsolete or discontinued". It would be regarded as "toxic" for transport purposes and vehicles carrying it in solution in tanks would have to display the appropriate hazard warning panel.

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for Transport if chlorfenethol has been *(a)* approved as a dangerous substance that is permitted for conveyance by road and *(b)* classified for the purpose of assigning a hazard warning sign on transporting vehicles.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: This substance is a solid organochlorine pesticide. It is regarded as "harmful" for the purposes of supply and use under the Classification, Packaging and Labelling Regulations 1984 and packages must be marked with a number of appropriate risk and safety phrases. The substance falls below the less stringent toxicity level for transport purposes and vehicles carrying it in solution in tanks would not be required to display hazard warning panels.

Channel Tunnel

Mr. Peter Rees asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he proposes to include provision in the forthcoming Channel tunnel Bill for the A20 Folkestone-Dover road scheme.

Mr. David Mitchell: We intend to make provision in the Bill for the western part of the scheme from the end of the M20, to which the tunnel terminal will be linked, to Court wood on the existing A20. This new road will provide much needed early relief for Folkestone and Capel le Ferne from the traffic between east Kent and the tunnel. The remainder of the scheme from Court wood to Dover will be taken forward as quickly as possible under the normal Highways Act procedures.

Public Transport, Merseyside

Sir Ian Percival asked the Secretary of State for Transport what maximum limit of expenditure by the Merseyside passenger transport authority he has fixed for 1986-87; what are his plans and intentions as to expenditure by that authority in the two years following; and what are the likely implications for the ratepayers of Sefton having regard to the resulting precepts.

Mr. Ridley: Under the Precept Limitation (Passenger Transport Authorities) (Prescribed Maximum) Order 1986 the maximum precept which may be levied by the Merseyside passenger transport authority on Merseyside districts, including Sefton, in 1986-87 is 44·88p. It could, of course levy less. This figure was based upon an expenditure level redetermined on 20 December 1985 at £81·3 million, although the authority applied for substantially more at £105 million. I have made it clear that in the following two years of precept control further substantial reductions in revenue support must be achieved in order to ensure a reasonable balance between the needs of transport users and of taxpayers.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Warship Yards

Mr. Hanley asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will make it his policy to ensure that Barrow and Birkenhead shipyards cannot pass out of United Kingdom ownership, following their privatisation; and if he plans to include provisions for a golden share.

Mr. Peter Morrison: We will ensure Vickers Shipbuilding and Engineering Ltd. remains in United Kingdom ownership following its sale by British Shipbuilders. Any necessary arrangements will be in place before the business is sold.

Multi-fibre Arrangement

Sir John Farr asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he is prepared to urge the introduction of a social clause into the multi-fibre arrangement bilateral agreements so as to ensure that the textile and clothing products imported into the United Kingdom are produced by workers who enjoy the protection of the minimum terms and conditions of employment laid down by the International Labour Organisation.

Mr. Alan Clark: I see no need to strengthen the existing references to social development in the mulit-fibre arrangement.

Sir John Farr asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the decisions reached on the Community's multi-fibre arrangement negotiating mandate at the February meeting of the Council of Ministers.

Mr. Alan Clark: The Council of Ministers reached decisions on some aspects of negotiating mandate but will not finalise its position until the Council on 10-11 March. The House will understand that the Community cannot announce its detailed negotiating objectives.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Marlow asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many officials in his Department have been seconded from industry; and how many were in place on *(a)* 1 January 1980, *(b)* 1 January 1981, *(c)* 1 January 1982, *(d)* 1 January 1983, *(e)* 1 January 1984, *(f)* 1 January 1985 and *(g)* 1 January 1986.

Mr. Pattie: The number of officials in the Department of Trade and Industry and its predecessor Departments who have been seconded from industry and commerce between 1 January 1980 and 1 January 1986 is 102.

The number in place on 1 January in each of the years concerned was:

	Number
1980	24
1981	15
1982	17
1983	21
1984	25
1985	31
1986	33

ENERGY

Oil (Production and Prices)

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will discuss world oil production and prices with the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: My right hon. Friend maintains frequent contacts with representatives of other oil-producing countries, including members of OPEC.

Chapel Cross and Calder Hall

Mr. Ashdown asked the Secretary of State for Energy (1) whether the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate had sight of all relevant reports and accompanying correspondence from Mr. Peter Phelan before signing off the long-term safety reviews for Chapel Cross and Calder Hall power stations; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what steps the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate has taken to satisfy itself of the capacity of Chapel Cross and Calder Hall nuclear power stations to withstand seismological shocks; and if he will make a statement;

(3) if he will specify the magnitude of seismic events expected to occur at least once in a nominal 40-year operating life at Chapel Cross and Calder Hall plants;

(4) if he will specify the most severe seismic event expected to occur at Chapel Cross or Calder Hall in a nominal 40-year operating life;

(5) if he will specify the maximum magnitude of seismic events which, in the light of recent research studies, could be expected to permit the nuclear reactors at Chapel Cross and Calder Hall to survive, be safely shut down and subsequently be maintained in safe condition.

Mr. Goodlad: The Nuclear Installations Inspectorate is already checking to see whether there is anything new in the reported allegations of Mr. Phelan, and I hope to be able to reply to the hon. Member's questions shortly.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Rape and Murder Charges

Mr. Corbett asked the Attorney-General if he will publish in the *Official Report* those cases, by title and trial result date since the passing of the Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act 1976, in which rape and murder charges have been tried in one trial, giving the number of defendants on each charge at each trial and specifying in which trials judges have *(a)* been requested to make and *(b)* have made directions under section 6(2)*(a)* of that Act.

The Attorney-General: The information sought by the hon. Member is not centrally recorded. It could be obtained only at disproportionate cost to the taxpayer.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Overseas Development Administration

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the staff of the Overseas Development Administration by grade showing in each case the number of males and females, respectively.

Mr. Raison: The total number of staff of the Overseas Development Administration on 1 February 1986 was 1,528. Of these, 599½ (including part-time staff) were female. Details are:

Grade	*Staff in Post*	
	Male	*Female*
Open Structure		
GRADE 1A—Permanent Secretary	1	
GRADE 2 —Deputy Secretary	1	
GRADE 3 —Under Secretary	7	
GRADE 5:		
Assistant Secretary	21	3½
Senior Economic Adviser	4	
Chief Statistician	1	
Principal Natural Resources Adviser	2	
Principal Engineering Adviser	1	
Principal Education Adviser	1	
Deputy Chief Scientific Officer	4	
GRADE 6:		
Senior Principal	8	
Natural Resources Adviser	16	
Population Adviser		1
Engineering/Architectural Adviser	12½	
Energy Adviser	1	
Electrical Adviser	1	

Grade	Staff in Post Male	Female
Employment Adviser	1	
Education Adviser	2	1
Senior Social Development Adviser	1	
Financial Management Adviser	2	
Nutritional Adviser	½	
Senior Principal Scientific Officer	12	2
GRADE 7:		
Principal	66	5
Economic Adviser	18	1
Statistician	4	2
Principal Information Officer	1	
Assistant Natural Resources Adviser	4	
Assistant Engineering/Architectural Adviser	6	
Social Development Adviser	1	
Demographer/Statistician	1	
Senior Procurement Adviser	1	
Principal Scientific Officer	47	4
Principal Research Officer	4	
Administration		
Senior Executive Officer	38	9
Higher Executive Officer	99	43½
Higher Executive Officer 'Development'	3	1
Administration Trainee/Higher Executive Officer	5	1
Executive Officer	111	82½
Clerical Officer	164	167
Clerical Assistant	7	14
Ancillary Grades		
Chief Superintendent of Typists		1
Senior Superintendent of Typists		2
Superintendent of Typists		5
Senior Personal Secretaries		3
Personal Secretaries		44½
Specialist Typists / Typists / Trainee Typist		60
Telex Operator	1	1½
Chief Photoprinter	1	
Assistant Chief Photoprinter	2	
Leading Operator	3	
Photoprinter I	3	3
Photoprinter II	2	5
Office Keeper II	1	1
Senior Messenger		13
Messenger	16	28½
Porter/Messenger	1	
Chief Paperkeeper		1
Senior Paperkeeper	1	6
Paperkeeper	7	17
Cleaner		3
Security IV	1	1
Security V	9	1
Telephonist		3
Laboratory Attendant	2	5
Others		
Senior Economist/Economic Assistant	12	2
Senior Assistant/Assistant Statistician	1	2
Senior Librarian	2	
Librarian		2
Assistant Librarian	2	2
Senior Information Officer	2	1
Information Officer	1	2
Principal Medical Adviser	1	
Medical Adviser	1	1
Principal Nursing and Health Services Adviser		1
Nursing and Health Services Adviser		1
Senior Occupational Health Nursing Adviser		1
Senior Scientific Officer	56	10
Higher Scientific Officer	36	13
Scientific Officer	18	12
Assistant Scientific Officer	12	11
Senior Research Officer	11	1
Professional and Technology Officer II	1	
Professional and Technology Officer IV	2	
Higher Grade (Draughtsman)	1	
Senior Grade Cartographer		1
Higher Grade Cartographer		1
Principal Photographer	1	
Senior Photographer	1	
	891	606
Industrials	31	
Totals	922	606

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many of the consultants used by the Overseas Development Administration in each of the past three years have been male and female, respectively.

Mr. Raison: The ODA employs firms, not individuals, to carry out consultancy contracts. We have no record of the number of male and female staff employed by firms for doing this work.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Departmental Responsibilities

Mr. Tony Lloyd asked the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what are the responsibilities and duties of the Duchy of Lancaster Office; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Tebbit: The Duchy of Lancaster Office administers, under my supervision, the Queen's estates in the right of Her Duchy of Lancaster; and other palatinate responsibilities which fall to me, such as the appointment of high sheriffs and of magistrates within the counties of Lancashire, Greater Manchester and Merseyside; and the administration of intestate estates within the county palatine. In addition, there are a small number of historical appointments to church livings and the governing bodies of schools and universities.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Environmentally Sensitive Areas

Mr. Chapman asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will report progress on his consultations with the Countryside Commission and the Nature Conservancy Council over the selection and setting up of environmentally sensitive areas proposed under the Agriculture Bill.

Mr. Jopling: My officials are in close touch with the Countryside Commission and the Nature Conservancy Council, which are now carrying out a detailed analysis of the short-listed areas in England and Wales in consultation with the various organisations concerned. They expect to complete this work around Easter and will be making recommendations to me and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales by the end of April.

EC (Agricultural Expenditure)

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what is the total amount of agricultural spending by the EEC which is permitted in terms of the strict budgetary controls agreed at the European Council; and what estimate has been made by the Commission of the likely expenditure in 1986 if its farm prices and other agricultural measures are agreed;

(2) what steps he is taking to inform hon. Members of the detailed proposals in the 1986 farm price review of the EEC before the debate on the subject which is to take place on Monday 10 March; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: I shall reply to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

Outgoers Scheme

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate the Commission has made of the increased production of other commodities if its proposals for a new outgoers scheme for dairy farmers is implemented.

Mr. Gummer: I shall reply to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

Intervention Stores

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the total amount of various perishable foodstuffs and fish, respectively, which were withdrawn from the market by the Intervention Board in 1985; and what part of each of these totals was destroyed.

Mr. Gummer: I shall reply to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Helsinki Final Act

Mr. Knowles asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made in the implementation by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and eastern European countries of the provisions of the Helsinki final act during the last six months.

Mr. Renton: Implementation by the Soviet Union and eastern European countries of their commitments under the Helsinki final act over the six-month period to 31 December 1985 has continued to be generally unsatisfactory. Levels of compliance have reflected the Warsaw Pact countries' selective interpretation of their commitments. There have again been widespread breaches of the provisions relating to human rights and fundamental freedoms though with variations in the pattern of implementation as between individual states.

SECURITY IN EUROPE: PRINCIPLES GUIDING RELATIONS BETWEEN PARTICIPATING STATE; CONFIDENCE-BUILDING MEASURES AND CERTAIN ASPECTS OF SECURITY AND DISARMAMENT (BASKET I).

The most notable feature of Eastern performance over the period was the continued non-compliance with principle VII which relates to

"respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief."

This was particularly evident in the Soviet Union where official harassment of religious groups, dissidents and ethnic minorities continued unabated, and in some instances appeared to have been stepped up. Soviet practice offered no evidence of any impending change in policy in any area of human rights.

The Jewish community continued to face difficulties, not only on the question of emigration, but also in practising its religion and in following its cultural traditions. Confiscation of religious material from the homes of Soviet Jews, particularly of refuseniks, was widespread and the pressures on the teaching of Hebrew maintained. In August, Roald Zelichenok, a private Hebrew teacher was sentenced to three years' labour camp for "defaming the Soviet state"; in October, Leonid Volvovsky was also imprisoned on the same charge. A number of other Jews, whose only offence appears to be to have taught Hebrew unofficially, continued to serve sentences throughout the period under review.

Members of Christian groups were also subjected to harassment and persecution where they have declined to register with the authorities or generally to work within the rigid laws governing religious activity in the Soviet Union. Although freedom of religion or belief is enshrined not only in the final act but also in the Soviet constitution, in practice churches must operate under official supervision. Arrests and imprisonment of believers of various sects were once again reported throughout the period. Vasiliy Boechko, an unregistered Pentecostalist bishop was arrested around the beginning of September and is still awaiting trial. Groups such as Jehovah's Witnesses and the Uniate Catholic Church remained proscribed organisations. In August, Iosip Terelya, a member of the unofficial committee to defend the Ukrainian Catholic church (the Uniates) was senteced to seven years in a labour camp plus five years of internal exile. He had spent many years previously in camps and psychiatric hospitals. In October another underground Baptist printing press was discovered, this time in Moldavia. Six arrests followed. In July, a group of Hare Krishna followers in the Stavropol territory were sentenced to up to five years in the camps; others in different parts of the Soviet Union were harassed or arrested. In Central Asia and Azerbaidzhan, Moslems have been subjected to continuing atheist propaganda. The authorities have expressed alarm at local indications of increased devotion to Islam. Relatively few officialy registered mosques are open.

The "Group to establish Trust between the USSR and US" was particularly affected by a crackdown on dissent before and after during the Moscow youth festival in July-August. Dr. Vladimir Brodsky, a leading member of the group was arrested in July and subsequently sentenced to three years imprisonment on a charge of "malicious hooliganism".

There was similarly no significant improvement in the position of the better known individual cases although the release of Mrs. Yelena Bonner to the West for medical treatment towards the end of the reporting period was a welcome development. Dr. Sakharov, however, remained in internal exile in Gorky. There was speculation that the psychiatrist Anatoly Koryagin might be close to death in Chistopol prison where he had been held since 1982. Recent news confirmed that he had been moved in July 1985 to a labour camp and is still critically ill in the camp

hospital. There was renewed evidence of the continuing abuse of psychiatry in suppressing dissent, a practice which Dr. Koryagin helped to expose.

The unsatisfactory attitude of the Bulgarian authorities towards their CSCE commitments remained substantially unchanged. Once more, emphasis was put on principles I (sovereignty) and VI (non-interference in internal affairs) while commitments under principle VII were virtually ignored. Bulgarian treatment of the ethnic Turkish minority, and denial of its existence, continued to give cause for very considerable concern. The Bulgarian authorities continue to try to establish control over religious communities by direct interference and force. The Government control where their citizens work and live and although the constitution guarantees freedom of speech and association, these cannot be exercised "to the detriment of the public interest".

In Czechoslovakia, the repressive attitude to human rights was maintained. Routine harassment of both dissidents and religious activists continued. Freedom of expression and other civil liberties remain severely restricted. There is continued pressure on human rights' groups such as Charter 77 and the Jazz Section. In two recent trials, friends of the accused and Western diplomats were denied entrance to the courtroom.

East German implementation of its CSCE commitments under the final act was varied. Restrictions on human rights and individual freedoms remained a central problem. There was little or no relaxation in the restrictions on freedom of movement. However, the GDR attitude towards the church remained more accommodating than in some other countries. Contacts with overseas churches were permitted without state interference.

Hungarian observance of CSCE principles during the six months remained generally good, though some retrograde steps were noted. Among the latter was the revision of an existing decree which widened the scope for police surveillance and deportation. During the CSCE Cultural Forum in Budapest, attended by delegates from eastern and western Europe, the Hungarian authorities decided to ban unauthorised public meetings discussing cultural freedom and related matters. Meetings, however, took place unhindered in private.

Religious freedom in Poland remained greater than in other eastern European countries, although criticism of the Church by the authorities increased, and harassment of priests associated with the opposition continued. The repression of dissent showed a tendency to increase. The growing use of a summary court procedure in cases against opposition activists gave cause for concern. The number of political prisoners rose to over 400 in the autumn; after which about 220 minor offenders were released, on stringent conditions, as a humanitarian gesture. These did not include any of the leading Solidarity activists. In November it was announced that about 60 staff in universities and polytechnics were to be dismissed from their administrative positions under a procedure introduced by amendments adopted in 1985 to the Higher Education Law.

Romania remained one of the more oppressive countries in Eastern Europe as far as human rights and fundamental freedoms were concerned. Conditions for national minorities, particularly Hungarians, seem to have deteriorated further. The Department of Religious Affairs maintained tight control over the various religious denominations and continued to harass church leaders and believers who went beyond the narrow guidelines laid down for religious practice. In August, however, the authorities finally granted an exit visa to Orthodox priest, Father Calciu as well as to the dissident Dorin Tudoran.

CONFIDENCE AND SECURITY-BUILDING MEASURES

The GDR notified participants of an exercise held from 6 to 14 July involving both Soviet and Eastern German troops. No observers were, however, invited. Soviet Union notified one major military exercise, "Caucasus" which took place from 15 to 21 July and to which observers from some Western countries were invited. These were believed to be the only exercises requiring notification held by the Warsaw Pact countries during the period under review. Warsaw Pact countries declined the invitation to send observers to the exercise "Brave Defender" held in the United Kingdom; however Soviet and Czechoslovak observers attended the exercise "Trutzige Sachsen" held in September by the Federal Republic of Germany.

CO-OPERATION IN THE FIELD OF ECONOMICS, OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY AND OF THE ENVIRONMENT (BASKET II)

In general, the procedures for conducting business in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe have remained unchanged and the flow of economic and commercial information limited. However, in Poland and Hungary, increasing numbers of domestic producers have been allowed to negotiate foreign trade transactions directly, without the intervention of the Foreign Trade Organisations.

CO-OPERATION IN HUMANITARIAN AND OTHER FIELDS (BASKET III)

Eastern implementation of their commitments in this field remained generally unsatisfactory, particularly with regard to family reunification and contacts with individuals from states outside the Warsaw Pact. Emigration to the West has continued at a low level. In the Soviet Union the number of exit visa permits granted to ethnic Germans declined further; the number of Soviet Jews who emigrated during the review period was marginally higher than the figure for the preceding six months but the figures still fell a very long way short of the high levels of emigration observed a few years ago: (the 1985 figure was 1,140 compared with 908 in 1984). Long waiting lists remained despite Soviet claims that virtually all those Jews wishing to leave had already done so. There were successive rumours and denials from different quarters about a possible increase in the number of emigrants. In the GDR, the number of emigration visas granted increased over the period but still only a fraction of those wishing to leave the GDR have been allowed to do so. With very few exceptions restrictions remained in force in all Warsaw Pact countries on individuals wishing to visit the West, as well as in access to Western diplomatic missions. Compliance with the Helsinki and Madrid provisions on information by the Warsaw Pact countries remained poor with restrictions on access to overseas sources of information. Jamming of Western broadcasts continued especially by the Soviet Union, which, according to BBC estimates, currently spends upwards of £500 million per annum on jamming.

CO-OPERATION AND EXCHANGES IN THE FIELD OF CULTURE AND EDUCATION

Bureaucratic and economic constraints continued to limit the development of most bilateral programmes with

Western countries, although there was agreement at the US-Soviet summit in November to broaden bilateral exchanges. The Budapest Cultural Forum of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) failed to reach agreement on practical measures to improve cultural co-operation between East and West.

Gibraltar

Sir Eldon Griffiths asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to seek to secure the listing of the Gibraltar defences in the world heritage list set up by the world heritage convention; what arrangements have been made with the Gibraltar Government to ensure their maintenance, repair and public display; what funds he makes available for these purposes; what steps he is taking to seek to enlist private contributions; what support is forthcoming from international agencies including the world heritage fund; if he will visit Gibraltar to inspect the conditions of the defences; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: The Gibraltar defences were put forward last year in the "tentative list" of sites for inclusion in the world heritage list. We have in hand work on the preparation of their case for their formal nomination to the list. When this has been completed, the Gibraltar defences will be among those sites to be considered for such nomination.

The Gibraltar defences are protected as ancient monuments under the Gibraltar Museum and Antiquities Ordinance 1982. Their maintenance, repair and public display are matters for the Gibraltar Government.

My right hon. and learned Friend has no plans at present to visit the Gibraltar defences.

Krasnoyarsk Radar System

Mr. Tony Lloyd asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he has taken to encourage the evaluation of the Krasnoyarsk radar system by the joint United States — Soviet standing consultative committee; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: We have made it clear that the siting and orientation of the large phased array radar under construction at Krasnoyarsk gives rise to serious questions in connection with obligations under the ABM treaty. The United Kingdom is not, however, a party to the treaty and does not participate in the Standing Consultative Commission, whose proceedings are confidential.

New Zealand (Royal Visit)

Mr. Greenway asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if Her Majesty's Government have made, or propose to make, any representations to the Government of New Zealand concerning the arrangements for the security of Her Majesty the Queen during her current visit to that country; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: Her Majesty paid this visit as Queen of New Zealand. We were not involved in any way in the organisation of this visit, for which full responsibility, including that for security, lay with the New Zealand authorities.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Value Added Tax

Mr. Gerald Bowden asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the current position on the difference of view between the European Community Commission and Her Majesty's Government regarding the zero rating of certain goods and services.

Mr. Brooke: The EC Commission has applied to the European Court of Justice for a declaration against the United Kingdom that the zero rating of certain goods and services is incompatible with the sixth VAT directive, as not being for clearly defined social reasons or for the benefit of the final consumer. The Government do not accept this contention and will defend the issue before the European Court. It is unlikely that the case will be heard, at the earliest, before the end of the year.

Mr. Foulkes asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will list for each country in the European Economic Community the percentage value added tax take-up entailed by the budget approved by the Council of Ministers.

Mr. Brooke: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Mr. Michael Brown asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total revenue generated by value added tax and duty on tobacco products in the last full year for which figures are available; and what proportion this represented of total value added tax receipts.

Mr. Brooke: The excise duties on tobacco products yielded some £4,340 million in the calendar year 1985. It is estimated that the related value added tax was of the order of £910 million. This total of £5·25 billion is equivalent to 26 per cent. of the total net receipts of value added tax in the same period.

Income Tax

Mr. Fallon asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the average amount of income tax paid at the standard rate in 1978-79 and 1984-85.

Mr. Moore: The average income tax liability per taxpayer, excluding liabilities at rates in excess of the basic rate and the investment income surcharge, was about £900 in 1978-79. The corresponding figure for 1984-85 was about £1,600. The estimate for 1978-79 takes account of tax collected at the lower rate of 25 per cent.

Taxation

Mr. Wigley asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the latest number of people who are paying income tax at the top rate of 60 per cent. on earned income; and what are the total tax receipts obtained from these persons paying at the rate of 60 per cent.

Mr. Moore: About 90,000 married couples and single people will pay income tax for 1985-86 at the rate of 60 per cent. The total tax liability on that part of their income subject to the 60 per cent. rate is about £1·4 billion. If investment income is disregarded, the number liable to tax at 60 per cent. on part of their earned income is about 50,000, with a corresponding tax liability on that income of about £0·8 billion.

Excise Duty

Mr. Bowen Wells asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the revenue received from duties on spirits from the beginning of the current financial year to the month for which he has the latest figures together with the figures for the same period in the two immediately preceding years; and if he will give similar data for the complete years 1983-84 and 1984-85, and the expected figures for the financial year ending 31 March.

Mr. Brooke: The revenue received from duties on spirits for the first nine months of the current financial year and of the previous two financial years is as follows:

£ million

	Excise duty	**VAT*	*Total*
April-December 1983	1,229	255	1,484
April-December 1984	926	280	1,206
April-December 1985	1,171	295	1,466

The revenue from duties on spirits for the last two complete financial years and the Budget estimate for the current year are as follows:

£ million

	Excise duty	**VAT*	*Total*
1983-84	1,702	430	2,132
1984-85	1,242	455	1,697
1985-86 (estimate)	1,460	n.a.	n.a.

*Estimates based on consumers' expenditure data; forecasts of VAT receipts from particular goods are not made.

Women (Tax Returns)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many women who have submitted tax returns during the last seven years to Inland Revenue offices in England and Wales were registered as being over the age of 60 years and being engaged in *(a)* full-time or *(b)* part-time employment.

Mr. Moore: The Inland Revenue keeps no records of tax returns submitted by reference to the age of the taxpayer. I regret that the information is not, therefore, available.

EC (Agricultural Spending)

Mr. Foulkes asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what level of European Economic Community agricultural expenditure was fixed for 1986 under the budgetary discipline arrangements; what is his current estimate of agricultural expenditure in 1986; what steps he will take to ensure that agricultural spending does not exceed the budgetary discipline limit; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: The Council of Ministers agreed last year on a financial guideline of 20,619 mecu for agricultural market support expenditure in 1986 for the Community of Ten. The EC budget for 1986 includes 20,445 mecu for such expenditure with an additional 567 mecu for expenditure in Spain and Portugal giving a total of 21,012 mecu for the whole Community. The EC Commission in its proposals for CAP prices for 1986-87 has indicated its intention of seeking 790 mecu supplementary provision for agriculture in 1986, mainly to take account of the effects of the significant fall in the value of the dollar against the ecu since the 1986 budget was drawn up. Both the Council of Ministers and the Commission have committed themselves under the budget discipline conclusions to make every effort to avoid the need to take supplementary provision for agriculture. It will be a key United Kingdom objective to ensure that the budget discipline conclusions are respected in the CAP price fixing negotiation.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Welsh Business

Mr. Best asked the Lord Privy Seal, if he will state for each of the last six years the number of *(a)* Welsh debates, *(b)* meetings of the Welsh Grand Committee and *(c)* statements on matters relating to Wales; and if he will give similar information in respect of Scotland.

Mr. Biffen: In so far as debates and statements on Scottish and Welsh matters can be separately identified the information is as follows:

Session	*Debates**		*Statements relating to*	
	Welsh	*Scottish*	*Wales*	*Scotland*
1979-80	11	13	1	1
1980-81	3	20	2	4
1981-82	5	12	3	3
1982-83	4	8	2	2
1983-84	7	17	3	4
1984-85	6	11	4	7

* Excluding debates on various stages of legislation, ten minute rule bills, money resolutions, SO No. 10 applications and PNQs but including *inter alia* daily adjournment debates and debates on statutory instruments.

Information about meetings of the Scottish and Welsh Grand Committees and of other standing committees is contained in the Return of Standing Committees published sessionally as a House of Commons paper.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Student Grants

105. **Mr. Mallon** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what have been the changes in the level of student grants, especially for those students from Northern Ireland, who are studying in Britain.

Dr. Mawhinney: The rates for mandatory awards, which were increased by around 3 per cent. for 1985-86, apply irrespective of whether students are studying within Northern Ireland or elsewhere within the United Kingdom. They are as follows:

£1,480 for students studying from their parental home;
£1,830 for students living away from home but outside London; and
£2,165 for students living away from home in London.

SCOTLAND

Electoral Areas

Mr. Bruce asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many orders have been made under section 17 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 to amend electoral areas; and how many were for *(a)* regional councils, *(b)* district councils, *(c)* island councils and *(d)* a combination of regional or island and district councils, respectively.

Mr. John MacKay: Twenty-one orders have been made under section 17 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 to amend the electoral areas constituted following the initial review by the Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland under schedule 5 of the Act of the electoral arrangements for regions, islands areas and districts throughout Scotland. Of these, three affect the electoral areas of regional councils, three affect the electoral areas of district councils, and 15 affect the electoral areas of both regional and district councils. None relate to islands area councils.

Salmon Poaching

Mr. Steel asked the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will give the average sentence meted out by courts for poaching salmon by means of poisoning the water in the last 12 months together with the previous three year's figures;

(2) if he will give the number of convictions obtained in the courts for poaching salmon by means of poisoning the water, in the last 12 months, together with the previous three years' figures;

(3) what was the average sentence meted out by courts for poaching salmon in the last 12 months, together with the previous three years' figures.

Mr. Rifkind: I regret that this information is not available.

Scottish Examination Board

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what action he proposes to take to require the Scottish Examination Board to review its syllabus for the higher grade examination in religious studies following the representations from various bodies about its apparent discrimination against candidates who are not of the Christian religion.

Mr. Allan Stewart: A number of representations were received by the Scottish Examination Board during the course of its normal consultations on the proposed new higher grade religious studies course about the fact that a candidate may concentrate wholly on Christianity if he or she wishes. These comments were considered and rejected by the board's religious studies panel. The new syllabus, like all other syllabuses of the Scottish Examination Board, will in any event be kept under review. I therefore see no reason to take any action.

Milk Quota

Mr. Hirst asked the Secretary of State for Scotland when he will reallocate the remainder of the Scottish running reserve of wholesale milk quota.

Mr. Rifkind: I intend that an amended and consolidated version of the Dairy Produce Quotas Regulations should come into operation in March. I am glad to say that this will enable most of the remainder of the Scottish running reserve of quota to be reallocated before the end of the 1985-86 milk year and will mean that producers' 1985-86 wholesale milk quota can be finalised.

In these reallocations we shall be helping a number of groups of producers. Firstly those whose development awards were reduced by 42·5 per cent. when the awards were made will have 10 per cent. of that cutback in quota restored to them.

Secondly in order to comply with Community requirements 1985-86 wholesale quota has to be 1 per cent. less than that for 1984-85, but small producers producing up to 200,000 litres per annum have had their quota maintained at the 1984-85 level. Similarly the whole of the 1 per cent. reduction for 1985-86 will be restored to islands producers and those in Kintyre, south of Tarbert.

Thirdly in view of the disproportionate amount of quota which came out of the areas of the Aberdeen and district milk marketing board and the North of Scotland milk marketing board as a result of the milk outgoers' scheme, I am restoring to producers there sufficient quota from the reserve to ensure that there has been no net loss of quota from these areas.

The fourth group of producers we shall be helping includes those whose land has been expropriated and either has been or will be restored to them, and who will have returned to dairying by 31 March 1989. The balance of the reserves available at the beginning of the 1986-87 milk year will be used for this purpose.

Since the reduction of 1 per cent. mentioned above can only be made on issued quota, it will be necessary to increase the 1985-86 cutback to 1·05 per cent. of the 1984-85 quota for mainland wholesale producers who have farming as their main occupation (with the exception of small producers). This will, however, be partly offset by a restoration of 0·4624 per cent. from the reserves, giving a net reduction in quota of 0·5876 per cent.

EMPLOYMENT

Radiation

Mr. Frank Cook asked the Paymaster General what changes were introduced into the methods of *(a)* assessing and *(b)* recording exposure of workers to radiation under the regulations which came into force on 1 January; whether, under the new regulations, there are any circumstances in which the dose record of a worker exposed to radiation either internally or externally will show a lower level of recorded exposure than previously would have been recorded for the same exposure; and if he will make a statement on the implications of the revised regulations for the interpretation of the cumulative dose records of workers exposed to radiation both before and after 1 January.

Mr. Trippier: The following changes in assessing and recording exposures of workers were introduced by the Ionising Radiations Regulations 1985 *(a)* any committed dose received from internal radiation must now be assessed, as well as any actual dose from external radiation, and *(b)* the dose record must show the sum total of committed and actual dose received. There are no circumstances in which a lower level of dose will be recorded under the new regulations than would have been recorded under the previous regulations. There is no requirement in the new regulations for a record of cumulative dose.

Community Programme

Sir Trevor Skeet asked the Paymaster General (1) how he proposes to seek to overcome trade union resistance to community programme schemes;

(2) whether he will remove the need to obtain trade union consent to community programme schemes as a precondition to obtaining Manpower Services Commission approval to such schemes.

Mr. Lang: The undoubted success of the community programme is due to the support of many organisations including employers and trade unions. Where local difficulties arise, efforts are made to seek local solutions and experience has shown that this is the best approach.

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Paymaster General what proportion of the places available on the community programme are currently taken up by participants in *(a)* Wolverhampton, *(b)* Birmingham, *(c)* Coventry and *(d)* Walsall; and how many of the additional places will be distributed among participants in these towns.

Mr. Lang: At the end of January the proportion of available community programme places taken up by participants in these areas were:—

(a) 84·3 per cent. (3,380 filled places) in Wolverhampton/Walsall.
(b) 82·2 per cent. (6,591 filled places) in Birmingham/Solihull.
(c) 86·8 per cent. (3,080 filled places) in Warwickshire, including Coventry.

Between 1 February and the end of May the number of filled places in these areas is planned to increase by:

(a) 720 in Wolverhampton/Walsall.
(b) 1,009 in Birmingham/Solihull.
(c) 320 in Warwickshire, including Coventry.

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Paymaster General if he will list the number of people who have been employed on a full-time basis on community programme projects in each year since 1982; and what this number represents as a percentage of the total number of participants in the community programme in each year during the same period.

Mr. Lang: The numbers and percentages of people employed on a full-time basis on community programme projects at the end of each year since 1982 are as follows:

		per cent.
1982	980	46·1
1983	39,200	34·1
1984	38,100	29·3
1985	48,400	26·5

School Leavers

Mr. Wainwright asked the Paymaster General how many 16-year-old 1985 school leavers are not taking advantage of a place on the YTS, and are currently registered as unemployed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: In January 1986 there were an estimated 100,000 young people in Great Britain included in the count of unemployed claimants who left school in 1985 aged 16. Most remain eligible to take advantage of the YTS: some were waiting to take up a YTS place allocated to them and others can be expected to participate later on. In addition, some members of the group will already have taken part in the YTS since leaving school.

Manufacturing Industry (Apprentices)

Mr. Wainwright asked the Paymaster General what is his Department's latest estimate of the number of full-time apprentices currently employed in British manufacturing industries; and what was the comparable number for the same period in 1979.

Mr. Trippier: There were 73,200 full-time apprentices employed in british manufacturing industries in March 1985. For 1979, the most comparable figure is 155,000.

The numbers entering traditional apprenticeships will become increasingly irrelevant as a measure of the real level of skills training being undertaken by industry because of both the modernisation of existing training arrangements and the substantial provision of initial skills training now taking place under YTS.

Public Sector Employees

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Paymaster General if he will compare the total number of persons employed in the entire public sector *(a)* in actual and *(b)* in full-time equivalent terms, where appropriate, for each of the years 1979, 1980, 1981, 1982, 1983, 1984 and 1985, respectively; and if he will show these figures as a percentage of the total employed work force in each year.

Mr. Lang: I refer my hon. Friend to an article "Employment in the public and private sectors 1979 to 1985" on pages 90-98 of *Economic Trends* December 1985, a copy of which is in the Library. The entire public sector employment figures, actual and full-time equivalents, are given in table 1 of appendix 1 for the years 1979 to 1985. The employed labour force figure for 1979 is in table A and the corresponding figures for the years 1980 to 1985 are in table 2 of appendix 1.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Paymaster General (1) if he will list the number of persons made redundant who were included in the unemployment count for each of the years 1979, 1980, 1981, 1982, 1983, 1984, 1985 and at the latest available date for which figures are available; and if he will show this figure as a percentage of the total unemployed for each year;

(2) if he will list the numbers of disabled included in the unemployment count for each of the years 1979, 1980, 1981, 1982, 1983, 1984, 1985; and if he will show this as a percentage of total unemployment in each year.

Mr. Lang: I refer my hon. Friend to the replies given to him on 27 November 1985 at columns 596-7.

Mr. Wainwright asked the Paymaster General how many people aged *(a)* under 19 years and *(b)* under 24 years are currently registered as unemployed in (i) England, (ii) Yorkshire and Humberside, (iii) West Yorkshire and (iv) the Kirklees area; and in each case, what proportion of them have been unemployed for a period of 52 weeks or more.

Mr. Lang: The following information is available in the Library. The figures relate to unemployed claimants on 9 January 1986, the latest date for which an analysis of unemployment by age and duration is available.

The table shows the numbers of unemployed claimants aged under 19 years and under 25 years (not available under 24 years) in the regions specified.

Numbers of unemployed claimants aged under 19 years and aged under 25 years

Region	Numbers of unemployed claimants	Percentage unemployed over 52 weeks
England:		
under 19 years	276,038	14·4
under 25 years	980,818	27·6
Yorkshire and Humberside:		
under 19 years	38,112	15·4
under 25 years	121,845	29·3
West Yorkshire Metropolitan County:		
under 19 years	14,447	15·1
under 25 years	46,636	27·6
Kirklees Metropolitan Borough:		
under 19 years	2,531	14·3
under 25 years	7,995	26·8

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim asked the Paymaster General what proportion of people were in work in Amber Valley and Derbyshire for *(a)* 1970, *(b)* 1975 and *(c)* the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Lang [*pursuant to his reply*, 28 February 1986, c. *730*]: The available information comes from the census of population and is as follows. Comparable figures for 1975 are not available.

Proportion of the population of working age who were in employment*

	1971 per cent.	1981 per cent.
Amber Valley	70·1	71·8
Derbyshire	70·2	70·1

* Men aged 15-64 inclusive and women aged 15-59 inclusive in 1971; men aged 16-64 inclusive and women aged 16-59 inclusive in 1981.

Youthline Scheme

Mr. Gould asked the Paymaster General if he will take steps to restore the 50 premium places on the youthline scheme in Barking, Waltham Forest and Redbridge and cancel the decision to reduce the number of such places to 35.

Mr. Trippier: No. The distribution of premium places is the responsibility of the Manpower Services Commission's area offices in consultation with Area Manpower Boards and referral services such as the careers service. Eleven further premium places have become available in the London north-east area, and a sub committee of the area manpower board will meet on 14 March to consider proposals from providers before making a final decision about their allocation.

Health and Safety Executive

Mr. Caborn asked the Paymaster General how many grade IB Health and Safety Executive inspectors he expects to leave the Health and Safety Executive in 1986 based on previous years; and how many Health and Safety Executive grade IB inspectors are to be appointed in 1986.

Mr. Trippier [*pursuant to his reply*, 3 March 1986, c. *7*]: Between 1982 and 1985 the number of factory inspectors leaving the Health and Safety Executive each year was between six and 12. It is planned to recruit some 35 factory inspectors during 1986-87. All appointments will be as inspector class II, the basic training grade.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Student Grants

7. **Mr. Randall** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what recent representations he has received on the level of the student travel grant.

21. **Mr. Corbyn** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received about student travel grants.

Mr. Walden: My right hon. Friend has received 8 representations on the level of the student travel grant this year.

30. **Mr. Teddy Taylor** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many letters he has received on the subject of the level of student grants.

56. **Mr. Clelland** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has recently received on the present level of student grants.

60. **Mr. James Hamilton** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what recent representations he has received on the level of student support.

63. **Mr. Hicks** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many representations he has received about the level of students grants; and if he will make a statement.

74. **Mr. Barron** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what recent representations he has received about the level of student support.

76. **Mr. McKelvey** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what recent representations he has received about student grants.

100. **Mr. Strang** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what recent representations he has received about the level of financial support for students.

Mr. Tom Cox asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what recent representations from students he has received on the level of student grants.

Mr. Walden: I refer the hon. Members to the answer I gave earlier today to the hon. Members for Battersea (Mr. Dubs) and Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton).

34. **Mr. Straw** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he last met the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals to discuss the present level of student grants.

Mr. Walden: My right hon. Friend last met the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals to discuss the present level of student grants, among other topics, on 17 February 1986.

61. **Mr. James Lamond** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he last met the National Union of Students to discuss the present level of student support.

89. **Mr. Terry Lewis** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received from the National Union of Students about student grants.

Mr. Walden: My right hon. Friend last met NUS representatives to discuss student financial support on 3 December 1984; and I last met them on 12 February to discuss the level of grant and the effect of the proposed changes in social benefits. Other recent meetings have been held with NUS representatives to discuss points made by them in correspondence.

65. **Mr. Boyes** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he last met the National Union of Students to discuss the level of travel grants.

Mr. Walden: My predecessor the hon. Member for City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke) met NUS representatives to discuss the level of travel grants on several occasions. He last met them on 12 November 1985.

Teachers' Pay Dispute

8. **Mr. Norris** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the current situation on the teachers' pay dispute; and if he will make a statement.

22. **Mr. Haselhurst** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement about the teachers' dispute.

24. **Mr. Proctor** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement concerning the present teachers' dispute.

29. **Sir William van Straubenzee** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will make a further statement on the current dispute over teachers' pay and conditions of employment.

37. **Mr. Sumberg** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the teachers' pay dispute.

38. **Mr. Dormand** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the teachers' dispute.

42. **Mr. Batiste** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the current situation on the teachers' pay dispute; and if he will make a statement.

46. **Mr. Greenway** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the current teachers' pay dispute.

48. **Mr. Nellist** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the latest development in the teachers' dispute.

68. **Mr. Evans** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the latest position in the teachers' pay dispute.

70. **Mr. Gerald Bowden** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the current situation on the teachers' pay dispute; and if he will make a statement.

86. **Mr. Adley** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the teachers' strike.

93. **Mr. Latham** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will outline the latest situation regarding the teachers' dispute.

102. **Mr. Jessel** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the teachers' pay dispute.

82. **Mr. Flannery** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on what he now proposes to do to end the teachers' dispute in view of the fact that the membership of the National Union of Teachers has voted to continue its industrial action in its most recent ballot.

Sir Keith Joseph: I am glad that yesterday the Burnham committee finally concluded a pay settlement for 1985. I regret that this does not mean an end to the irresponsible disruption of pupils' education in the schools. I hope that teachers intent on that course will consider their position very carefully and resume normal working. The pupils need and deserve to get back to normal.

16. **Mr. Wigley** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many meetings he has held with *(a)* teachers' unions and *(b)* the employer's side since the commencement of the teachers' pay dispute, primarily or wholly concerned with the resolution of that dispute.

Sir Keith Joseph: Since February 1985 I have had about a dozen meetings with teacher unions and about half a dozen with groups of employer representatives at which the teachers' dispute might be regarded as the main subject under consideration.

98. **Mr. Yeo** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the outstanding issues on restructuring teachers' pay, promotions and conditions of service.

Sir Keith Joseph: The outstanding issues remain as when I made a statement on them in August of last year. The Government continue to look for a clear definition of the range of teachers' duties linked to their contracts of employment and a pay structure providing better pay and career opportunities for effective teachers.

Continental School Hours

15. **Mr. Favell** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will estimate the financial effects of introducing continental school hours.

Mr. Dunn: I assume my hon. Friend is referring to a school day which starts much earlier than now and ends at about 1 o'clock or 2 o'clock. Such a day is found on the continent only in Denmark, Italy and Germany. It is not possible to estimate the cost of changing to it, as it would vary considerably from school to school.

General Certificate of Secondary Education Examinations

17. **Mr. Hayes** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what extra resources he plans to make available for the funding of the general certificate of secondary education examinations.

Mr. Chris Patten: The general criteria for the GCSE provide that syllabuses and methods of assessment should not make unreasonable demands on human or financial resources. The Government's expenditure plans should allow authorities to make appropriate provision for the GCSE provided that they take advantage of the scope of efficiency savings and contain their costs. However, my right hon. Friend has received representations on this issue and has undertaken to give the matter further consideration.

Schools (Toilet Facilities)

18. **Mr. Litherland** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has as to the number of primary schools with outside toilets.

Mr. Dunn: The report "A Study of School Building", published jointly by the Department and the Welsh Office in 1977, found that there were at the time some 7,000 primary schools in England and Wales with outside toilets. The Department is currently carrying out a sample survey of the improvement needs of the existing stock of school buildings. This will include information on improvements to toilet accommodation where this is below regulation standards.

28. **Miss Maynard** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has as to the number of schools, built before 1946, which have outside toilets.

69. **Mr. Ray Powell** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has as to the number of schools with outside toilets.

Mr. Dunn: The report "A Study of School Building", published jointly by the Department and the Welsh Office in 1977, found that there were at that time some 7,000 primary and some 600 secondary schools with outside toilets. Of these, about 6,000 primary and about 600 secondary schools had their oldest accommodation built prior to 1946. The Department is currently carrying out a sample survey of the improvement needs of the existing stock of school buildings. This will include information on improvements to toilet accommodation where this is below regulation standards.

Higher Education (Statistics)

20 **Mr. Lewis Stevens** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he can yet update the information on the proportion of young people entering higher education in the United Kingdom and other European countries, respectively; and if he can give the most recently available analogous data for other European countries, the United States of America and Japan.

Mr. Walden: The readily available information is given in the following table:

All New Entrants to Higher Education as a percentage of the relevant young persons' age group

	a Year	*b* Age	*c* New entrants to higher education per relevant population*
United Kingdom	1983	18-20	†30·1
Austria	1981	18-20	‡18·2
Belgium	1981	18-20	‖12·9
Denmark	1982	—	35·3
France	1982	18-20	34·1
Germany, Federal Republic of	1982	19-21	27·8
Ireland	1982	—	24·6
Italy	1983	19-21	27·6
Netherlands	1982	18-20	26·1
Spain	1980	—	28·3
Sweden	1979	—	25·1
Yugoslavia	1978	—	¶33·2
United States	1982	18	•61·2
Japan	1982	18	•34·2

— Not known.

* New entrants (all ages) to full-time and part-time higher education as a percentage of the average population in the most relevant age group. This is the age group, shown in column b, which includes 80 per cent. of new entrants to higher education. The average population is calculated by dividing the total population of the group by the number of years involved.

† Part-time new entrants included to aid international comparisons. Overseas students are excluded, as are postgraduates and others with a higher education qualification. Excludes students studying for higher education qualifications outside of the public education system other than nursing and paramedical students at DHSS establishments. If included the UK figure would be around 40 per cent.

‡ Provisional.

‖ University only.

¶ Regular first year students.

• Includes private sector colleges and may include re-entrants.

University Staff (Pay)

23. **Mr. Parry** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many representations he received concerning the recent protest by university staff concerning rates of pay.

Sir Keith Joseph: Following the strike called by the Association of University Teachers on 15 January, I received about 300 letters concerning rates of pay.

Schools (Repairs and Maintenance)

25. **Mr. Jack Thompson** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received about the state of repairs and maintenance in schools.

26. **Mr. Haynes** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what recent representations he has received about the present level of expenditure on repairs and maintenance in schools.

41. **Mr. Stott** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received about the level of expenditure on repairs and maintenance in schools.

73. **Mrs. Clwyd** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received from local education authorities about the state of repairs and maintenance in schools.

84. **Mr. Madden** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what recent representations he has received about the state of repair and maintenance in schools.

94. **Mr. Eastham** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received from the National Economic Development Council about the state of repairs and maintenance in schools in England and Wales.

62. **Mr. Rogers** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received from the Building Employers Confederation about the state of repair and maintenance of schools in England and Wales.

Mr. Dunn: The question of school repair and maintenance was discussed at last month's meeting of NEDC, which my right hon. Friend attended. In addition, my Department received last April a copy of a Building Employers Confederation publication entitled "Building — the Nation's needs: Spotlight on Education

Buildings" which included comments on school building maintenance. More generally, this issue has been covered in the report last May from Her Majesty's Inspectorate on the effect on education provision of LEA expenditure policies in 1984, in a report in October 1985 from the National Confederation of Parent Teacher associations and in 1985 conference resolutions from the Council of Local Education Authorities (CLEA) and the Campaign for the Advancement of State Education (CASE). My right hon. Friend and I also receive letters on this subject from time to time.

Falling Rolls

27. **Sir John Biggs-Davison** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what advice has been given to local education authorities engaged in the reorganisation of their schools due to falling rolls.

Mr. Dunn: Advice on the statutory procedures and my right hon. Friend's policies is contained in DES circulars 2/80, 2/81 and 4/82 and administrative memorandum 4/84. In addition, the White Paper "Better Schools" (Cmnd. 9469) proposes principles on the minimum desirable size of schools.

Private Schools

31. **Mr. Freud** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on his powers of supervision and inspection in respect of private schools.

Mr. Dunn: I refer the hon. Member to chapter 12 of the White Paper "Better Schools" (Cmnd. 9469) published last March.

36. **Mr. Leigh** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what steps he is taking to encourage people to set up private schools.

Mr. Dunn: No encouragement is needed. Any person may establish an independent school, subject to the requirements of part III of the Education Act 1944.

Learning Difficulties (Private Sector)

32. **Mr. Nicholas Baker** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will bring forward proposals to harness resources from the private sector to improve the education of children with special learning difficulties.

Mr. Dunn: There is a long tradition of voluntary support for special education, including the provision of non-maintained special schools, and of co-operation with the maintained sector. My right hon. Friend appreciates the value of this support, but does not see that at present it needs further encouragement by any specific action on his part.

Lindop Report

33. **Mr. Andrew F. Bennett** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the Lindop report, Cmnd. 9501, "Academic Validation in Public Sector Higher Education".

Mr. Stern asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he expects to announce his proposals in the light of the Lindop report on the review of public sector course validation.

Sir Keith Joseph: I hope to announce the Government's conclusion following their consideration of the Lindop committee's report shortly.

University Funding

35. **Mr. Willie W. Hamilton** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what recent representations he has had from the Scottish and Open Universities, respectively, concerning their future funding; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Walden: Each of the Scottish universities made a detailed submission to the University Grants Committee last autumn, as part of the committee's major review of funding for the period 1986-87 to 1989-90. Four of them sent copies of the main parts of their submissions to my right hon. Friend. The UGC intends to announce the first outcomes of its review in May.

The Open University Visiting Committee advised my right hon. Friend in November 1985 about the university's funding. My right hon. Friend made additional funds available and the university was advised of its revised grants on 7 January this year. Copies of the visiting committee's report and of the grants letter were placed in the Library on 14 January.

Research Resources

39. **Mr. Brandon-Bravo** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what action he is taking to increase the availability of resources for research.

Mr. Walden: My right hon. Friend considers the resources that can be made available for research within his programme in the course of the annual public expenditure surveys.

School Maintenance

40. **Ms. Clare Short** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what guidance he gives to local education authorities on the level of expenditure on school maintenance.

Mr. Dunn: Last year my Department published architects and building group design note 40 ("Maintenance and Renewal in Educational Buildings") which recommends that the assessment of maintenance needs should be related to the ascertained condition of an authority's buildings and their individual elements. Because local and particular needs are bound to vary widely, the design note does not recommend the use of general yardsticks or norms for assessing maintenance expenditure.

Schools (Police Relations)

43. **Mr. Chapman** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement about the refusal of certain schools in London to admit police officers for educational purposes.

Mr. Chris Patten: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) on 30 January at c. *571*.

Parental Choice

44. **Mr. Ottaway** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he is considering any measures to broaden further parents' choice of schools.

Mr. Dunn: The Government have no present plans to take further the substantial advances represented by the Education Act 1980, but continue to explore ways in which this might be achieved.

90. **Mr. Portillo** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will take further steps to give to parents the opportunity to educate their children outside the maintained sector.

Mr. Dunn: There is no obligation on parents to send their children to schools in the maintained sector. The assisted places scheme made independent schools available to a wider range of parents. The Government have no present plans to extend the scheme although they continue to consider ways in which parental choice might be further widened.

Drug Abuse

45. **Mr. Roger King** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what role he intends schools to play in combating drug abuse.

Mr. Dunn: Schools have a vital role to play in helping to combat drug abuse. By using their skills and experience, and with the benefit of material and expertise from professional agencies, teachers are able to inform young people of the dangers of experimenting with drugs and help those who are at risk. The Government have announced a number of measures to help them in this role, including the publication of a booklet "Drug Misuse and the Young" which provides information for teachers about the drugs problem; the appointment of drug advisers in each local education authority to stimulate and co-ordinate action within the education service aimed at combating drug misuse and the funding of the preparation by the Health Education Council of curriculum materials on drugs education for use in schools.

Leicester Grammar School

47. **Mr. Spencer** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he expects to be able to grant assisted places status to Leicester grammar school.

Mr. Dunn: Financial constraints rule out any enlargement of the scheme at present.

National Union of Teachers

49. **Mr. Couchman** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he last met representatives from the National Union of Teachers.

Sir Keith Joseph: I last met representatives of the National Union of Teachers on 19 November 1985.

Professional Association of Teachers

50. **Mr. Powley** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he has any plans to meet representatives from the Professional Association of Teachers.

Sir Keith Joseph: I have received no request, but the association knows of my readiness to meet it.

Inner London Teachers Association

51. **Mr. Maples** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he has any plans to meet officers of the Inner London Teachers Association.

Sir Keith Joseph: No. But I share the concern expressed by the noble Lord Harris of Greenwich in another place on 5 February, at column 1234, about this organisation.

Universities (Research and Development)

52. **Mr. Hirst** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement about the funding of research and development in United Kingdom universities.

Mr. Walden: It is estimated that expenditure on research and development in GB universities by source of funds increased as follows:

£ million cash

Source of Funds	*1981-82*	*1983-84*
UGC*	484	551 (Financial year)
Research Councils† grants and contracts	103	134 (Academic year)
Other research grants† and contracts	119	168 (Academic year)

* Estimate taken from the Annual Review of Government Funded R & D 1985.
† UGC Statistics Volume 3 (Finance).

In addition a substantial part of UGC equipment grant (£83·6 million in the academic year 1983-84) and Computer Board grant (£32·5 million in the financial year 1983-84) will have been used to support research.

Schools (Lunchtime Supervision)

53. **Mr. Cash** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he is satisfied with the take-up by local authorities of money set aside for assistance with lunchtime supervision.

Mr. Chris Patten: Yes; 42 per cent. of LEAs have now put forward applications. By 3 March applications had been received from the following local education authorities:

Gloucestershire
Berkshire
Redbridge
Bradford
Hereford and Worcester
Hillingdon
Bury
Harrow
Newham
Durham
South Tyneside
North Yorkshire
Surrey
Buckinghamshire
Shropshire
Nottinghamshire
Ealing
Gateshead
Oxfordshire
Bedfordshire
Bolton
Bromley
Essex
Sunderland
Hampshire

East Sussex
Havering
Doncaster
Cleveland
Somerset
Suffolk
Norfolk
Wiltshire
Northumberland
Solihull
Staffordshire
Barking and Dagenham
Northamptonshire
Devon
Bexley
Kingston upon Thames

Universities (Freedom of Speech)

54. **Mr. Maclean** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he has yet completed his consideration of the contents of the guidelines issued by the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals on freedom of speech and lawful assembly; and if he will make a statement.

77. **Mr. Andrew MacKay** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he has yet reached a conclusion as to whether the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals guidelines on freedom of speech and lawful assembly raise questions he would wish to discuss with the committee.

103. **Mr. Hickmet** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he has completed his consideration of the guidelines for the protection of freedom of speech in universities issued by the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Walden: My right hon. Friend recently discussed the guidelines with the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals. As a result of that discussion the committee chairman has written to reiterate the universities' unequivocal and forthright support for freedom of speech, and making it clear that nothing in their guidance was intended to afford a pretext for cancelling a meeting other than in the most exceptional circumstances.

Swann Report

55. **Mr. Meadowcroft** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on progress made on the implementation of the recommendations of the Swann report.

Mr. Chris Patten: Action is continuing on the various initiatives described by my right hon. Friend in his response to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) on 17 July 1985 at columns *162-64*, and in my response to a question from the hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Dubs) on 18 November 1985 at columns *1-3*. In particular, the working group on the collection of ethnically based statistics on teachers held its first meeting in February. The report of the working group on the collection of ethnically based statistics on school pupils is now being finalised. Regulations governing the in-service teacher training grants scheme have been amended to allow its extension from September 1986 to cover teaching and the curriculum in a multi-ethnic society. A conference has been held for representatives of the teacher training institutions to discuss the form the new courses might take. Her Majesty's Inspectorate is holding a conference on 5 and 6 March—to be attended by chief education officers and others—on the implications of the Swann report for local education authorities with few, if any, ethnic minority pupils. An Education Bill was introduced in another place on 19 February which will give parents, including those from the ethnic minorities, greater involvement in schools. Parental representation on governing bodies will be increased and there will be a new category of governor, normally co-opted by the governing body, with the aim of strengthening links with the community served by the school. Governing bodies are also to be made more accountable to all parents through an annual report and meeting.

Repairs and Maintenance

57. **Mr. Fatchett** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many local education authorities budgeted to reduce their expenditure in real terms on repairs and maintenance in 1984-5.

59. **Mr. Fisher** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many local education authorities budgeted to reduce their expenditure on maintenance in real terms in 1984-85.

Mr. Dunn: Detailed information on LEA expenditure in 1984-85 is not yet available. In 1983-84, 32 LEAs spent less in real terms, as measured by the GDP deflator, on the repair and maintenance of school and colleges, than in 1982-83. The majority of LEA raised their spending in real terms between the two years; nationally the increase was 8 per cent.

Social Worker Education

58. **Mr. Ward** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether Her Majesty's Government will undertake a review of social worker education.

Mr. Walden: The Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work has issued a number of broad recommendations on ways in which social work training might be reformed. The council will in due course present developed proposals to the Government.

Higher Education

64. **Mr. Alton** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he now expects to be in a position to publish the White Paper on higher education.

Mr. Walden: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) on 4 February 1986 at column *111*.

GCSE Examination

66. **Mr. Nicholas Brown** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what progress has been made with training teachers to undertake the new GCSE courses, examinations, project work and assessments.

85. **Mr. Alan Howarth** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on progress towards the introduction of general certificate of secondary education examinations.

Mr. Beith asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what progress he has made implementing the new general certificate of secondary education examinations.

92. **Mr. Squire** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the latest position regarding the introduction of the new general certificate of secondary education examination syllabus.

Mr. Chris Patten: I refer the hon. Members to the answers which I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for York (Mr. Gregory) and to the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy).

Technical Schools

67. **Mr. Holt** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will consider the reintroduction of technical schools for pupils aged 13 years and over.

Mr. Dunn: My right hon. Friend is always ready to consider statutory proposals and policy suggestions but has no current plans to reintroduce technical schools. The Government's policy, explained in the White Paper "Better Schools", is that the education of all pupils of compulsory school age should be broad and balanced and should contain a strong practical and technical element. The technical and vocational education initiative is exploring how such an element might best be developed for 14 to 18-year olds.

Teachers

71. **Mr. Stephen Ross** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has on the subject specialisation of the teachers who have left the profession during the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Chris Patten: The latest period for which relevant information is available is the year ending 31 March 1984. Information is given for full-time teachers who left maintained nursery, primary and secondary schools in England.

Leavers from maintained nursery, primary and secondary schools by age and subject of degree†*
England, year ending 31 March 1984 (provisional)

	Age					
	Under 30	*30-39*	*40-49*	*50-59*	*60+*	*All Ages*
Graduates‡						
Education	557	307	82	80	23	1,049
Mathematics	299	260	88	100	49	796
Physics	111	113	48	39	21	332
Chemistry	76	131	63	71	30	371
Biology	353	229	56	59	16	713
Other Sciences	186	191	65	64	24	530
Geography	315	232	45	99	35	726
Economics	57	82	23	46	37	245
Other Social Sciences	371	327	73	40	19	830
English	624	559	190	256	132	1,761
French	244	297	100	151	52	844
Other Modern Languages	147	142	57	65	15	426
Classics	24	35	37	61	39	196
History	359	280	100	188	98	1,025
Music	168	71	13	16	4	272
Arts (other)	623	643	173	159	77	1,675
Non-Graduates	2,262	4,742	2,323	5,461	3,337	18,125
Total	6,776	8,641	3,536	6,955	4,008	29,916

* Full-time teachers only. Moves from one full-time post to another within the maintained NPS schools sector are excluded, as are moves to full-time teaching posts in maintained nursery, primary and secondary schools in Wales. About 5 per cent. overall of the levers shown went to full-time teaching posts in other maintained, assisted or grant-aided establishments (mainly special schools and establishments of further education). Further percentages, unquantified but probably small, of those shown may have gone to part-time teaching posts in maintained nursery, primary or secondary schools or other maintained, assisted or grant-aided establishments in England and Wales; or full-time or Part-time teaching posts in universities, independent establishments, Scotland, Northern Ireland or overseas.

† Subject of qualification available for graduates only.

‡ Each graduate teacher has been allocated to the first degree subject named on that teachers' record, except where the first-named subject was education and a second subject was named. In these latter cases teachers have been allocated to the second-named subject. The subject education has been used only where there was no other second subject.

Science Budget

72. **Mr. Pawsey** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received on the size of the science budget for 1986-87.

Mr. Walden: My right hon. Friend has received 161 representations about the resources available for science; these generally relate to the Government's plans for science funding over a period rather than the budget for a specific year.

Adult Education

75. **Mr. Tom Clarke** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he will next meet the chairman of the Manpower Services Commission to discuss the role of the commission in developing adult education.

Mr. Chris Patten: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science has quarterly meetings with the chairman of the Manpower Services Commission to discuss its role and activities. The agenda for the next

meeting—due on 26 March—has yet to be agreed. In addition, there are other meetings between the Department and the commission at various levels, including my own, to discuss particular issues as they arise and in the course of co-operation on joint initiatives.

State Schools (Expansion)

78. **Mr. Chope** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will take steps to ensure that popular schools in the state sector are free to expand.

Mr. Dunn: There are no statutory constraints on expanding popular schools, except to the extent that this might involve the significant enlargement of the premises, or an intention substantially to reduce admissions at another school, either of which would require the procedures set down in sections 12 to 15 of the Education Act 1980 to be followed. Expansion of popular schools may not necessarily be consistent with the efficient use of limited resources, but, with that proviso, the Government would welcome measures to allow for the greater satisfaction of parental preferences.

Primary Schools

79. **Mr. Pike** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will institute an immediate review on the structural condition of primary school buildings.

Mr. Dunn: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 10 February at column *320* to the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett).

Youth Training Scheme

80. **Mr. Lawler** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what plans there are to integrate educational qualifications with the two-year YTS.

Mr. Chris Patten: The Manpower Services Commission, having consulted the Education Departments, has established a YTS certification board under the chairmanship of Mr. Peter Reay of Cadbury Schweppes plc. Members of the board are representatives of the City and Guilds of London Institute, the Business and Technician Education Council, the Royal Society of Arts and the Scottish Vocational Education Council.

It will be for that board to secure co-ordination of qualifications available within YTS to ensure that every trainee has the opportunity to progress towards an appropriate qualification. Such qualifications may be those offered by the organisations in membership of the board, or may be those offered by others. The MSC is particularly aware of the need to ensure that qualifications such as O-levels (and, from 1988, GCSE) and A-levels are available to those trainees for whom these represent suitable avenues for progress in working life.

MSC (Area Manpower Boards)

81. **Mr. Sheerman** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement about educational representation within the area manpower boards of the Manpower Services Commission

Mr. Chris Patten: Appointments to the area manpower boards are made by the Manpower Services Commission. Each of the area manpower boards includes amongst its members a representative of the education service, usually a chief education officer, and a representative of professional education interests, normally a college principal.

Science and Mathematics Teachers

83. **Dr. Michael Clark** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has on the number of unfilled vacancies for science and mathematics teachers in secondary schools; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chris Patten: The most recent data supplied by local eduation authorities indicate 337 and 304 unfilled vacancies for science and mathematics teachers respectively in England and Wales in January 1985 out of a total of 2,035 vacancies for all subjects, which is less than 1 per cent. of the secondary teacher force. When account is taken of each subject's share of curriculum time the data indicate that authorities have relatively greater difficulty in meeting the demand for teachers of physics and mathematics than for secondary subjects generally. The Government are seeking to improve the supply of teachers in these particular subjects, through support for a revised pay structure for teachers, through a bursary scheme for students on relevant training courses, and through consideration of a range of other possible measures.

Science Policy

87. **Mr. Soames** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what are the objectives of Her Majesty's Government in its science policy.

Mr. Walden: The Department's aim in science is to maintain and enhance the strength and quality of the science base in higher education and the research councils. Consonant with this, the objectives are: to encourage greater concentration and selectivity of research activities; closer and better working with industry and commerce; more funding from private sector sources; better management yielding greater value for money; and increased flexibility enabling faster response to new scientific opportunities; to keep under review the balance between international and national scientific endeavours; and thereby to strengthen the knowledge and skills of the United Kingdom in science and technology, and improve the efficiency, competitiveness and innovative capacity of the United Kingdom economy.

Physics and Mathematics

88. **Mr. Norman Atkinson** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will estimate the percentage of the school population never experiencing being taught by either a physics or mathematics graduate teacher.

Mr. Chris Patten: Information is not available in the form requested. However, a survey of a sample of maintained secondary schools in England carried out by this Department in 1984 gives the following information:

Percentage of pupils studying subject

	Year groups 1-3	*Year groups 4-5*
Physics	34	36
Mathematics	94	97
Remedial mathematics	6	4

Percentage of periods taught by full-time teachers for whom this was a main subject of Bachelor of Education or other degree

	Year groups 1-3	*Year groups 4-5*	*Sixth forms*
Physics	44	51	75
Mathematics	37	46	75
Remedial mathematics	—	1	—

Vocational Education

91. **Mr. Peter Griffiths** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he has discussed with the National Association of Head Teachers its proposals to him for more vocational education for some pupils from the age of 14 years.

Mr. Chris Patten: I will be meeting members of the National Association of Head Teachers later this month to discuss their consultative document, "A Policy 14-18".

Voluntary Aided Schools

95. **Mr. Amess** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on his policy towards voluntary aided schools.

Mr. Dunn: The Government continue to value highly the contribution made by aided and other voluntary schools to the diversity of the maintained sector of education and are committed to the dual system which facilitates this.

Adverse Weather (School Closures)

96. **Mr. Lofthouse** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has on the number of schools that have had to close due to the recent cold weather.

Mr. Dunn: This information is not collected centrally.

Teachers (No-disruption Policy)

97. **Mr. Bellingham** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what discussions he has had with teaching unions and education authorities about the possibility of the adoption of a no-disruption policy by groups of teachers.

Sir Keith Joseph: My discussions with local authority employers and teacher unions have often covered the question of a bargain which would bring a lasting end to disruption, but a no-disruption agreement has not been specifically discussed. I am aware, of course, that the Professional Association of Teachers has a general policy of not engaging in disruption.

Pre-compulsory Schooling

99. **Mrs. Ann Winterton** asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what proportion of the relevant age groups are in some form of pre-compulsory schooling; and what was the comparable figure for 1979.

Mr. Dunn: In 1985 43 per cent. of 3 and 4-year olds (excluding rising fives) attended maintained nursery schools, nursery classes or infant classes in primary schools. Both the percentage rate of participation and the actual numbers were the highest ever. The comparable percentage for 1979 was 37 per cent.

School (Leicestershire)

Mr. Janner asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what has been the increase in real terms in central Government financial support for education provision by Leicestershire county council in the last five years for which records are available; and what has been the equivalent increase in direct central Government support to independent schools in Leicestershire in the corresponding period.

Mr. Dunn: The major part of central Government support for education provision by local authorities is through rate support grants, in particular the block grant. This is unhypothecated and authorities have discretion over how it is used; it is not possible to identify any particular amount as being in support of education. There is no direct central Government support to independent schools.

Oxfordshire

Mr. Baldry asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what has been the allocation in real terms for educational capital projects for Oxfordshire in 1986 and for the past five years.

Mr. Dunn: The following are the allocations of prescribed expenditure made by my right hon. Friend under the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980 to the Oxfordshire education authority, expressed in 1984-85 real terms:

Year	*Allocation £000's*
1981-82	3,714
1982-83	4,656
1983-84	4,186
1984-85	3,245
1985-86	3,476
1986-87	1,873

The following are the allocations for capital expenditure by the governors of voluntary aided and special agreement schools in the area of the Oxfordshire education authority on which my right hon. Friend was prepared to pay grant, expressed in 1984-85 real terms:

Year	**Allocation £000's*
1981-82	†
1982-83	51
1983-84	58
1984-85	15
1985-86	108
1986-87	428

Notes:

* The allocations shown are those announced just before the start of the financial year in question and do not include possible later revisions.

† Allocations for 1981-82 were made on a different basis from those for later years and have therefore been excluded.

Mr. Baldry asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) by what criteria Oxfordshire county council was allocated money to be spent in 1986 on school capital projects;

(2) why he has made a reduction of 43 per cent. in the amount that Oxfordshire is allowed to spend on capital projects on education in 1986.

Mr. Dunn: The allocations made by my right hon. Friend under the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980 are not money grants but represent limits on the capital spending which local education authorities may undertake. The allocations are unhypothecated sums to cover all LEA capital expenditure but LEAs are notified of the notional elements for schools and for further education as an indication of how the allocation was calculated. However, LEAs are free to apply their allocations as they wish and may supplement or vary them by using the flexibilities available to them under the Act.

In calculating the schools element of the allocations for 1986-87, my right hon. Friend made allowance for authorities' expenditure on projects already under way (to the extent that he had allowed for such expenditure when setting provisional indications for 1986-87 in January 1985); took account of authorities' statutory need to undertake new work to provide school places required as a result of local increases or shifts in population; sought, in accordance with his stated policies on falling rolls, to take into account authorities' priorities for new improvement projects in connection with the removal of surplus school places; and, so far as resources permitted, made allowance for modest progress to be made in the provision of nursery and special education and the improvement of the school building stock. These criteria were applied to all LEAs' plans and the schools element of the allocation set for Oxfordshire education authority reflects the extent to which that LEA's capital expenditure plans were in accord with my right hon. Friend's priorities.

In calculating the allocations for capital expenditure by the governors of voluntary aided and special agreement schools on which he was prepared to pay grant in 1986-87, my right hon. Friend took into account, within the resources available to him, governors' estimates of expenditure to which they were committed on projects already under way; the need for new or expanded aided schools in areas of population growth; the duty upon governors to implement statutory proposals which he had approved; and the need for work to make good the serious dilapidation of buildings.

Pupil-Teacher Ratios

Mr. Hind asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science to what extent pupil-teacher ratios have changed since 1979.

Mr. Dunn: The pupil-teacher ratios within maintained primary and secondary schools and the overall pupil-teacher ratio for all teachers employed by local education authorities in England are as follows:

January of year	*Pupil-teacher ratio within maintained primary schools*	*Pupil-teacher ratio within maintained secondary schools*	*Overall pupil-teacher ratio*
1979	23·1	16·7	18·9
1980	22·7	16·6	18·7
1981	22·6	16·6	18·6
1982	22·5	16·6	18·5
1983	22·3	16·5	18·1
1984	22·1	16·2	17·9
1985	22·2	16·1	17·8

Burnham Committee

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science on what basis he allocates seats on the Burnham committee as between the National Union of Teachers and the Professional Association of Teachers; and if he will now revise these allocations so as to reflect more exactly total memberships of those unions.

Sir Keith Joseph: In reviewing representation on the teachers' panel of the Burnham primary and secondary committee I, like my predecessors, take account of the numbers in membership of the teacher associations and the nature of their membership. The teachers' panel was recently reconstituted to reflect the membership of the unions as at 31 December 1984 (the latest date for which figures are available for all associations).

School Closures

Mr. Radice asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what financial savings have been estimated to have arisen from the closure of schools following from his Department's circular 2/81, "Falling Rolls and Surplus Places," as supplied from local education authorities' estimates when submitting proposals.

Sir Keith Joseph: This information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Primary Schools (Southampton)

Mr. Chope asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the design capacity of primary schools in the city of Southampton and the number of pupils on the roll at each school.

Mr. Dunn: The Department does not hold records of the design capacity of individual schools.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Students (Benefits)

104. **Mr. Bruce** asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what studies his Department has made on the effect of benefit changes on students.

Mr. Newton I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Leeds West (Mr. Meadowcroft) on 27 February at c. *682-83*.

Blood Products (Heat Treatment)

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he is satisfied that heat treatment of blood products made available to haemophiliacs removes all reasonable risk of HTLV3 infection.

Mr. Whitney I am advised that the heat treatment processes currently used should inactivate any HTLV3 virus which might be present in the coagulation factor concentrates used by haemophiliacs. We have no evidence of transmission of the virus resulting from the use of the heat treated material currently available in this country.

Generic Drugs

Mr. Michael Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what steps are taken to seek to establish that every generic product has an identical bioequivalence as the original licensed proprietary product;

(2) what research is done to assess the bioequivalence of any recently introduced generic product.

Mr. Whitney Before the licensing authority will license any generic medicinal product, it considers whether a lack of bioequivalence would constitute a hazard for reasons of safety or lack of efficacy. Where it considers that such a hazard would exist it will not issue a licence until it has received, and been satisfied by the results of, in-vivo bioavailability studies in support of the licence application. Where the product is a solid dose form, the licensing authority must also be satisfied with the results of in-vitro studies, which the applicant is required to submit, on the liberation and dissolution rate of the active ingredient or ingredients.

Psychotherapy

Mr Bright asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if discussions have taken place between officials of his Department and representatives of the professional bodies concerned about the regulation of the practice of psychotherapy.

Mr. Whitney No such discussions have taken place. As I said to my hon. Friend in a letter on 27 January 1986, it is for the professions themselves to resolve the various issues involved—and to reach a consensus view—before the question of statutory registration can be considered.

Mr. Bright asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many complaints his Department has received since 1979 alleging malpractice by practitioners of psychotherapy.

Mr. Whitney: Figures are not maintained routinely but our records show no such complaints in the past year.

Pensioner Households

Mr. Andrew Bowden asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many pensioner households receiving *(a)* certificated housing benefit and *(b)* standard housing benefit are subject to non-dependant deductions.

Mr. Major: Precise information is not available, as these details are not collected centrally. Our estimates suggest that there are about 180,000 pensioner households receiving certificated housing benefit, and 270,000 pensioner households receiving standard housing benefit, from which a deduction is made in respect of non-dependants.

Low-income Families

Sir Brandon Rhys Williams asked the Secretary of State for Social Services on what date he now proposes to publish the low-income family tables for 1983 derived from the family expenditure survey.

Mr. Newton: I am afraid the technical work in preparing the tables has taken longer than expected. However, we hope to publish them in the next few weeks.

Mortgage Payments

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give details of the total cost of mortgage interest payments in respect of supplementary benefit recipients for each of the years 1979, 1980, 1981, 1982, 1983, 1984 and 1985, respectively.

Mr. Newton: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to him on 28 November 1985 at column *652*. No later information is available.

Incomes

Mr. Frank Field asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will estimate the number of claimants who, as a result of the level of work expenses disregard, find *(a)* that their incomes would be no higher in work than out of it and *(b)* their incomes would be less than £5 higher in work than out of it.

Mr. Newton: I regret it is not possible to make these estimates as no information is available about claimants' work expenses, apart from that mentioned in my reply to the hon. Member on 3 March, or about their potential earnings in full-time work.

Local Authorities (Social Services Provisions)

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he has any plans to introduce legislation to oblige local authorities to put out to tender to private companies any of their social services provisions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Whitney: The consultation paper on competition in the provision of local authority services issued on 14 February 1985 by my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for the Environment, for Scotland and for Wales, recognised the need to provide in the proposed legislation for certain social services activities to be exempted. There has been no change in this view.

Community Health Councils (Secretaries)

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is his Department's policy on whether a secretary of a community health council should ordinarily be regarded as a paid advocate within the meaning of the National Health Service (Services Committees and Tribunals) Regulations 1974; what steps he takes to ensure that the chairpersons of service committees are aware of this policy; and if he will consider amending the regulations on this matter.

Mr. Whitney: It is the Department's opinion that the secretary of a community health council should not ordinarily be regarded as a "paid advocate" within the meaning of the regulations as they now stand. When the

regulations were drafted the possibility of CHC secretaries acting as patients' friend at hearings had not been envisaged and, as the question has not been tested in the courts, it is open to a service committee to take a different view. The Secretary of State has conveyed his opinion where it has been sought by family practitioner committees or community health councils. This regulation is being considered as part of a wider review of service committee regulations.

Cadaver Organs

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what arrangements exist for collaboration between doctors, chaplains and other appropriate hospital staff in approaching next-of-kin or near relatives of recently dead patients for permission to remove suitable organs in order to preserve life in another person; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Whitney: Arrangements for collaboration between hospital staff in approaching relatives for permission to remove organs from cadavers for the purposes of transplantation are a matter for the staff concerned, in accordance with health authority policy. The Department actively encourages such collaboration, and the Chief Medical Officer wrote last year to the directors of all transplant units enclosing examples of good practice.

Brain Death

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give his best estimate of the number of people each year classified as brain-dead and certified as dead; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Whitney: In 1982 it was estimated that about 2,000 patients die in the United Kingdom each year in circumstances where brain death might be diagnosed. The total number of all deaths in the United Kingdom in 1984, the most recent year for which figures are available, was 564,966. Patients who are diagnosed as brain dead may be suitable as organ donors. As part of our campaign to increase the numbers of donor organs becoming available for transplantation, we are considering supporting a study which would seek to establish how many brain deaths occur and what might be done to increase the proportion where organ donation procedures are initiated.

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what consideration he has given to the concept of required request in relation to hospital doctors requesting consent for the removal of any organs for transplant; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Whitney: I am informed that in some American states doctors attending patients who are diagnosed as brain dead are required by law either to ensure that requests for organ donation are made to the relatives, or to satisfy themselves that there are good reasons why such requests should not be made. In this country whether to remove organs from a brain-dead patient is a clinical matter for the doctors concerned, and I do not think it would be acceptable to make this subject to legal requirements. It might be possible to achieve similar results by means of a voluntary code of practice, but this would be a matter for the medical profession, and we are currently discussing the possibility with its representative bodies.

Bed and Breakfast Charges

Mr. Watts asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the average charge paid for bed and breakfast in Slough by single claimants and couples, respectively, in each of the last three financial years.

Mr. Newton: I regret that no information is available centrally on the average charge paid for bed and breakfast by single claimants and couples in Slough in each of the last three financial years. Records of bed and breakfast charges are not kept routinely so that information could be obtained only by a special exercise that would be disproportionately expensive.

AIDS

Mr. Thurnham asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if, pursuant to the answer of 23 January, *Official Report*, column *307*, what further advice has been given to health authorities; and if he will make a statement about any recent medical advances in relation to treatment of acquired immune deficiency syndrome about which he has information.

Mr. Whitney: No further advice has been issued to health authorities since my right hon. Friend's reply to my hon. Friend on 23 January at column *307*. There is still no vaccine or specific treatment for the underlying immune deficiency but the Department continues to monitor developments in this field.

Departmental Staff

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what percentage of the total number of staff employed by his Department are women; how many of them are employed on a part-time basis; and how many are not eligible for an occupational pension.

Mr. Major: As at 1 January 1986 it is estimated that just over 63 per cent. of the Department's staff were women. It is further estimated 3,880 women were employed on a part-time basis on the same date. Most, if not all of them, work 15 hours a week or more and are therefore within the scope of the occupational pension scheme. The exact figure is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Precise figures on the number of women employed are collected annually and are available in May of each year.

Legal Proceedings

Mrs Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many cases of legal proceedings have been instituted by private citizens against his Department during the last seven years.

Mr. Major: Information regarding the number of cases of legal proceedings instituted by private citizens against the Department in England and Wales during the last seven years is not readily available prior to 1985, and the cost of obtaining the information would be disproportionate.

Since the beginning of 1985 476 such cases (embracing applications for judicial review in the High Court, appeals

to the Court of Appeal from decisions of social security commissioners, actions by way of writ in the High Court, county court actions and originating applications to industrial tribunals) have been counted. It is not possible to give precise figures because the conduct of litigation commenced against the Department is shared by the solicitor's office to the Department and Treasury Solicitor and there is no central point of control.

The figures do not include applications for leave to appeal and appeals to the Court of Appeal by private citizens against the decisions of the social security commissioners where the Secretary of State for Social Services was not a party. I have asked my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland to let the hon. Member have the information relating to Scotland, which is a separate jurisdiction.

Benefits

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list the total spending which has been devoted by his Department to heating assistance benefits in each year since 1978-79 and the number of people who have submitted claims or qualified for such benefits in each year during the same period.

Mr. Newton: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Volunteer Schemes

Mr. Alex Carlile asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will include victims support schemes in the programme of opportunities for volunteering; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Whitney: New arrangements have been made for 1986-87 to provide central Government funds for grants to local victim support schemes. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary announced in his reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) on 14 January at column *545-546* that he proposed to make £136,000 available for this purpose through the national association of victims support schemes. Following last year's review, the conditions under which grants may be made in the DHSS opportunities for volunteering scheme have been amended to exclude victim support schemes as being more closely related to those of other Government Departments or public services.

Central Middlesex Hospital

Mr. Pavitt asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what information he has as to when the Central Middlesex hospital went on to a yellow alert, and as to how many elderly patients have been admitted suffering from the effects of extreme cold weather.

Mr. Whitney: The Central Middlesex hospital went on to a yellow alert on Thursday 20 February 1986. I am sorry I cannot give the hon. Member the other information he seeks as it is not collected centrally. The hon. Member may, therefore, wish to contact the chairman of Brent health authority.

DEFENCE

Royal Naval Hospital, Haslar

Viscount Cranborne asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the standard of health care provided by the royal naval hospital, Haslar.

Mr. Lee: The standard of health care provided by the royal naval hospital, Haslar is just as good as that provided by a district general hosptial in the National Health Service.

Ethnic Monitoring

Mr. Dubs asked the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he is taking to introduce ethnic monitoring to the services.

Mr. Lee: No decision has been taken on the introduction of ethnic monitoring to the services.

Crown Immunity

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he has any plans to abolish Crown immunity in service hosptials.

Mr. Lee: No. Service hospitals are subject to the Service Discipline Acts and have military procedures to cover all aspects of their administration.

Ammunition

Mrs. Dunwoody asked the Secretary of State for Defence from which companies and for what amounts orders have been placed to meet his Department's small arms ammunition requirement for 1986-87.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Contracts for small arms ammunition for 1986-87 have been placed as follows:

a. 17 million rounds of 7.62mm 1 ball/1 tracer on Royal Ordnance Small Arms, Radway Green;

b. 4 million rounds of 5.56mm tracer on Fabrique Nationale, Belgium;

c. 15 million rounds of 9mm ball on Dynamit Nobel of West Germany.

Mrs. Dunwoody asked the Secretary of State for Defence with which companies his Department has entered into price linked contracts for small arms ammunition since 1981.

Mr. Norman Lamont: None.

Mrs. Dunwoody asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the procedure for the submission of bids by foreign ammunition firms for defence contracts; and on what criteria selections of contracts are made.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Bids are invited from recognised foreign ammunition firms that meet internationally agreed standards of quality. The criterion for selection is value for money, as stated by the Prime Minister on 13 January 1986, and as I made clear in the debate on the Army on 30 January 1986 at column 1182.

Mrs. Dunwoody asked the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of his Department's 1986-87 small arms ammunition requirement will be open to overseas competition.

Mr. Norman Lamont: It has not yet been decided to what extent the 1986-87 purchase of small arms

ammunition should reflect our stated intention of procuring about a quarter of the overall ammunition requirement for that year through competitive tendering.

Mrs. Dunwoody asked the Secretary of State for Defence from which companies in the United Kingdom his Department has purchased small arms ammunition since 1981.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Purchases since 1981 have almost entirely been from Royal Ordnance plc. Apart from very minor requirements, the only other United Kingdom company from which purchases have been made is Eley Ltd.

Mrs. Dunwoody asked the Secretary of State for Defence from which countries, and for what amounts, his Department has purchased small arms ammunition since 1975.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I shall write to the hon. Lady.

Mrs. Dunwoody asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether his Department plans to purchase additional ammunition from India.

Mr. Norman Lamont: We have no plans at present to buy ammunition from India.

Mrs. Dunwoody asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is his Department's requirement for small arms ammunition for 1986-87.

Mr. Norman Lamont: We intend to order substantial further amounts of small arms ammunition in 1986-87. It is not our practice to disclose our total ammunition requirements.

Royal Ordnance Small Arms Ltd.

Mrs. Dunwoody asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many people are employed at Royal Ordnance Small Arms Ltd., Radway Green, Cheshire, on a temporary basis;

(2) how many people are employed at Royal Ordnance Small Arms Ltd., at Radway Green, Cheshire and paid on an hourly, weekly, or monthly basis;

(3) how many people are employed at Royal Ordnance Small Arms Ltd., at Radway Green, Cheshire;

(4) how many people have been employed by Royal Ordnance Small Arms Ltd., Radway Green, Cheshire, for the years 1981-82, 1982-83, 1983-84, 1984-85 and 1985-86, respectively.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The total work force at Radway Green at the end of March in each of the following years was:

	Number
1981	1,676
1982	1,576
1983	1,636
1984	1,962
1985	2,213

I understand that the present total is about 2,340. Detailed information about the work force is a matter for the company.

United States Bases

Mr. Foulkes asked the Secretary of State for Defence if the Ambassador's agreement of April 1950 regulating the presence of United States bases in the United Kingdom and the subsequent administrative agreement of 1953 are both still classified documents.

Mr. Stanley [*pursuant to his reply*, 10 February 1986, c. *385-6*]: The status of the documents referred to by the hon. Member is being considered. This is likely to take a little time but as soon as the outcome is known I shall write to the hon. Member.

Service Personnel

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many service personnel were recorded as being absent without leave during 1983-84 and 1984-85.

Mr. Lee [*pursuant to his reply*, 10 February 1986, c. *387-88*]: The numbers of service personnel who were recorded as having deserted or being absent without leave in 1983, 1984 and 1985 were as follows:

	1983	*1984*	*1985*
Royal Navy	143	107	113
Royal Marines	6	3	4
Army	670	662	507
RAF	19	16	9
	838	788	633

The figures for the Royal Navy and Royal Marines include all those who were absent without leave for more than seven days during the year. The Army and RAF include all those who were absent without leave for more than 21 days. The figures for the RAF for 1985 are for the whole year; the figures for the Royal Navy and Army are up to the end of November 1985 only.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence what procedure is followed subsequent to a unit suspecting one of its personnel of being absent without leave.

Mr. Lee [*pursuant to his reply*, 10 February 1986, c. *387-88*]: The procedures to be followed subsequent to a unit suspecting one of its personnel of being absent without leave are laid down in Queen's Regulations for the Royal Navy, chapter 19 articles 1920-1940; in Queen's Regulations for the Army chapter 5 paragraphs 207-210 and in Queen's Regulations for the Royal Air Force paragraphs 1085-1086. These regulations are supplemented by detailed administrative instructions. Copies of these documents are in the Library of the House.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many service personnel were imprisoned as a result of being found guilty of absence without leave during 1983-84 and 1984-85.

Mr. Lee [*pursuant to his reply*, 10 February 1986, c. *387-88*]: No service personnel were imprisoned solely as a result of being found guilty of absence without leave during the period 1983 to 1985.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many service personnel were held in a place of detention for periods in excess of 24 hours upon returning from a period of absence without leave during 1983-84 and 1984-85.

Mr. Lee [*pursuant to his reply*, 10 February 1986, c. *387-388*]: The information requested is not recorded by the three services and could be obtained only at

disproportionate cost. It does not automatically follow that an absentee returning to his unit will be held in detention or close arrest. An absentee may have acceptable reasons for his absence which makes disciplinary action unnecessary or he may have surrendered voluntarily.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many service personnel were found guilty of deliberate absenteeism but not imprisoned; and how many were not held in places of detention, on the grounds of mitigating circumstances regarding their action during 1983-84 and 1984-85.

Mr. Lee [*pursuant to his reply*, 10 February 1986, c. *387-388*]: The number of service men dealt with summarily for deliberate absenteeism and who were found guilty but not awarded custodial sentences is not centrally recorded. The following number of Royal Navy and RAF personnel were convicted of offences of desertion or absence without leave by courts-martial and not awarded custodial sentences:

	1983	*1984*	*1985*
Royal Navy	4	7	1
Royal Air Force	1	—	1

In the case of the Army, statistics are not kept in a form which would allow them to be given save at disproportionate cost and effort.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 5 March 1986

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Vehicle Manufacturers (State Aid)

76. **Mr. Speed** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information he has as to the level of state aid from member countries of the European Economic Community to motor vehicle manufacturing companies over the last five years.

Mr. Alan Clark: Comprehensive information is not available, as details of aids notified to and approved by the Commission under article 93 of the EEC treaty are not normally disclosed to all member states.

Multi-fibre Arrangement

Sir John Farr asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will name those countries, which are multi-fibre arrangement signatories, which are regarded by his Department as having open markets for multi-fibre arrangement purposes.

Mr. Alan Clark: The Government have said that in our view favourable treatment should be given to those developing countries whose own barriers to British exporters are low. This is a matter of degree, but Hong Kong, Macao and Singapore would seem to meet such a definition.

Sir John Farr asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he supports the increased growth rates in the multi-fibre arrangement quota system proposed by the European Commission.

Mr. Alan Clark: Some increases on existing growth rates may be justified, especially for the poorest countries and countries which themselves offer open markets.

Mr. Haynes asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will explain the administrative systems he envisages to control any liberalisation of children's clothing under the multi-fibre arrangement, having regard to equity as between the member states and the elimination of abuse.

Mr. Alan Clark: The question whether and to what extent children's clothing should be liberalised under a renewed MFA is still under discussion in the Community, taking account among other things of administrative practicability and possible problems of fraud. The method of administrative control will depend on the decision reached.

Mr. Haynes asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will name those countries which are multi-fibre arrangement signatories, which are regarded by his Department as genuinely poor countries for multi-fibre arrangement purposes.

Mr. Alan Clark: The present MFA does not provide for special treatment for the poorest countries, but the United Kingdom has argued that the renewed arrangements should do so. Whether to adopt the wider World Bank definition or the UN definition is still under discussion in the Community. The United Kingdom has argued for the wider one, which includes such countries as India, not covered by the narrower definition. The narrower the definition the more favourable the treatment that might be given to such countries.

General Motors (Imports)

Mr. Speed asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the number of General Motors-manufactured motor cars imported into the United Kingdom and made in the United Kingdom, respectively, for each of the last five calendar years.

Mr. Peter Morrison: I shall reply to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

Footwear Exports

Mr. Freeman asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will give the latest figures for the annual rate of exports of leather footwear to the United States of America and Canada.

Mr. Alan Clark: In 1985 United Kingdom companies exported leather footwear to the value of £16 million (884 thousand pairs) to the USA, and £3 million (230 thousand pairs) to Canada. These are provisional figures.

Kenya (Debt)

Mr. Stern asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations have been made in the last six months to the Government of Kenya regarding the repayment of commercial debts due to British creditors of Kenyan companies.

Mr. Alan Clark: Since September 1985 representations have been made to the Government of Kenya about two cases involving commercial debts owed to British creditors.

Private Mobile Radio

Mr. Hunter asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what decisions have been taken on the award of licences to operate private mobile radio (PMR) systems in band III and on the licensing of further national wide-area radio-paging frequencies.

Mr. Pattie: I have received, and am very grateful for, the advice of the Director General of Telecommunications on applications for licences to operate nationwide pmr systems, systems in London, and further radiopaging licences. The Department has also considered applications to operate local pmr systems in band III in the areas of greatest demand outside London.

I have decided that the following applicants should be invited to participate in further discussions with the Department leading to the issue of those licences:

Band III Nationwide pmr (two networks of 100 channels each)

(a) a consortium of Pye Telecommunications; Digital Paging Systems (UK); Investors in Industry; Racal Telecommunications Group; and Securicor Communications.

(b) GEC Telecommunications.

London pmr (networks of 20 channels)

(a) London Car Telephones.

(b) Air Call.

(c) Relcom Communications.
(d) Sinclair Communications.
(e) National Radiofone.
Provincial pmr (networks of 5-19 channels)
Birmingham-National Radiofone.
Manchester/Merseyside-National Radiofone.
Nottingham-Zycomm Electronics.
Leeds/Bradford-RT Radiophones.
Glasgow/Edinburgh/Aberdeen-Tactico/National Radiofone (joint venture).
National wide-area radiopaging
153 MHz
(a) A consortium of Air Call, Digital Paging Systems (UK), Inter-City Paging and Pageboy Services (UK).
(b) A consortium of Mercury Communications and Motorola.
(c) Racal.
454 MHz
(d) Infowave.
(e) Millicom (UK).

In relation to pmr systems in band III, the applicants named will now be invited to discussions at the Department to define further the technical aspects of the proposed systems (including the degree of interconnection to the PSTN) and to discuss performance requirements that will be applied to the licence conditions. Licences will be granted when these discussions have been concluded and subject to the Department being satisfied that the licence conditions will be properly observed.

Licences will not be awarded at this stage in four of the other areas outside London for which applications were invited. This is because insufficient suitable applications were received.

In relation to national wide-area radiopaging, licences will be awarded following discussions about which frequencies should be assigned bearing in mind the need to make provision for future expansion of services. It may be appropriate for some of the above operators to be allocated frequencies in the band 138-141 MHz, rather than at 153 MHz.

Potatoes

Mr. Colin Shepherd asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the tonnage of ware potatoes imported into the United Kingdom for the years 1983-84, 1984-85 and since 1 April 1985.

Mr. Gummer: I have been asked to reply.

For the crop years 1 June to 31 May, United Kingdom imports of ware potatoes were as follows:

	tonnes
1983-84	121,444
1984-85	63,909

During the period 1 June to 31 December 1985, the latest date for which figures are currently available, United Kingdom imports of ware potatoes totalled 53,613 tonnes.

United Kingdom imports of ware potatoes during the months of April and May 1985 were:

	tonnes
April 1985	5,554
May 1985	6,606

Source: Her Majesty's Customs and Excise.

Mr. Colin Shepherd asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the tonnage of processed potatoes imported into the United Kingdom for the years 1983-84, 1984-85 and since 1 April 1985.

Mr. Gummer: I have been asked to reply.

For the crop years 1 June to 31 May, United Kingdom imports of processed potatoes were as follows:

	tonnes
1983-84	411,390
1984-85	368,528

During the period 1 June to 31 December 1985, the latest date for which figures are currently available, United Kingdom imports of processed potatoes totalled 195,439 tonnes.

United Kingdom imports of processed potatoes during the months of April and May 1985 were:

	tonnes
April 1985	29,453
May 1985	32,452

Source: Her Majesty's Customs and Excise.

All figures have been expressed in raw potato equivalent terms.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Students (Fees)

Mr. Yeo asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what recommendations have been issued about fees for students on courses of further and higher education in the academic year 1986-87.

Sir Keith Joseph: For the academic year 1986-87 I have recommended the following fee levels for home students and for students from other European Community countries. Fees for 1985-86 are shown in brackets.

	£	£
Postgraduate courses	1,680	(1,632)
First degree and diploma courses	536	(520)

These recommended fees represent a 3 per cent. increase over those for 1985-86.

Other fees for home and European Community students are the responsibility of the local education authorities. I understand that the Council of Local Education Authorities has recommended fees for 1986-87 as follows. Fees for 1985-86 are shown in brackets.

	Advanced Further Education		*Non-Advanced Further Education*	
Full-time	£536·00	(£520·00)	£342·00	(£321·00)
Sandwich/block release (weekly rate)	£14·90	(£14·50)	£9·50	(£9·00)
Part-time per course hour	50p	(50p)	32p	(30p)
Part-time annual fee for one session per week	£53·60	(£52·00)	£34·20	(£32·00)

* Other than first degree and diploma courses.

The Government's policy is that students from outside the European Community should pay fees that cover the cost of their education here. It is for institutions and local authorities to determine the fees to be charged to overseas students in the light of this policy and of their own circumstances.

For the universities, the University Grants Committee has recommended minimum fee levels for undergraduate and postgraduate courses as follows. Recommended minima for 1985-86 are shown in brackets.

	£	£
Arts courses	3,480	(3,310)
Science courses	4,570	(4,350)
Clinical courses in medicine, dentistry and veterinary science	8,450	(8,050)

For local authority institutions, the Council of Local Education Authorities has recommended minimum fee levels as follows. Recommended minima for 1985-86 are shown in brackets.

	£	£
Advanced courses	3,540	(3,310)
Non-advanced courses	1,947	(1,820)

Young Persons (Employment)

Mr. Key asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if Her Majesty's Government have considered the impact on children's education of any increase in the employment of young persons which could result from changes in legislation proposed in the Shops Bill.

Mr. Dunn: The provisions of the law on the employment of schoolchildren, which are designed in part to safeguard their education, remain unchanged by the Shops Bill.

Schools (Capital Allocations)

Mr. Steen asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) if he will list the criteria by which he decides the amount of public funds made available to governors of aided and state-aided schools; and if he will make a statement as to the level of grant for expenditure by governors of aided and state-aided schools in Devon;

(2) what is the capital allocation for voluntary-aided schools in every local authority in England *(a)* in total and *(b)* as a percentage of the total money made available in England by way of capital allocation for education;

(3) what is the capital allocation for 1986-87 for wholly supported schools in the public sector in every local authority in England.

Mr. Dunn: The information requested on allocations is set out in the table. The allocations made for expenditure at voluntary aided schools represent 8·7 per cent. of the total of capital allocations for education.

In allocating the resources available for capital expenditure by the governors of voluntary aided and special agreement schools on which he was prepared to pay grant in 1986-87, my right hon. Friend took into account governors' estimates of expenditure on projects already under way, the need for new or expanded aided schools in areas of population growth, the duty upon governors to implement statutory proposals which he had approved, and, to the extent that resources allowed, the need for work to make good the dilapidation of school buildings. The allocations which were set, including that for Devon education authority's area, reflect the extent to which governors' plans were in accord with my right hon. Friend's priorities.

Education capital expenditure 1986-87
Allocations for each local education authority

£000s

Local education authority	*Allocations of prescribed expenditure**	*Notional schools element†*	*Allocations for expenditure by governors of aided and special agreement schools‡*
Avon	4,070	2,986	193
Barking	1,135	471	—
Barnet	1,621	472	400
Barnsley	577	572	—
Bedfordshire	1,934	1,696	—
Berkshire	5,399	4,918	265
Bexley	715	679	3
Birmingham	5,016	4,134	615
Bolton	576	392	575
Bradford	7,061	6,740	320
Brent	1,589	1,309	12
Bromley	1,747	1,679	—
Buckinghamshire	5,582	5,378	423
Bury	882	331	3
Calderdale	1,203	1,164	3
Cambridgeshire	2,591	2,441	127
Cheshire	3,837	3,332	836
Cleveland	4,933	3,160	135
Cornwall	3,592	3,401	252
Coventry	5,396	3,199	22
Croydon	2,784	2,691	48
Cumbria	2,254	2,174	401
Derbyshire	7,202	6,330	190
Devon	8,418	7,453	132
Doncaster	338	223	50
Dorset	3,377	2,352	216
Dudley	2,012	1,520	724
Durham	2,231	1,387	425
Ealing	2,154	1,520	331
East Sussex	3,786	2,836	380

Local education authority	Allocations of prescribed expenditure*	Notional schools element†	Allocations for expenditure by governors of aided and special agreement schools‡
Enfield	706	634	197
Essex	11,417	11,034	150
Gateshead	1,451	1,375	163
Gloucestershire	6,561	5,998	252
Hampshire	12,905	10,484	70
Haringey	797	783	323
Harrow	4,078	317	1
Havering	395	395	—
Hereford and Worcester	1,929	1,727	1,399
Hertfordshire	4,677	3,357	46
Hillingdon	306	297	40
Hounslow	668	540	169
Humberside	7,524	6,740	1,818
Inner London	12,575	7,367	1,686
Isle of Wight	1,129	1,103	2
Isles of Scilly	—	—	—
Kent	6,405	5,152	496
Kingston	1,806	444	44
Kirklees	1,956	932	16
Knowsley	1,483	969	600
Lancashire	12,538	9,851	1,302
Leeds	2,634	1,616	90
Leicestershire	7,061	5,754	1,241
Lincolnshire	3,908	3,523	3
Liverpool	2,904	1,751	2,360
Manchester	6,501	4,535	2,250
Merton	1,203	782	170
Newcastle	2,586	830	191
Newham	1,271	1,235	47
Norfolk	4,394	4,182	89
Northamptonshire	4,339	3,250	505
North Tyneside	1,536	1,536	20
Northumberland	1,003	950	—
North Yorkshire	2,504	2,281	273
Nottinghamshire	3,043	1,917	66
Oldham	1,428	1,111	16
Oxfordshire	2,055	938	470
Redbridge	1,149	1,015	[illegible]
Richmond	249	221	—
Rochdale	2,163	2,028	—
Rotherham	578	484	69
Salford	1,625	1,621	610
Sandwell	1,203	964	—
Sefton	2,667	2,588	2
Sheffield	2,330	1,307	300
Shropshire	2,602	2,219	112
Solihull	1,295	1,242	—
Somerset	2,014	1,792	22
South Tyneside	732	633	185
Staffordshire	9,313	6,775	181
St Helens	772	747	6
Stockport	1,453	1,131	447
Suffolk	5,866	5,731	163
Sunderland	1,928	900	—
Surrey	3,610	3,064	10
Sutton	329	305	35
Tameside	306	306	35
Trafford	1,276	1,191	—
Wakefield	1,990	1,837	120
Walsall	1,119	1,054	26
Waltham Forest	2,184	2,100	245
Warwickshire	1,236	1,145	19
West Sussex	2,157	1,978	334
Wigan	2,339	2,285	781
Wiltshire	1,983	1,781	29
Wirral	1,402	1,373	416
Wolverhampton	1,418	453	6
Totals	292,994	232,900	27,827

Notes to Table:

* Allocations of prescribed expenditure are made under section 72 of the Local Government, Planning and Land Act, 1980 and are unhypothecated grants to cover all LEA capital expenditure.

† LEAs are notified of the notional elements for schools and further education capital expenditure underlying the allocations as an indication of how thay were calculated. LEAs are free to apply their allocations as they wish.

‡ This expenditure is not prescribed expenditure and is assisted by grant from the Department. The allocations shown are those announced on 18 December 1985 and are subject to variation in the course of the 1986-87 financial year. There is considerable variation between LEAs in the proportion of schools which are aided.

Medical Research Council

Mr. Freeson asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what units run by the Medical Research Council have been closed in each of the last three years; and which units are now threatened with closure.

Mr. Walden: The information is as follows:

Calendar year	*Unit*
1983	Lipid Metabolism
1984	Laboratory Studies of Tuberculosis Dental
1985	Pneumoconiosis Neurochemical Pharmacology

I understand that the possible closure of the following three units is at present under consideration:

The Trauma Unit, Manchester; the MRC Unit on Meural Mechanisms of Behaviour, London; and the Developmental Neurobiology Unit, London.

Mr. Freeson asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will give details of the Medical Research Council's expenditure for each of the last five years, broken down into the grants it gives and its own expenditure and the projected expenditure for the next three years, in cash and real terms.

Mr. Walden: The details are as follows:

Table 1

Medical Research Council (MRC) expenditure—Cash terms

£ million

	Financial years				
	1980-81	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*
MRC total expenditure	92,901	106,511	112,864	119,778	123,758
of which:					
Grants awarded by MRC	29,303	32,394	33,991	37,167	39,581
Expenditure in MRC's own research establishments	51,795	60,777	64,325	66,800	67,057
Other MRC expenditure	11,843	12,340	14,548	15,811	17,120

Table 2

Medical Research Council expenditure—Cost terms 1984-85 prices

£ million

	Financial years				
	1980-81	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*
MRC total expenditure	119,201	124,207	122,991	124,914	123,758
of which:					
Grants awarded by MRC	37,582	37,776	37,041	38,761	39,581
Expenditure in MRC's own research establishments	66,429	70,874	70,097	69,665	67,057
Other MRC expenditure	15,189	15,556	15,853	16,489	17,120

Table 3

MRC projected expenditure

£ million

Financial years	*Cash terms*	*Cost terms at 1984-85 prices*
1986-87	135·4	123·4
1987-88	138·1	121·6
1988-89	142·1	121·5

Mr. Freeson asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what percentage of *(a)* alpha rated and *(b)* other research projects by universities were funded by the Medical Research Council in each of the last five years; and how much uncommitted money the Medical Research Council currently has available to finance new projects and programmes or existing ones which may merit renewal.

Mr. Walden: The information is as follows:

Academic Year

	1980-81 Per cent.	1981-82 Per cent.	1982-83 Per cent.	1983-84 Per cent.	1984-85 Per cent.
Alpha graded research grant applications funded by the MRC	89	88	95	70	83
Other research grant applications not alpha graded and funded by MRC	—	—	—	—	—

The figures relate to short-term support only. Information on long-term support is not available.

I understand that in the academic year 1985-86 the MRC had uncommitted funds of £6·72 million to be spent on research grants in 1986-87.

Science Budget

Mr. Freeson asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what has been the amount of the science budget for each of the last five years in cash and real terms; what is the projected amount for each of the next three years; and if he will break it down to show the amounts in respect of the research councils, the British Museum, the Royal Society and the Fellowship of Engineering.

Mr. Walden: The following tables show the information requested. The cash terms figures (table 1) represent actual expenditures for the years up to 1984-85, the planned cash provisions for 1985-86 and 1986-87 (subject in the case of 1986-87, to parliamentary approval of the Supply Estimates in due course), and the amounts provisionally recommended by the Advisory Board for the Research Councils for 1987-88 and 1988-89.

Science Budget 1981-82 to 1988-89

Table 1

Cash Terms £ million	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88	1988-89
AFRC	42·1	43·6	46·0	46·7	50·3	52·7	49·6	50·8
ESRC	20·7	20·9	*22·4	*22·0	*†23·6	23·6	23·9	24·5
MRC	101·7	107·5	113·7	117·2	122·3	128·3	130·8	134·0
NERC	54·3	58·0	62·5	65·9	67·3	70·3	70·8	72·5
SERC	216·8	234·4	254·5	278·8	298·0	315·5	317·0	324·9
‡BM (NH)	10·9	12·7	12·2	14·1	16·2	17·2	17·4	17·8
RS	4·2	4·5	5·0	5·3	5·9	6·4	6·7	6·8
FOE	—	—	—	0·15	0·25	0·45	0·6	0·7
ABRC secretariat, science policy studies and flexibility margin	—	—	—	—	—	0·2	12·7	13·0
Total science budget	450·7	481·6	516·3	550·2	583·9	614·6	629·5	645·0

* Includes £0·050 million in respect of science policy studies
† Includes £0·075 million in respect of ABRC secretariat
‡ Includes expenditure by the Property Services Agency on behalf of the Museum

Science Budget 1981-82 to 1988-89

Table 2

Real Terms £ million at 1984-85 Prices	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88	1988-89
AFRC	49·1	47·5	48·0	46·7	47·9	48·0	43·7	43·4
ESRC	24·1	22·8	23·3	22·0	22·5	21·5	21·0	20·9
MRC	118·6	117·2	118·6	117·2	116·5	116·9	115·2	114·6
NERC	63·3	63·2	65·2	65·9	64·1	64·1	62·3	62·0
SERC	252·8	255·4	265·4	278·8	283·8	287·5	279·1	277·8
BM (NH)	12·7	13·8	12·7	14·1	15·4	15·7	15·3	15·2
RS	4·9	4·9	5·2	5·3	5·6	5·8	5·9	5·8
FOE	—	—	—	0·15	0·2	0·4	0·5	0·6
ABRC secretariat science policy studies and flexibility margin	—	—	—	—	—	0·2	11·2	11·1
Total science budget	525·5	524·8	538·4	550·2	556·0	560·1	554·2	551·4

PRIME MINISTER

Government Achievements

Mr. Hirst asked the Prime Minister if she will list the achievements of her Government since 1979 as they relate to Scotland.

The Prime Minister: In the area of industry and economic development, we established in 1981 Locate in Scotland, which has been highly successful in attracting inward investment. Through the Scottish Development Agency there has been a substantial programme of economic and environmental recovery in older urban and industrial areas, much increased unlocking of private sector investment, including £94·2 million through the LEG-UP (Local Enterprise Grants for Urban Projects) scheme and an extended range of programmes to promote technological change and industrial efficiency. Our

support for the Highlands and Islands Development Board was reaffirmed following the report of the Scottish Affairs Committee. Enterprise zones have been established at Invergordon and Clydebank and in Tayside. We have created a national network of area tourist boards and extended the Scottish Tourist Board's powers to include promotional activity overseas.

Over 1,350 offers of regional selective assistance worth £362 million have been made for projects estimated to cost £4,100 million and promising to create or safeguard over 138,000 jobs. In 1984 responsibility for the payment of regional development grants in Scotland was transferred from the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to the Secretary of State for Scotland. Since the transfer, over 1,200 applications for new regional development grants worth over £50 million and associated with project costs of around £420 million and 14,600 new jobs, have been approved. We have seen the introduction of the very successful better business and better technical services schemes which between them have attracted over 10,000 applications. Areas eligible for European Coal and Steel Community loans have been extended and a continuing and successful programme of case surgeries for businesses has been established.

Benefiting from the Government's policies on taxation and licensing, 1984 was a record year for oil and gas exploration and development in the North sea and 1985 a record for approval of new developments. Oil-related employment increased from nearly 42,000 in June 1979 to almost 64,000 by December 1985. With Government support, the electricity boards maintained supplies to consumers during the coal dispute while containing operating costs.

Over 124,000 young people have entered into the youth training scheme in Scotland since its inception in 1983. The expansion to a two-year programme from April 1986 will emphasise improved training leading to vocational qualifications. The community programme will train 21,000 adults in Scotland in 1985-86 and is expected to train up to 25,000 in 1986-87.

In education, major reforms to the structure of the curriculum and examinations for pupils aged 14 to 16 have begun with the introduction of new standard grade courses and examinations. In addition, Scotland is playing a full part in the technical and vocational education initiative with six projects under way and more in preparation. The level of educational attainment in Scotland has improved; the percentage of school leavers with at least one Scottish certificate of education qualification increasing from 68 per cent. in 1978-79 to 74 per cent. in 1983-84. The percentage of school leavers who held at least one SCE higher grade has also increased in the same period from 26 to 33 per cent.

Through the Scottish 16+ action plan, the Government have introduced an innovative approach to the provision of non-advanced further education in the form of modular courses leading to the award of a new national certificate by the Scottish Vocational Education Council. The new system provides increased flexibility for students and makes available new opportunities for adults with retraining needs. It has won widespread praise as a major advance in educational thinking and the speed with which it has been implemented provides a clear indication of the Government's commitment to improving the quality of vocational education. In the first year of operation 35,000 students from nearly 500 presenting centres throughout Scotland successfully undertook courses leading to the award of the SCOTVEC national certificate.

Other developments have been the introduction of a new right to parents to choose their children's school; the introduction of a requirement on education authorities to make widely available information about schools under their management; the publication of HMI reports of inspections of schools and colleges of further education; a scheme of assisted places at the fee paying schools; and the introduction of an improved approach to the education of handicapped pupils and other pupils with special educational needs.

We have also funded a new building for the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama in Glasgow, a new National Science Reference Library, and additional teaching accommodation at Robert Gordon's Institute of Technology, Aberdeen. We have supported the establishment of the Scottish Community Education Council, International Youth Year 1985, the Burrell Gallery in Glasgow and the new Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh.

£14 million has been allocated to create additional places in engineering and technology in the Scottish central institutions and over 200 new student places have been created at Scottish universities participating in the engineering and technology programme. Computers have been introduced into schools and colleges.

On the social work front, new legislation has made substantial improvements in the adoption and fostering of children. There has been an improvement in the use of secure accommodation for children. The arrangements for financial support of list D schools have been rationalised.

We have made several major legislative changes in Scottish criminal law and procedure including the introduction of new police powers of detention and search, compensation orders for the victims of crime, restrictions on alcohol at football grounds and the introduction of fines enforcement officers in the sheriff court. We have maintained support for a strong and effective police service by increasing police numbers and awarding substantial improvements in pay and conditions. We have approved a major computerisation project for the Scottish Criminal Record Office serving all forces. The Scottish crime squad is being expanded to supplement the force's increased efforts in countering trafficking in drugs. The rate of police grant will be increased in 1986-87.

In family and civil law, a range of useful reforms have been effected, including the extension to the sheriff court of concurrent jurisdiction in divorce, and protection of the occupancy rights of spouses in the matrimonial home.

In health, additional resources have facilitated an 11 per cent. increase in the numbers of hospital medical and dental staff and nurses and midwives. The proportion of resources devoted to the administration of the service has been progressively reduced. 42 major new hospital developments have provided a total of over 4,200 beds and over 440 day places. We have reformed the mental health legislation. We have provided grant support for facilities for drug misusers and have promoted a health education campaign to counter drug misuse.

£40 million has been spent on prison improvements. A new prison is nearing completion at Shotts and major redevelopment work to Greenock prison and Polmont young offenders institute is virtually complete. The

substantial refurbishment of Peterhead prison and a wide range of other projects have improved the accommodation and facilities for both inmates and staff.

In civil defence, the functions of local authorities have been strengthened and extended and the range of activities attracting 100 per cent. grant has been increased.

Over £500 million has been invested in the motorway and trunk road network, and about 200 miles of motorways and major trunk road improvements have been completed. The reconstruction of the A9 from Perth to Easter Ross is nearing completion; substantial progress has been made on the upgrading to dual carriageway standard of the Perth-Dundee-Aberdeen route; and 21 bypasses have been opened, relieving communities of through traffic. A further 43 miles of motorway and major trunk road improvements, including five bypasses, are under construction. Over the same period, annual expenditure on structural maintenance of existing trunk roads has increased by about 50 per cent. in real terms.

In transport, financial support to island shipping services has been increased and a major new investment programme in ships and terminals initiated.

Work has started on electrification of the east coast main line between London and Edinburgh, at a cost of £360 million. The Glasgow-Ayr railway line is being electrified and Glasgow commuter rolling stock modernised, with substantial financial assistance from the Government. Relaxation of licensing on Anglo-Scottish air routes has produced significant benefits for travellers.

In physical planning, measures have been taken to simplify and speed up the planning system. Guidance has been issued specifically with a view to meeting the planning requirements of high technology industries, small businesses and private housebuilders. In the environment, following the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act and the 1981 Countryside (Scotland) Act, there has been an increase in resources provided to improve facilities and to conserve the countryside and wildlife habitats. Many sites of special scientific interest have been notified, national nature reserves and national scenic areas designated and regional parks being introduced. Government machinery for the protection, support and care of historic buildings and monuments in Scotland has been reorganised to develop the cultural, economic, recreational, tourist and educational potential of this area of the national heritage.

In housing we have introduced a statutory charter of rights for public sector tenants, including the right to buy. Over 130,000 tenants have applied to purchase their homes and more than 78,000 sales have been completed. Since 1979, 122,000 new homes have been built and the proportion of owner-occupiers has increased from 35 to 40 per cent., with a reduction in the proportion of householders in public housing to below 50 per cent. for the first time for many years. Over 160,000 home improvement grants have been approved and the number of houses below the tolerable standard reduced from 113,000 in March 1980 to 63,000 in 1985. The housing association movement's investment programme has exceeded £100 million in each of the last five years; and the number of bed spaces in sheltered houses for elderly persons has increased from 19·5 per 1,000 in 1980 to 41·5 now. Improvements to the building control system are being made. These will enable projects to start earlier without sacrificing standards or safeguards.

The allocation of functions between regional and district councils has been rationalised in the light of the Stodart report; legislation relating to civic government has been modernised; and the Montgomery report has opened up the way to adjustment of the functions of the Islands councils. Estimating and accounting disciplines have been imposed on Scottish direct labour organisations, which are now required to compete for a significant proportion of their work. Powers have been taken to cut the rates of local authorities planning excessive expenditure and welcome savings have been returned to the ratepayers.

Following the revaluation in 1985, we introduced a quick and effective statutory revaluation rate rebate scheme for those valuations which had increased by more than three times. Proposals have been published for the final abolition of domestic rates in Scotland by 1992 and their replacement by a community charge.

The number of staff employed in the Scottish Office (excluding the prison service) has been reduced by 1,384 (or 13·8 per cent.) and by 1989 staff numbers will be 1,624 (20 per cent.) less than a decade before. The financial management initiative is being implemented vigorously in the Scottish Office with annual management plans, revised to give greater emphasis to objectives and performance, linked to a budgeting system for controlling running costs. Policy reviews are being conducted of all non-departmental public bodies, and financial management surveys of such bodies with executive responsibilities.

Over 900 civil service jobs have been dispersed to west central Scotland and plans are well advanced for the dispersal of more than 1,000 further jobs.

The successful negotiation of a common fisheries policy and improved arrangements for conservation of stocks have provided good opportunities on a long-term basis for the Scottish fishing industry. The Government have taken steps to reduce the incidence of salmon poaching in Scotland in particular by way of the Salmon Bill which is at present going through Parliament. We have supported the hill farming sector through substantially increased aids for livestock producers, enhanced payments to producers within the Highlands and Islands Development Board area and an extension of the less favoured areas to include producers on marginal land.

The Government gave additional emergency aid to over 20,000 livestock producers in recognition of the effect of the bad summer of 1985. The integrated development programme for the Western Isles and approval in principle of proposals for an agricultural development proposal for the other Scottish islands. The introduction of compulsory pasteurisation of milk in Scotland from August 1983 has eliminated outbreaks of milk-borne disease in the general community and the transition from statutory control of milk prices was smoothly accomplished in Scotland during the period 1981-83. We have undertaken a major review of the structure and management of agricultural research and development in Scotland and have introduced changes in the organisation of agricultural education and reviewed agricultural advisory services with a view to improving their efficiency and effectiveness, and to developing a more commercial approach.

EC (Budget)

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Prime Minister if Her Majesty's Government will resist any proposals in the

various Councils of Ministers which would breach the strict budgetary controls on spending agreed at the Dublin summit.

The Prime Minister: A key objective of Her Majesty's Government when examining new expenditure proposals is that they should be compatible with the budgetary discipline conclusions adopted by the Foreign Affairs Council on 4 December 1984.

"List of Ministerial Responsibilities"

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop asked the Prime Minister when an up-to-date issue of the Cabinet Office document called "List of Ministerial Responsibilities", embodying all the Ministerial changes since October 1985, will be available.

The Prime Minister: A new edition of the "List of Ministerial Responsibilities" will be available at the end of this month.

Mr. Harvey Michael Ross

Mr. Sedgemore asked the Prime Minister if she will make representations to the Israeli Prime Minister to deport Mr. Harvey Michael Ross of Leeds to Britain for questioning by the fraud squad.

The Prime Minister: Our arrangements for securing the surrender from Israel of a fugitive criminal charged with or convicted of certain serious offences in this country are governed by the extradition treaty of 1960. I understand that the West Yorkshire police are looking into certain allegations made against Mr. Ross, but that they are not yet in a position to submit a report on the case to the Director of Public Prosecutions for the purpose of obtaining his instructions in the matter.

Bullion Crimes (Israel)

Mr. Sedgemore asked the Prime Minister if she will ask the Israeli Prime Minister to refuse to provide a haven for those suspected of being involved in bullion frauds or gold smuggling in Britain.

The Prime Minister: No. Where a person who is suspected of committing an offence in this country which is extraditable under the terms of the United Kingdom-Israeli extradition treaty of 1960 later flees to Israel, a request for extradition would be made in the usual way under the terms of the treaty.

Research and Development Budget

Mr. Freeson asked the Prime Minister if she will appoint a science Minister to administer the total Government research and development budget.

The Prime Minister: No. I am satisfied with present arrangements.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Winnick asked the Prime Minister how many oral questions were tabled to the Prime Minister on average for each question time in every February from 1978 till the present date.

The Prime Minister: Records in my office show the following estimates:

Date	*Average**
February	
1978	44
1979	56
1980	58
1981	61
1982	67
1983	74
1984	100
1985	140
1986	152

*Rounded to nearest whole figure.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Special Hospitals (Patient Abuse)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many allegations of cruelty or abuse to patients in special hospitals have been made during the last seven years; and what disciplinary procedures have been taken as a result.

Mr. Whitney: At Rampton hospital, a special police inquiry team was set up in May 1979, following allegations of widespread ill-treatment of patients. The police team, which completed its work in May 1983, investigated more than 1,000 allegations, some of which related to incidents alleged to have occurred several years previously. As a consequence of that investigation, 24 members of the staff of the hospital were charged with one or more offences. Of those, 10 were convicted of one or more offences, three subsequently had their convictions quashed by the Appeal Court and a further five are at present awaiting the hearing of appeals to the House of Lords. Disciplinary procedures have been initiated in all cases of staff still employed at the hospital who were convicted, but that action is in suspense in those cases where the outcome of the appeal is still awaited. Between May 1983 and December 1985, 51 allegations of physical cruelty or abuse were made to the hospital managers. None of those resulted in disciplinary procedures. It is understood that the police also continued to receive allegations during that period, some of which repeated earlier allegations, but none of them resulted in prosecutions.

The position in the other three special hospitals in the seven years 1979 to 1985 was as follows:

Broadmoor Hospital

Seventy-eight allegations of various kinds were made. Following preliminary investigation either to clarify the nature of the allegation or to establish whether there was any supporting evidence or corroboration, 18 of these allegations were investigated more fully. In three of these cases, the patients concerned referred the matter to the police. In 11 other cases, the hospital managers asked the police to investigate and in one of those cases a member of the staff was prosecuted and sentenced to a term of imprisonment. Disciplinary procedures were taken in that case (resulting in dismissal) and in one other case. In addition, two members of staff were formally counselled by their professional superiors.

Moss Side Hospital

There were 55 allegations. Twenty-three of these were referred to the police but there were no prosecutions. Disciplinary procedures were followed in three cases and, in addition, five members of staff were formally counselled by their professional superiors.

Park Lane Hospital

There were 10 allegations, of which six were referred to the police for investigation. No prosecutions or disciplinary procedures resulted.

Nuclear Installations (Cancer)

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what evidence he has of additional health hazards to the general public, including the incidence of cancers, in areas near to nuclear power installations; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what assessment he makes of the health hazards to the neighbouring population arising from the existence of nuclear power installations in the United Kingdom on the neighbouring population on the basis of the evidence available to him from statistical returns or other such information on the health of the population.

Mr. Whitney: On the basis of current evidence I am advised that there is no established causal link between nuclear power installations and the incidence of disease in populations near to them. However, there are a number of studies currently in progress into the incidence of cancers in the United Kingdom. These include studies of areas both around and remote from nuclear establishments. The results of these will be considered by the Committee on the Medical Aspects of Radiation in the Environment as they become available.

The establishment of COMARE was announced by my right hon. and learned Friend on 25 July 1985, at column *771*, with the objective of offering Government independent medical and scientific advice on the health effects of natural and man-made radiation in the environment.

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Social Services which areas of the United Kingdom have the highest incidences of those forms of cancer which have been correlated with atomic radiation; and whether any of these areas are in the immediate vicinity of nuclear power installations.

Mr. Whitney: The information is not immediately available in the form requested, but will be extracted for local authority district areas for 1984. I shall let my hon. Friend have the results as soon as they are available.

Dental Charges

Mr. Weetch asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if, further to the answer of 20 December, *Official Report*, column *420*, he will give the average amount of dental charges remitted on form FID, in money terms and the percentage that fell within the following or other convenient ranges of charges *(a)* £0-£5·99, *(b)* £6·00-£9·99, *(c)* £10·00-£14·99, *(d)* 15·00-£29·99, *(e)* £30·00-£49·99 and *(f)* over £50·00.

Mr. Whitney: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

War Pensions

Mr. Mates asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he is satisfied with the operation of the rules concerning the backdating of claims to war pensions.

Dr. McDonald asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will review the commencement date for the war pension award of Mr. Bertram Stevens who was contaminated by mustard gas at Bari harbour, Italy in 1943; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fowler: In general, yes. However, following representations from the hon. Lady about the case of her constituent, Mr. Bertram Stevens, and also from my hon. Friend, I have undertaken a thorough review of Mr. Stevens' case.

Mr. Stevens was awarded a war pension from 24 November 1983, the date he made his claim. He has contended that he would have claimed sooner if he had been aware of the precise nature of the substance with which he had been contaminated. As a result of my review I have decided, in view of the exceptional circumstances, to backdate his pension to the date after discharge that his symptoms due to the Bari incident first manifested themselves. Full details of the revised award will be notified to Mr. Stevens as soon as possible.

I also propose that the cases of the 600 or so other casualties who were contaminated by mustard gas in the incident should be investigated to see whether similar action is appropriate.

Pensions and Benefits

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will compare retirement and other state pensions and all other welfare and national insurance benefits and allowances paid in November 1979 with those paid in November 1985; and also show the 1985 payments as a percentage of those of 1979.

Mr. Major: The information requested is set out in the following table. May I also take this opportunity to correct a figure in my predecessor's reply to my hon. Friend on 6 February 1985, at columns 595-600. Under item 14 (supplementary benefit) the November 1979 scale rate for a dependent child aged 18 or over was given as £18·95. It should have read £14·65.

Benefit Rates—Comparisons 1979 to 1985

	A *November 1979* £	*B* *November 1985* £	*Percentage increase (B over A)* *per cent.*
1. *Retirement Pension* (RP)			
—single	23·30	38·30	64·4
—couple	37·30	61·30	64·3
Non-contributory over 80's pension			
—single	14·00	23·00	64·3
—couple	22·40	36·75	64·1

	A November 1979 £	B November 1985 £	Percentage increase (B over A) per cent.
2. *Widows' Benefits* (WB)			
Widows' Allowance	32·60	53·60	64·4
Widowed Mothers' Allowance	23·30	38·30	64·4
Widows' Pension	23·30	38·30	64·4
Age-related widows' pension—30 per cent. to 93 per cent. of rate of widows' pension	—	—	—
3. *Invalidity Pension* (IVP)			
—single	23·30	38·30	64·4
—couple	37·30	61·30	64·3
Invalidity allowance			
—higher rate	4·90	8·05	64·3
—middle rate	3·10	5·10	64·5
—lower rate	1·55	2·55	64·5
4. *Unemployment Benefit* (UB)			
Under pension age			
—single	18·50	30·45	64·6
—couple	29·95	49·25	64·4
Over pension age			
—single	23·30	38·30	64·4
—couple	37·30	61·30	64·3
5. *Sickness Benefit* (SB)			
Under pension age			
—single	18·50	29·15	57·6
—couple	29·94	47·15	57·4
Over pension age			
—single	23·30	36·65	57·3
—couple	37·30	58·65	57·2
6. *Maternity Allowance* (MA)			
—single	18·50	29·15	57·6
—couple	29·95	47·15	57·4
Maternity grant (lump sum)	25·00	25·00	00·0
7. *Attendance Allowance*			
—higher rate	18·60	30·60	64·5
—lower rate	12·40	20·45	64·9
8. *Severe Disablement Allowance* (SDA)/NCIP			
—single	14·00	23·00	64·3
—couple	22·40	36·75	64·1
9. *Invalid Care Allowance* (ICA)			
—single	14·00	23·00	64·3
—couple	22·40	36·75	64·1
10. *Mobility Allowance*	12·00	21·40	78·3
11. *Child Benefit*	*4·00	7·00	75·0
12. *One Parent Benefit*	2·50	4·55	82·0
13. *Family Income Supplement*			
Prescribed amount—one child family†	56·00	*97·50	74·1
Increase for each additional child†	4·50	11·50	155·6
Maximum payment—one child family	13·50	25·00	85·2
Increase for each additional child	1·00	2·00	100·0
14. *Supplementary Benefit*			
Supplementary pension			
—single	23·70	37·50	58·2
—couple	37·65	60·00	59·4
—non-householder	18·95	30·00	58·3

	A November 1979 £	B November 1985 £	Percentage increase (B over A) per cent.
Long-term scale rate			
—single	23·70	37·50	58·2
—couple	37·65	60·00	59·4
—non-householder 18+	18·95	30·00	59·3
—non-householder 16-17	11·25	23·00	104·4
Ordinary rate			
—single	18·30	29·50	61·2
—couple	29·70	47·85	61·1
—non-householder 18+	14·65	23·60	61·1
—non-householder 16-17	11·25	18·20	61·8
Dependent children			
—18+	14·65	23·60	61·1
—16-17	11·25	18·20	61·8
—11-15‡	7·70-9·35	15·10	96·1-61·5
—under 11‡	5·20-6·25	10·10	94·2-61·6
Blind addition	1·25	1·25	0
Heating additions			
—higher rate	2·85	5·45	91·1
—middle rate	‖1·90	—	—
—lower rate	0·95	2·20	131·6
Central heating additions			
—higher rate	1·90	4·40	131·6
—middle rate	‖0·95	—	—
—lower rate	0·50	2·20	340·0
Estate rate heating additions			
—higher rate	n.a.	8·80	—
—lower rate	n.a.	4·40	—
Dietary additions			
—lower rate	1·05	1·60	52·4
—higher rate	2·50	3·70	48·0
—kidney dialysis	7·10	10·65	50·0
Notional laundry charge	0·10	0·55	450·0
Extra bath	discretionary until 1980	0·30	—
Board and Lodging personal expenses			
Over pension age			
—single	6·85	10·85	58·4
—couple	11·80	21·70	83·9
Long term rate			
—single	6·85	10·85	58·4
—couple	11·80	21·70	83·9
Ordinary rate			
—single	5·95	9·70	63·0
—couple	9·70	19·40	100·0
Dependants			
—18+	5·95	9·70	63·0
—16-17	3·65	5·85	60·3
—11-15‡	2·60-3·10	5·00	92·3-61·3
—under 11‡	1·60-2·05	3·25	103·1-58·5
Meals allowance (per meal)			
—breakfast	0·65	1·10	69·2
—main meal	0·90	1·55	72·2
Increase in maximum amounts for board and lodging			
—single	¶	17·30	—
—couple	¶	34·60	—
Maintenance and insurance allowance	1·07	1·85	72·9
15. *Industrial Disablement Pension*			
—over 18	38·00	62·50	64·5
—under 18	23·30	38·30	64·4
Reduced rates			
10 per cent. to 90 per cent. of basic rate	—	—	—
Maximum disablement gratuity (lump sum)	2,530·00	4,150·00	64·0
Unemployability supplement	23·30	38·30	64·4
Increases for early onset of incapacity			
—higher rate	4·90	8·05	64·3
—middle rate	3·10	5·10	64·5
—lower rate	1·55	2·55	64·5
Maximum special hardship allowance	15·20	25·00	64·5
Exceptionally severe disablement allowance	15·20	25·00	64·5

	A November 1979 £	B November 1985 £	Percentage increase (B over A) per cent.
Industrial Death Benefit			
—initial rate	27·30	53·60	96·3
—higher permanent rate	20·05	38·85	93·8
—lower permanent rate	5·85	11·49	96·4
Constant Attendance Allowance			
—normal maximum rate	15·20	25·00	64·5
—part-time rate	7·60	12·50	64·5
—intermediate rate	22·80	37·50	64·5
—exceptional rate	30·40	50·00	64·5
16. *Workmen's compensation, pneumoconiosis, byssinosis and other schemes*			
—maximum major incapacity allowance	38·00	62·50	64·5
—partial disablement allowance	14·00	23·00	64·3
17. *Housing Benefit*•			
Needs allowance			
—single	31·05	47·70	53·6
—couple/single parent	45·55	70·20	54·1
—single handicapped	34·60	53·20	53·8
—couple—one handicapped	49·10	75·70	54·2
—couple—both handicapped	50·80	78·25	54·0
—pensioner addition	n.a.	0·85	—
—dependent child addition	7·70	14·50	88·3
18. *Dependency Additions*			
For child			
—with MA, SB, UB	1·70	■	—
—with IVP, RP, WB, NCIP/SDA, ICA, and if claimant over pension age, with SB and UB	7·10	8·05	13·4
For spouse			
—with NCIP/SDA and ICA	8·40	13·75	63·7
—with MA and SB under pension age	11·45	18·00	57·2
—with MA and SB over pension age	14·00	22·00	57·1
—with UB under pension age	11·45	18·80	64·2
—with UB over pension age	14·00	23·00	64·3
—with IVP and unemployability supplement	14·00	23·00	64·3
—with RP	14·00	23·00	64·3

All benefits are weekly rates unless otherwise stated.
n.a.—Not available at that time.
• April 1979 rate.
† These are *not* rates of benefit.
‡ 1979 scales for children: 13-15; 11-12; 5-10; under 5.
‖ Middle rate abolished 1980.
¶ Changes in the supplementary benefits scheme since 1980 mean no comparable rates are available.
● 1979 rates are comparable figures—housing benefit scheme not fully introduced until April 1984-85.
■ Abolished 1984.
★ Amount for family with child under 11. Age-related amounts introduced from November 1985.

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of Social Services what is the maximum loss at current benefit rates that will be sustained under the changes proposed in the Social Security Bill by a young person aged under 25 years without children who is *(a)* not in work and claiming supplementary benefit and *(b)* in work and claiming housing benefit; under what circumstances these losses will be sustained; and how many people he estimates will be affected to this extent.

Mr. Newton: The variations in claimants' circumstances are such that it is not possible to give a figure of the maximum loss or gain which an individual claimant might experience, or the precise circumstances which might give rise to it. The technical annex published with Cmnd. 9691, however, includes tables which illustrate, on the basis of the assumptions explained in pages 9 to 14 of the annex, the effect of the move to income support on the benefit entitlement of young childless people under 25. The tables show the range of increases and decreases in benefit entitlement, including those whose underlying entitlement would decrease by £5 or more. In the main, these are likely to be the minority of young people in this age group who are householders. Those on benefit at the time of change would receive transitional protection.

The tables in the annex also show the range of increases and decreases in entitlement to housing benefit. Of those young people without children whose underlying entitlement to housing benefit is shown as decreasing, it is estimated that just over half are in work.

Rape Crisis Centres

Mrs. Dunwoody asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will increase the funding of rape crisis

centres; and if he will draw up guidelines for the provision of such centres where they do not exist in cities with a population of 50,000 or more persons.

Mr. Whitney: The London rape counselling and research project is the only centre receiving financial support from this Department. This was the first centre of its kind in this country, and it was recognised when our support commenced that some proportion of its work would be given over to national publicity and promotional work in the field of counselling and to the provision of a consultative and advice service to others setting up similar services elsewhere. The grant has been made to support these activities.

Financial support for the local work carried out by this and other centres is a matter to be considered by local authorities, some of whom we understand have already made grants.

The provision of centres in cities where they do not already exist is a matter for local decision and we have no plans to draw up guidelines.

NHS (Cleaning Contracts)

Mr. Franks asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what information he has regarding the quality of work carried out by private contractors who have secured cleaning contracts for National Health Service buildings.

Mr. Whitney: It is the responsibility of health authorities to monitor the quality of work performed by private contractors.

Child Employees

Mr. Key asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if he will institute an inquiry into the employment of children by parents running small family businesses;

(2) whether he is satisfied that increased Sunday trading will not lead to an increase in the breaches of section 18 of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933 and the Employment of Children Act 1973; and if he will make a statement;

(3) if he will list *(a)* the number of prosecutions and *(b)* the number of convictions in each of the past three years under section 18 of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933 and the Employment of Children Act 1973 in respect of the employment of children and young persons below the statutory school-leaving age; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Whitney: The Government have no plans to change the existing restrictions in the Children and Young Persons Act 1933 and byelaws made under that Act on the employment of children below statutory school leaving age. The Employment of Children Act 1973 has not yet been implemented. We are, however, satisfied that the existing legislation dealing with the employment, education, care and protection of children provides adequate powers to local authorities to safeguard children including those employed by their parents. We do not therefore propose to institute an inquiry. Comprehensive information on the numbers of prosecutions and convictions under section 18 of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933 is not available centrally in the form requested.

Social Security Reform

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what will be the housing benefit paid to *(a)* a single person aged under 18 years, *(b)* a single person aged under 25 years, *(c)* a single person aged 25 to 59 years, *(d)* a couple without children where rates and rent are (i) 25 per cent. below average, (ii) average and (iii) 25 per cent. above average and gross weekly income is (1) at the level of unemployment benefit, (2) earnings of £45, (3) £55, (4) £65, (5) £75, (6) £85, (7) £95, (8) £110 and (9) £125 a week under current provisions and under the assumptions set out in the technical annex to Cmnd. 9691; and in each case at what level of income the entitlement to housing benefit would disappear;

(2) what is his estimate of the number of *(a)* single people aged under 18 years, *(b)* single people aged under 18 years to 24 years, *(c)* single people aged 25 years to 59 years and *(d)* couples where the claimant is aged under 25 years who currently receive some housing benefit; and approximately how many in each category will lose all their housing benefit under the proposals in the Social Security Bill, on the assumptions in the technical annex to Cmnd. 9691;

(3) if he will publish in the *Official Report* tables similar to tables 8A, 8B, 17A and 17B in the technical annex to Cmnd. 9691 showing the average change in disposable income by family status under the proposals in the Social Security Bill;

(4) if he will publish in the *Official Report* extra information expanding tables 10A-16B of the technical annex to Cmnd. 9691 showing separately for sick and disabled, lone parents, couples with children in full-time work and not in full-time work, others in full-time work and not in full-time work, and non-pensioners without children who are couples, the numbers losing, gaining and remaining the same, indicating the amount of the change where appropriate who are *(a)* under 25 years and *(b)* aged 25 years or more;

(5) what is his estimate of the average amounts paid in *(a)* water rates, *(b)* sewerage charges and *(c)* domestic rates in (i) England, (ii) Wales and (iii) Scotland in 1985-86 by those receiving supplementary benefit which were used in the calculations in the technical annex to Cmnd. 9691.

Mr. Newton: I shall let the hon. Member have replies as soon as possible.

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services under what circumstances, under the assumptions set out in the technical annex to Cmnd. 9691, a single person under the age of 25 years will be better off *(a)* if they receive income support and *(b)* if they receive housing benefit but not income support (i) at the point of change and (ii) under the effects of the structural reform, showing separately those circumstances which will result in gains of over £5 a week.

Mr. Newton: The variations in claimants' circumstances are such that it is not possible to give an exhaustive answer, but the main circumstance under which the benefit entitlement of single people under 25 would increase, for both income support and housing benefit, would be if they were entitled to the proposed disability premium. Equally, the entitlement to housing benefit of those with unavoidably high rents might increase. The range of gains, and the numbers involved, are given in the tables contained in the technical annex to Cmnd. 9691.

Supplementary Benefit

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what steps he has taken to fulfil his undertaking in Cmnd. 9296 that the issues of studying on the dole would receive particular attention; what has been the outcome; and in what form the House will have an opportunity to debate the matter.

Mr. Newton: The Government's wide-ranging review of social security took account of this subject. In our Green and White Papers we put forward proposals for major structural reforms to the social security scheme: matters of detail will require further consideration. The relevant regulations, under the Social Security Bill presently before the House, will be subject to debate in the usual way.

Income Support

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how much housing addition will be paid to non-householders in income support.

Mr. Newton: None. As we have made clear, the proposals for income support would end the present distinction between householders and non-householders.

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what rate of income support will be due to a couple where *(a)* one member and *(b)* both members are aged under 18 years; and what the amounts will be if they have a child or children or if they have responsibilities as a householder.

Mr. Newton: The illustrative rates of benefit set out in the technical annex to Cmnd. 9691 assume a personal allowance of £36·40 for couples where both are aged under 18. If one member is aged 18 or over then the personal allowance would be the same as that for a couple over 18 — £48. In both cases, a family premium would be payable to those with children.

Social Security Bill

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how much money has been concentrated on older people by the proposed introduction of a 25 age point in the Social Security Bill; and in what proposed changes this concentration manifests itself.

Mr. Newton: The rates of income support illustrated in the technical annex to Cmnd. 9691 imply some increase in overall expenditure as compared to present rates of supplementary benefit and weekly additions to them. These increases manifest themselves in particular in the position of claimants over 25 in someone else's household. At present the ordinary rate for such claimants is £23·60 on top of which a non-householder's housing addition of £3·90 would be paid. On the assumptions in the illustrative annex such a person would receive £30·60.

Mr. Tony Lloyd asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give details of his plans for a transition period to avoid difficulties on the introduction of the new provisions contained in the Social Security Bill.

Mr. Newton: The main transitional proposals were set out in the White Paper "Reform of Social Security: Programme for Action" (Cmnd. 9691) published on 16 December 1985. Detailed plans are currently being developed to ensure that the new provisions are introduced as smoothly as possible.

Mr. Tony Lloyd asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will estimate the amount of money which will be lost or gained in *(a)* the city of Manchester, *(b)* Greater Manchester and *(c)* the north-west region as a result of the changes planned for benefits as a result of the Social Security Bill.

Mr. Newton: I regret this information is not available for *(a)* and *(b)*, and for *(c)* could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Ophthalmology (Waiting Times)

Mr. Tony Lloyd asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list for each health district in the north-west region waiting times for ophthalmology.

Mr. Whitney: I am sorry I cannot give the hon. Member the information he seeks. The numbers in the central data sample are too small for reliable estimates to be made below regional level.

The estimated median interval between the date a patient was placed on the waiting list and the date of admission to departments of Ophthalmology in the north-western region in 1983, the latest year for which information is held centrally, was 10 weeks.

The hon. Member may wish to write to the chairman of the North Western regional health authority, who may be able to assist him further.

Pharmaceuticals (Product Licences)

Mr. Tony Lloyd asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish the number of applications *(a)* he has received and *(b)* he has granted for parallel product licences for pharmaceuticals; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Whitney: The current position on applications for pharmaceutical product licences (parallel importing) is as follows:

	Number
Applications received	2,500
Applications cleared	1,825
Licences granted	900

The outstanding applications await assessment, but a large proportion of them cannot be determined until information is received from regulatory authorities in other European Community member states.

All applications for product licences (parallel importing) are subject to detailed medical and pharmaceutical assessment and following appropriate inquiries are granted where the licensing authority is satisfied that the imported product is therapeutically equivalent to that which is the subject of the United Kingdom product licence.

The conditions for the grant of PL(PI) licences are set out in Medicines Act leaflet MAL2(PI), a copy of which is in the Library.

Cookers (Single Payments)

Mr. Tony Lloyd asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what instructions he has issued to local offices of his Department about guidelines issued to claimants of single payments concerning reconditioned and new cookers; if he has expressly forbidden the use of maximum prices in such guidelines; if he will indicate the

circumstances under which a single payment would be given for a new cooker; if he will indicate what he considers to be a reasonable distance for claimants to travel to seek suitable reconditioned cookers; and if local offices issue lists of firms which supply reconditioned cookers.

Mr. Major: The matters raised are dealt with in the guidance contained in circular S36/85, a copy of which I sent to the hon. Member under cover of my letter of 11 November 1985. Copies of the circular are also in the Library. I also refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend to my hon. Friend the Member for Aldrige-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) on 24 February, at columns *476-78*, announcing the reference to the Social Security Advisory Committee for consultation of proposals for changes to the single payment regulations which would, among other changes, introduce a standard sum for cookers.

Pensioners (Payments Overseas)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many British passport holders living in South Africa, New Zealand, Australia and Canada are at present claiming British state pension; and what proportion of them are receiving it at 1979, 1980, 1981, 1982, 1983 and 1984 levels.

Mr. Major: On 31 December 1985 British widows' and retirement pensions were being paid to 19,763 pensioners living in South Africa, 23,672 in New Zealand, 99,129 in Australia and 56,451 in Canada. As entitlement to pension depends on the claimant's national insurance contribution record and not nationality, it is not known how many are British passport holders. The other requested information is not available; it could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Severe Weather Payments

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what proportion of the £1,700,000 made available in 1985 to supplementary benefit claimants for exceptionally severe weather payments was paid to claimants registered at offices of his Department in the Wolverhampton area; and how many claimants in the same area qualified for such benefit.

Mr. Newton: A total of £20,888 was paid to claimants by the Wolverhampton north and south local offices in 1985, in respect of extra fuel used during a period of exceptionally severe weather. The total number of payments made was 2,224.

Ms. Harman asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what he estimates is the administrative cost for every £1 paid in exceptionally severe weather benefit.

Mr. Newton: We do not have information for this year. Last year some £1·7 million was spent in benefit payments at a further administrative cost of over £1 million.

Sickness Benefit

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) how many people received reduced rate sickness benefit in each of the last five years for which figures are available; and how many of these subsequently obtained invalidity benefit;

(2) what would be the annual cost of paying sickness benefit to anyone who had paid or been credited with contributions on earnings of 25 times the lower earnings limit in the relevant tax year;

(3) what is his estimate of the number of people each year who will fail to qualify for invalidity benefit as a result of the proposal in the Social Security Bill to abolish reduced rate sickness benefit.

Mr. Major: I shall let the right hon. Member have replies as soon as possible.

Heart Disease

Mr. Coombs asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the cost to the National Health Service of coronary heart disease for the last year to a convenient date; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Whitney [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 February 1986, c. *205*]: It is not possible to estimate the total cost to the National Health Service as a whole of treating coronary heart disease, since data are not available on the proportion of general practitioners' time involved. Hospital costs can, however, be estimated using detailed data from the annual hospital in-patient inquiry returns. From these it is estimated that in 1982 (the latest year for which these returns have been analysed) the cost (revalued to 1984-85 cost levels) was £160 million.

WALES

NHS (Management)

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the introduction so far in the National Health Service in Wales of general management consequent upon the Griffiths report.

Mr. Mark Robinson: The introduction of management structures associated with the implementation of general management in the National Health Service in Wales is proceeding satisfactorily. A general manager has been appointed in all district health authorities and at the Welsh Health Common Service Authority. The arrangements for implementing general management at district and unit levels have been approved in all cases following extensive dialogue with authorities. A number of unit general managers have already been appointed. The Executive committee of the Health Policy Board is to monitor structure proposals for the sub unit level.

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales what initiatives he proposes to strengthen the capability of nurses to participate in the management of health care in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mark Robinson: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I have made it clear to health authorities that their new management structures must provide appropriate channels for the submission of professional advice and further that they should encourage applications for posts in general management from all disciplines, including nurses. Already two nurses have been appointed to unit general manager posts.

The post of chief administrative nursing officer is to be maintained in all health authorities and nurses will also have a recognised and important role to play at unit level.

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he takes to ensure that the professional views of midwives in the National Health Service in Wales are considered by senior management; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mark Robinson: I recognise that the midwifery profession has an important role in the NHS, and the health authorities are aware of this.

Midwives are members of, for example, the statutory Welsh Nursing and Midwifery Committee, the Welsh National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting which has its own midwifery committee, and of a number of other national committees.

Education (Capital Allocations)

Mr. Steen asked the Secretary of State for Wales what is the capital allocation for voluntary-aided schools in every local authority in Wales *(a)* in total and *(b)* as a percentage of the total money made available in Wales by way of capital allocation for education.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The capital allocation for voluntary-aided schools in Wales for 1985-86 was £1,249,000. This is 1·24 per cent. of the total of county capital allocations. These allocations are made under section 72 of the Local Government Planning and Land Act 1980. A new system of formula allocations was introduced for 1985-86 and there is no longer an identifiable component for education.

Mr. Steen asked the Secretary of State for Wales what is the capital allocation for 1986-87 for wholly-supported schools in the public sector in every local authority in Wales.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: No specific allocation is made for expenditure on school building within the capital allocations made to local authorities by my right hon. Friend.

Hypothermia

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many deaths from hypothermia have been recorded in Wales since January 1985; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mark Robinson: Since January 1985 there have been 63 deaths registered with hypothermia mentioned on the death certificate. This includes cases in which hypothermia was not recorded as the underlying cause of death. The figure is provisional.

North Wales Social Work Practice Centre

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Wales whether he will continue to fund one of the posts at the north Wales social work practice centre at the University College of North Wales, Bangor, after September 1987.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: An announcement regarding grant under section 21 of the Education Act 1980 to non-local education authority bodies will be made shortly.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Aid Trade Provision Projects

Mr. Beith asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the aid trade provision projects that have been agreed in the current year's financial provision.

Mr. Raison: So far in the present financial year four agreements involving aid trade provision funds of £4·9 million have been signed. The overall value of British exports associated with these agreements is expected to be £14·1 million. These are:

£ million

Country	*Project*	*United Kingdom company*	*United Kingdom export value*	*Aid trade provision allocation*
Kenya	Sugar milling equipment	Fletcher & Stewart	0·891	0·230
Indonesia	Offshore supply vessels	B.S./BMEL	2·156	0·571
Indonesia	Buket Assam rail bridges	Balfour Beatty	0·750	0·226
Caribbean	BAe 748 aircraft for LIAT	British Aerospace	10·336	3·838

In addition, a number of small aid trade provision technical co-operation projects have been signed this financial year.

Since 1 April 1985 ATP support of £188·9 million has been offered for the projects listed in part A of the following table. None of these offers has so far resulted in an ATP agreement being signed. Increased ATP support has also been offered on seven projects on which initial offers had been made before 1 April 1985; these are listed in part B of the table.

£ million

Country	*Project*	*United Kingdom company*	*United Kingdom export value*	*Aid trade provision allocation*
Algeria	Bellara Steel Works	W. S. Atkins	15·048	3.777
Bangladesh	Barisal Power Station	Hawker Siddeley Power Eng.	5·502	1·382
Burma	Gas Turbines	JBE	12·200	3·540
Burma	Diesel Engines	Kelvin Diesels	17·358	4·860
Burma	Marine Propulsion Units	Sykes Marine	5·000	1·450
Botswana	Morupule Power Station Extension	NEI	6·500	3·080

Country	Project	United Kingdom company	United Kingdom export value	Aid trade provision allocation
Cameroon	Railbus	BreLeyland	8·570	2·152
China	Air separation units	Air Products Ltd.	17·000	5·040
Colombia	System X	Plessey	8·500	2·134
Cyprus	Larnaca Airport	UKAG	18·975	4·763
Economic Community of West African States	Telecommunications Project	Not known	16·000	5·750
Egypt	Sadat City Water Supply	GKN Birwelco	4·587	1·151
India	Damodar Valley Corp.	GEC PR/JBE	20·930	6·380
India	Diesel Pumping Sets	NEI/APE	3·240	0·813
India	Gas turbines	Ruston Diesels	28·800	7·220
India	Petrochemicals	JBE	24·260	6·080
India	Optical Fibres	STC	17·000	4·500
India	HBJ pipecoating	Snamprogetti	20·000	5·020
India	UAE Submarine Cable	STC	24·450	6·140
Indonesia	Computers	ICL	15·650	4·660
Indonesia	Radio and TV	Link Electronics	18·063	5·420
Indonesia	Machine Tools	Crown Agents	24·300	6·100
Kenya	Kipevu Power Station	JBE	9·520	2·450
Malawi	Power Transmission	Balfour Beatty HSPE	8·080	2·030
Malawi	UXD5 Rural Telephone Exchange	GEC	5·118	1·888
Malaysia	Cross Braced Bogies	BRE Ltd.	6·160	1·610
Malaysia	Labua Sabah Submarine Cable	Balfour Beatty	15·830	3·970
Malaysia	Load Despatch Centres	Ferranti	2·731	0·676
Malaysia	Railway Braking	Davies & Metcalf	8·932	2·238
Malaysia	Sarawak Transmission Line	GEC	3·600	0·903
Malaysia	Sungai Piah Hydro Project	GEC	4·500	1·130
Malaysia	Air Navigation Equipment	Racal Avionics	0·600	0·150
Malaysia	Transmission Switchgear	GEC	5·300	1·322
Mauritius	Water Turbine	Gilbert Gordon Gilkes	0·544	0·137
Mexico	Railway Coaches	BRE Ltd.	11·000	2·750
Sri Lanka	Samanala Wewa Hydro Project	Balfour Beatty (Lead Consortium)	57·200	14·400
Syria	Sweidieh Power Station	JBE	33·400	8·400
Thailand	Mae Moh Boilers	McDermott Eng.	23·400	7·090
Thailand	Bangkok Buses	Leyland	80·000	20·000
Tunisia	Sakmo Diesel Engines	Hawker Siddeley	88·529	22·220
Tunisia	Kef Eddour Phosphate Mine	Taymel	12·000	3·048
Yemen Arab Republic	Yominco Oil Products Pipeline	Technip	16·986	6·800
			725·363	188·883

Enhanced offers of ATP support have also been made this financial year in respect of the following projects:

£ million

Country	Project	United Kingdom company	United Kingdom export value	Total aid trade provision allocation
Burma	Rangoon Electrical Distribution	BCPE	20·000	5·800
India	Delhi Electricity Gas Turbines	John Brown Engineering	31·430	10·595
Malaysia	Rural Water Supply Schemes	Biwaters	194·000	59·460
Malaysia	Locomotives	GEC/Brush	24·500	8·960
Mauritius	Plaisance Airport	Plessey	23·870	6·788
Thailand	Railbus	Bre-Leyland	7·966	1·999
Thailand	Mae Moh Turbines	NEI	40·546	11·300
Turkey	Bosphorous Bridge	Cleveland Bridge	40·000	14·800

Antigua and Barbuda

Mr. Beith asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has any plans to increase the amount of development assistance given to Antigua and Barbuda; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Raison: On the independence of Antigua and Barbuda in 1981, the British Government agreed to provide a capital aid grant of £5 million followed by a £5 million interest free loan. Only £1·43 million of this has so far been committed, but we are prepared to increase the rate of commitment and disbursement with the co-operation of the Government of Antigua and Barbuda. There is also a continuing programme of technical co-operation. Antigua and Barbuda also benefit from a regional grant of £4·5 million agreed in 1985 for the provision of shore facilities for the coastguard services for eastern Caribbean states. I see no need for more aid for the time being.

TRANSPORT

M4 (Service Stations)

Mr. Lawrence asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether he proposes to offer service station licences on the 50 mile stretch of the M4 west of Hungerford.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: There are motorway service areas on M4 at Heston, Membury, Leigh Delamere and Aust. Consultants are examining potential sites for a further service area in the vicinity of Reading.

Commissioners of Irish Lights

Mr. John David Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his reply on 27 February, *Official Report*, column *649*, who appoints the Commissioners of Irish Lights.

Mr. Ridley: Under an Act of the Irish Parliament in 1786, as amended by the Dublin Port Act 1867, there may be up to 21 commissioners. One is the holder for the time being of the office of Lord Mayor of Dublin. Three others are aldermen or councillors of Dublin corporation appointed by that body with tenure for its elected life. The remaining commissioners elect new members to their body, for life, when vacancies occur. The Irish Government have a power of disapprobation of these appointments but none to make them. I have no powers of either sort.

Mr. John David Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he is consulted about appointments to the office of Commissioner of Irish Lights.

Mr. Ridley: No.

Mr. John David Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Transport how many lighthouses are controlled by the Commissioners of Irish Lights; and how many of these are in United Kingdom territory or waters.

Mr. Ridley: The commissioners directly control the 87 lighthouses that are vested in them, of which 14 are in or off Northern Ireland.

The commissioners, under section 653 of the Merchant Shipping Act 1894, may also control any of the lighthouses in or off the island of Ireland that are operated by local lighthouse authorities.

Okehampton Bypass

Mr. Steen asked the Secretary of State for Transport if, in view of the fact that the Government rejected the decision of the Joint Committee on the Okehampton Bypass Special Procedure Order, Her Majesty's Government will now reimburse the objectors to that order who petitioned against it in Parliament the costs they incurred in so doing; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: As I advised my hon. Friend recently, the Joint Committee which heard the petitions had powers to award costs, but was not asked to do so.

ENERGY

Electricity Industry (Privatisation)

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he has commissioned an opinion survey of staff of the electricity supply industry on the subject of privatisation.

Mr. Goodlad: No.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL FOR SCOTLAND

Salmon Poaching

Mr. Steel asked the Solicitor-General for Scotland if he will give the number of cases brought before the courts for salmon poaching in the last 12 months and the number of those which resulted in prosecution.

The Solicitor-General for Scotland: The relevant figures are not yet available.

Mr. Steel asked the Solicitor-General for Scotland if he will give the number of cases brought before the courts for salmon poaching by means of poisoning in the last 12 months together with the previous three years' figures.

The Solicitor-General for Scotland: Figures for salmon poaching by poisoning are not separately kept.

EMPLOYMENT

Training and Special Employment Schemes

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Paymaster General what was the cost of all the Government training schemes and special employment measures for each year from and including the financial year 1972-73; what was the average number of participants in each year; and if he will compare the total expenditure in 1979-80 with that of 1984-85.

Mr. Lang: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to him on 15 January 1985 at columns *76-78*. Information for 1984-85 is set out in the table. Expenditure on employment and training measures doubled in real terms between 1979-80 and 1984-85.

Trainees/Participants and Expenditure for Training and Employment Measures 1984-85

	Participants	*£'000s*
Adult Training Schemes	136,585	251,000
Open Tech	12,000	17,066
Youth Opportunity Programme/Youth Training Scheme (Entrants)	395,000	787,878
Young Workers Scheme (Approved Applications)	66,182	41,300
Community Industry	9,532	23,900
Community Programme (Entrants)	161,437	524,200
Temporary Short Time Working Compensation Scheme (Jobs Saved)	8,009	6,023

	Participants	£'000s
Job Release Scheme (Entrants)	14,895	280,207
Job Splitting Scheme (Jobs Split)	260	217
Enterprise Allowance Scheme (Entrants)	46,816	76,800
Voluntary Projects Programme (Entrants)	N/A	9,300

YTS

Mr. Wainwright asked the Paymaster General if he is satisfied with the progress being made in the Yorkshire and Humberside region to provide sufficient places under the two-year YTS due to commence on 1 April; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: Yes. Already by 11 February 89 per cent. of the required places were definitely or likely to be provided. Approximately 90 per cent. of basic places had been found, and 81 per cent. of premium places, which are designed to help young people and parts of the country with special needs.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Thurnham asked the Paymaster General when the first set of unemployment figures will be published which will include the self-employed in the base formula; and if he will recalculate the overall unemployment percentage figure for January on this basis.

Mr. Lang: It is intended to publish an additional unemployment rate, taking account of the self-employed and the armed forces in the calculation, from next June. Figures cannot at present be calculated retrospectively but a revised series of figures on the new basis will be issued with the new rates.

Sellafield

Mr. Frank Cook asked the Paymaster General if he will place in the Library a full copy of the Sellafield site licence issued by the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate.

Mr. Trippier: I have arranged for a copy of the Sellafield site licence to be placed in the Library.

Training Credit Scheme

Mr. Baldry asked the Paymaster General whether, further to the recommendations of the Manpower Services Commission report "A Challenge to Complacency", he will introduce an individual training credit scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: "A Challenge to Complacency" was prepared by consultants at the request of the Manpower Services Commission and the National Economic Development Office. Its suggestions for action are being carefully considered by the commission in consultation with this and other Departments and any decisions on following action will be announced in due course.

Darlington Jobcentre

Mr. Fallon asked the Paymaster General how many people have been placed in jobs through Darlington jobcentre since *(a)* June 1983 and *(b)* April 1985.

Mr. Lang: Between 4 June 1983 and 7 February 1986, 9,072 placings were made by the Darlington jobcentre. The corresponding figure for the period 1 April 1985 to 7 February 1986 is 3,124. These figures exclude placings on Government schemes.

Enterprise Allowance Scheme

Mr. Lawler asked the Paymaster General what criteria are used to determine whether a person who has completed a YTS course is immediately allowed on to the enterprise allowance scheme.

Mr. Trippier: All entrants for the enterprise allowance scheme, including those from YTS, have to satisfy all the eligibility conditions of the scheme which include being at least 18 years of age and in receipt of unemployment or supplementary benefit at the time of application. In order to facilitate movement between the YTS and the enterprise allowance scheme, people completing YTS are deemed to have satisfied the 13 weeks (8 weeks from 1 April 1986) unemployment condition.

Factory Inspectors

Mr. Tony Lloyd asked the Paymaster General if he will publish the number of specialist factory inspectors employed in the field consultancy group in Manchester in December 1979 and December 1985.

Mr. Trippier: On 1 December 1979 there were 14 inspectors in the Manchester field consultancy group. On 1 December 1985 there were 11.

Mr. Tony Lloyd asked the Paymaster General if he will publish the number of factory inspectors actively engaged in inspections in December 1979 and December 1985.

Mr. Trippier: On 1 December 1979 there were 670 factory inspectors working in the field. On 1 December 1985 there were 535. Inspectors based in the field are actively involved in inspection, except the director of each area.

Specialist inspectors working in HSE's seven field consultant groups are also involved in inspection: on 1 December 1979 there were 122 inspectors working in the field consultant groups, and on 1 December 1985 there were 85.

Mr. Tony Lloyd asked the Paymaster General if he will publish the planned figures, as agreed in June 1979, for the number of factory inspectors in the north-west region for each year from 1979 to 1985.

Mr. Trippier: The Health and Safety Executive draws up detailed manpower plans annually for the next financial year. The plans include total numbers of inspectors, but are not broken down by region or area.

Mr. Tony Lloyd asked the Paymaster General if he will give details of planned recruitment of factory innspectors for the north-west region for the year from April 1986-87.

Mr. Trippier: The Health and Safety Executive plan to recruit some 35 factory inspectors during 1986-87. It is not yet known how many will start work in each area.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Durham Prison (H Wing)

Mr. Kilroy-Silk asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners are currently in H wing at Durham prison; of these how many are classified as category A prisoners; and for how long each of the women has been at Durham prison.

Mr. Mellor: On 27 February there were 40, of whom one is classified as category A. Nineteen have been at Durham for less than six months; four between six months and a year; seven between a year and 18 months; four between 18 months and two years; and four between two years and three years. One has been there for six years and seven months and one for 11 years and two months.

Fire Service Control Rooms

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has as to the numbers of civilians employed in fire service control rooms in *(a)* London and *(b)* Leicestershire and as to the different rates of pay involved for each scale.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The number and grades of control room staff in London and Leicestershire fire brigades are:

London (as at 31.7.85)

	Number
Principal Controller	1
Senior Controller	1
Area Controllers	13
Control Officer I	15
Control officer II	25
Control Officer III	117
Assistant Group Officer	1
	173

Leicestershire (as at 1.1.86)

	Number
Group Fire Control Officer	1
Fire Control Officer	1
Senior Fire Control Operators	4
Leading Fire Control Operators	4
Fire Control Operators	9
	19

The current rates of pay of control room staff were promulgated in circulars issued by the national joint council for local authorities' fire brigades (on which the Government are not represented) on 7 November 1985. Copies are in the Library.

These rates do not apply in London. I am making inquiries about control staff salaries in the London fire brigade for which the GLC is responsible and my noble Friend will write to my hon. Friend.

Police Control Rooms

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the chief constable of Leicestershire detailing the number of civilians employed by the Leicestershire constabulary in police control rooms and the different rates of pay involved for each scale.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Police civilians in England and Wales are employed by the police authority or local authority. My right hon. Friend has no responsibility for the pay of police civilians, which is negotiated in the national joint council for local authorities' administrative, professional, technical and clerical services.

Control room work is usually carried out by a combination of police officers and civilians. I understand that there are 62 civilians employed on this work in the Leicestershire constabulary. Their rates of pay range from £5,550 to £6,399 per annum. They also receive a shift disturbance allowance, ranging from 14 per cent. to 20 per cent.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Nuclear Bunkers

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) if a bunker connected with Gough barracks, Armagh, features in the Government's contingency plans for the event of actual or threatened nuclear attack;

(2) why the Government have decided that the proposed new nuclear bunkers should not be sited in the area which houses the normal peacetime administration of Northern Ireland;

(3) if he will make a statement outlining the condition of Belfast in the event of a nuclear attack as assessed by Government in their consideration of the plans for the three new bunkers;

(4) if he will make a statement on the proposed arrangements following completion of the three new nuclear bunkers outlining what actual affairs will be managed or monitored from each of the bunkers;

(5) what is the latest estimate for the cost of building the three new nuclear bunkers; what proportion of this is accounted for by security costs; and what is the estimated cost of maintaining the bunkers once they have been built;

(6) what role the civil defence main control building in Mount Eden Park, Belfast, will play in the new arrangements following completion of the three new nuclear bunkers;

(7) when work will begin on the proposed three new nuclear bunkers in Northern Ireland; when it will be completed; and what role the Property Services Agency will have in the development of the three proposed sites;

(8) if he will make a statement outlining the restrictions or vetting to be imposed on the selection of contractors and employees at the sites of the proposed three nuclear bunkers; under what restrictions workers at the sites will operate; and if he will make a statement outlining what type of security measures will be taken around the sites to prevent public access or view.

Mr. Scott: I shall reply to the hon. Gentleman as soon as possible.

DEFENCE

Crown Liability

Mr. Best asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he has considered excluding Crown liability under section 10 of the 1947 Act only in respect of activities which are peculiar to the armed forces; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lee: Whilst no option in the review of section 10 of the Crown Proceedings Act 1947 has yet been closed, attempts over the years to distinguish between activities with a military character and those which are essentially civil in nature have always foundered because of the discrimination it would create between different categories of service men and because it would create more anomalies than it would remove.

Fulbeck Airfield

Mr. Douglas Hogg asked the Secretary of State for Defence when, and on what terms, Fulbeck airfield was originally acquired by the relevant Government Department; and whether he will place a copy of the conveyance and all other deeds and contractual documents in the Library.

Mr. Lee: Fulbeck airfield was originally requisitioned for use in world war two and the Air Ministry later purchased it in eight conveyances between May 1944 and June 1948. These conveyances were of the type normally used for transactions of this sort, and, as such, confidential to seller and buyer; it would not therefore be appropriate for them to be placed in the Library.

SCOTLAND

Road Statistics

Mr. David Marshall asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will state for each region the length of the following categories of road in 1984 *(a)* motorways, *(b)* other trunk roads, *(c)* principal roads and *(d)* other roads.

Mr. Ancram: The information, as at 1 April 1984, is as follows:

	Motorways Kms	*Other Trunk Roads Kms*	*Principal Roads Kms*	*Other Roads Kms*
Borders	—	182·35	435·94	2,390·38
Central	60·53	112·87	334·55	1,520·35
Dumfries and Galloway	—	347·71	498·64	3,456·49
Fife	14·63	100·58	327·45	1,753·72
Grampian	—	342·30	845·20	6,416·83
Highland	—	778·00	1,619·49	4,954·27
Lothian	38·96	103·72	437·98	2,826·26
Strathclyde	*90·43	726·76	1,677·91	10,380·37
Tayside	31·65	220·71	698·02	3,802·77
Orkney	—	—	160·81	775·80
Shetland	—	—	226·00	656·00
Western Isles	—	—	345·19	817·19
	236·20	2,915·00	7,607·18	39,750·43

* Includes 24·10 kms of local authority motorway

Education (Capital Allowances)

Mr. Steens asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the capital allocation for voluntary-aided schools in every local authority in Scotland *(a)* in total and *(b)* as a percentage of the total money available in Scotland by way of capital allocation for education.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The category of voluntary-aided schools does not exist in Scotland.

Mr. Steen asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the capital allocation for 1986-87 for wholly-supported schools in the public sector in every local authority in Scotland.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Local authorities in Scotland receive a block allocation of consent to incur capital expenditure on schools, further education colleges and community education buildings. Within this overall level of consent they are free to determine which educational building projects will proceed. Information on the level of the block allocations for 1986-87 for each regional and island authority is given in the following table.

Block allocation for education building 1986-87

Regional/Island authority	*Cash prices £,000*
Borders	780
Central	1,870
Dumfries and Galloway	2,010
Fife	5,665
Grampian	4,900
Highland	1,615
Lothian	4,525
Strathclyde	18,050
Tayside	1,665
Orkney	1,110
Shetland	980
Western Isles	4,150

Note: Block allocation figures include, where appropriate, assumed levels of capital from current revenue.

Road Schemes

Sir Russell Johnston asked the Secretary of State for Scotland whether there are items of information which his Department does not provide on request to objectors to trunk road proposals in Scotland which are provided on request to objectors to trunk road schemes in England and Wales after publication of a line order.

Mr. Ancram [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 February 1986, c. *189-90*]: My understanding is that, broadly speaking, the information provided on request by the Scottish Development Department is very similar to that provided in England and Wales. However, each request is considered individually on its merits, having regard to the cost and the need to prevent unnecessary blight.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Philippines

14. **Mr. Parry** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether there will be any change in Her Majesty's Government's relations with the Government of the Philippines following the recent presidential elections there.

Mr. Renton: Our policy towards the new Government of President Aquino was set out in my statement in this House on 26 February at column 945. But I am happy to say again that we look forward to a close and positive working relationship with the new President and her colleagues.

73. **Mr. Anderson** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about policy towards the Government of the Philippines.

Mr. Renton: I refer the hon. Member to my statement in this House on 26 February at column 945.

European Community

15. **Mr. Crowther** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the current priorities of the Government with respect to the European Economic Community.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: Our priorities remain as set out in the Queen's speech. The main priority is completion of the internal market, which is the key to creating prosperity and jobs in Europe.

United Nations Relief and Works Agency

16. **Mr. Haynes** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what protests he has made to those Arab states who have failed to pay their subscriptions to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency.

Mr. Renton: We have consistently supported resolutions at the United Nations urging all Governments to support the valuable work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency.

Lebanon (Israeli Action)

17. **Sir John Farr** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations Her Majesty's Government have made to Israel in relation to that country's recent armed incursion into Lebanon.

Mr. Renton: We have repeatedly urged the Israeli Government to implement their stated intention to withdraw all Israeli forces from Lebanon.

Chile

18. **Mr. Flannery** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on current relations with Chile.

Mr. Eggar: We have normal diplomatic relations with Chile. But we leave the Chilean Government in no doubt about our concerns over their continuing human rights violations, and our wish to see an orderly restoration of full democracy in Chile. We consider that President Pinochet's rejection, last December, of dialogue with the democratic opposition has done nothing to improve prospects.

71. **Mr. Redmond** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the visits by Ministers or officials in his Department to Chile in the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: The following Foreign and Commonwealth Office officials have visited Chile in the last 12 months: the head of South America department, a member of research department, and an economic adviser. There have been no ministerial visits.

Disarmament Talks

19. **Mr. Soames** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress in the mutual and balanced force reduction talks.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The response of the Soviet Union and its allies to the recent constructive Western proposal has been disappointing. Instead of matching the significant moves made by Western countries they have returned instead to the inadequate verification proposals which they made almost three years ago. We look to the East to reconsider its position in the light of Mr. Gorbachev's statements that the East is prepared both for reasonable verification and to achieve success at MBFR.

Falkland Islands

20. **Mr. Weetch** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent attempts he has made to resume negotiations with Argentina over the Falkland Islands following the passing of United Nations resolutions in 1984 and 1985.

Mr. Eggar: As I explained to the House on 18 December 1985, we shall continue to seek every opportunity to encourage the Argentine Government to take a more realistic approach and to match our readiness to rebuild confidence. We shall also continue to stand by our commitment to the Falkland Islanders.

68. **Mr. Greg Knight** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement concerning Government policy on fishing within a radius of 200 miles of the Falkland Islands.

Mr. Eggar: We are co-operating fully with the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation, which is conducting a technical study of the south west Atlantic fishery. We expect that this will lead on to discussion and agreement on multilateral fisheries conservation and management arrangements. Pending action on the study we have urged all those countries with fishing fleets active in the area to exercise restraint. There has been a generally helpful response.

Syrian Foreign Affairs Minister

21. **Mr. Latham** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will make a statement on the official visit to London of the Foreign Affairs Minister of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: Mr. Shara's visit formed part of our continuing political dialogue with Syria. Our talks covered regional and bilateral issues.

European Commission (UK Presidency)

22 **Miss Maynard** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the priorities which the United Kingdom Government intend to pursue during their six-monthly presidency of the European Economic Commission; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The main task of the next United Kindgom Presidency is the efficient conduct of EC business in the Council of Ministers, During our Presidency our priorities will be:

—to keep up momentum on completion of the Common Market, including transport liberalisation;

—to ease burdens on businesses, and promote flexibility in the labour market;

— to promote continuing reforms in the CAP with a view to reducing agricultural surpluses;

— to work for sound management of the Community budget;

— to secure the launch of a new round of multilateral trade netotiations in the GATT and to conclude negotiations on the renewal of the multi-fibre arrangement;

—to support the Commission in handling trade relations with the US and Japan;

—to ensure that the Twelve member states act together in important matters of foreign policy in the spirit of the new treaty provisions signed in Luxembourg, which were based on a British initiative.

Central America

23 **Mr. Pike** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has held with the United States Government concerning American foreign policy towards central America.

Mr. Eggar: We regularly discuss all important issues, including the situation in central America, with the United States Government at a number of levels. They are fully aware of our views.

29 **Mr. Terry Lewis** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the European Economic Community Council will next discuss the problems of central America.

Mr. Eggar: As I told the hon. Member on 25 February, there is regular discussion at appropriate levels within the framework of European political co-operation of all important issues including central America. We are in close contact with our European partners over developments in central America and elsewhere.

51 **Mr. Frank Cook** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent action has been taken by the European Economic Community to help the Contadora peace process in central America.

Mr. Eggar: We and our European partners have consistently expressed our support for the Contadora process. Most recently on 20 January, the Twelve publicly welcomed the impetus given to the Contadora process by the Caraballeda and Guatemala declarations.

Argentine Politicians (UK Visit)

24. **Mr. Ray Powell** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what contacts his Department had with the Argentine politicians in their recent visit to the United Kingdom.

27. **Mr. Dalyell** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his contact with the Argentine parliamentary delegation led by Senor Adolfo Gass during the week beginning 17 February.

Mr. Eggar: In response to an approach from the South Atlantic Council I offered to see the Argentine delegation in the House of Commons. It did not take up the offer.

South Africa

25. **Mr. Willie W. Hamilton** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the progress of talks between the South African authorities and the Commonwealth representative group.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The Commonwealth Group is comprised of eminent figures who act independently and not as representatives of Governments. We are encouraged by the apparently successful start to their mission, including a preliminary visit to South Africa.

26. **Mr. Canavan** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will make a statement about the policy of Her Majesty's Government on the current situation in South Africa.

75. **Mr. Hunter** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the situation in South Africa.

Mrs. Chalker: I refer the hon. Member and my hon. Friend to the answer I gave earlier to the hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett).

30. **Mr. Rogers** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what Her Majesty's Government intend to do to ensure the release of political prisoners and the end of detention without trial in South Africa.

Mrs. Chalker: We have frequently urged the South African Government to release political prisoners without condition and to end the practice of detention without trial. We shall continue to make representations as appropriate.

35. **Mr. Stan Thorne** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will expand upon the text of the Lusaka communiqué on South Africa.

Mrs. Chalker: We fully subscribe to the Lusaka communiqué which voices unanimous condemnation of apartheid by Ministers of the European Community and Front-Line states and calls for dialogue between representatives of all communities in South Africa.

Israel (North Sea Oil Sales)

28. **Mr. McWilliam** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if, during the recent visit of the Israeli Premier, he discussed sales of North Sea oil to Israel.

Mr. Renton: Yes. My right hon. and learned Friend told Mr. Peres that there would be no change in our guidelines.

Philippine Ambassador

31. **Mr. Wareing** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to meet the ambassador of the Philippines.

Mr. Renton: My right hon. and learned Friend has no plans to meet the Ambassador of the Philippines. The Philippines Embassy is in charge of the Minister-Counsellor, Mr. Almendrala, with whom the Foreign Office is in close contact.

South African Military Attaches

32. **Mrs. Clwyd** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will arrange for the expulsion of South African military attaches from Britain.

Mrs. Chalker: We agreed with our European partners to withdraw our military attaches from Pretoria and not to grant accreditation to military attaches from South Africa. The question of the continued presence of South African military attaches in London and other EC capitals remains under review.

European Community (Procedural Reform)

33. **Mr. Proctor** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the European Economic Community agreement, signed on Monday 17 February, concerning procedural reform; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: We welcome the result of the Danish referendum on 27 February, and the fact that Denmark, Italy and Greece have now signed the Single European Act. The way is now open for member states to start the necessary procedures leading to ratification and implementation.

European Community (Policy Co-ordination)

34. **Miss Boothroyd** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in what areas he expects enhanced foreign policy co-ordination between the European Economic Community member states following the passaing of the proposed European Economic Community treaty changes; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: The Twelve consult and co-ordinate their views on a wide range of foreign policy issues including the economic and political aspects of security. The new treaty provisions on policital co-operation (which are separate from the changes to the Community treaties also incorporated in the Single European Act) are designed to further this process. The agenda for political co-operation depends on which problems are foremost at the time. I refer the hon. Member to the evidence my right hon. and learned Friend gave to the Foreign Affairs Committee of this House on 11 December. I understand that the Select Committee has placed an uncorrected transcript of the evidence in the Library of the House and that a final version will be published in due course.

Soviet Jewry

36. **Mr. Janner** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether, following the release of Anatoly Shcharansky from the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, he will now make further representations to the Soviet authorities on behalf of the following Soviet Jews who wish to emigrate, namely; Vladimir Szerah, Victor Brailovsky and Ida Nubel, Josef Begun, Aba Taratuta and Yuli Koscharovsky and Professor Alexander Lerner; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: We made clear at the time of Mr. Shcharansky's release that we welcomed this development, for which we had long pressed, and that we hoped it would lead to sympathetic and speedy consideration of other human rights' cases. We shall continue to press the Soviet Union for a general improvement in its human rights performance and for full implementation of its international commitments, including those relating to emigration and family reunification.

Pakistan

37. **Mr. Spencer** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about relations with Pakistan.

Mr. Eggar: We have good relations with Pakistan.

El Salvador (Officer Training)

38. **Mr. Allan Roberts** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received from other countries about the Government's intention to provide military training in the United Kingdom for officer from El Salvador; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: None.

Soviet Union (Human Rights)

39. **Mr. Woodall** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made in the implementation by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics of the human rights provisions of the Helsinki agreement during the past six months.

Mr. Renton: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, East (Mr. Knowles) on 4 March at columns *89-93*.

Syrian Foreign Affairs Minister

40. **Mr. Campbell** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, during the recent visit of the Syrian Foreign Minister, what assurance he received that Syria would hand over to Governments affected any terrorist on their territory.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I mentioned to Mr. Shara' our increasing concern about terrorism and the need for full international co-operation to combat it. I made clear that we are particularly disturbed by continuing reports of Syrian provision of facilities for the Abu Nidhal group.

Palestine Liberation Organisation

41. **Mr. Tom Cox** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the

occasions on which official spokesmen for the Palestine Liberation Organisation have declared their acceptance of United Nations resolutions 242 and 338.

44. **Mr. Mikardo** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has any recent information on the present official attitude of the Palestine Liberation Organisation to United Nations resolutions 242 and 338.

Mr. Renton: Spokesmen of the Palestine Liberation Organisation have on a number of occasions expressed acceptance of all relevant United Nations resolutions but, as King Hussein made clear on 19 February, the PLO declined to accept Security Council resolutions 242 and 338 unconditionally.

African National Congress

42. **Mr. Jim Callaghan** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, following meetings between Her Majesty's Government and the African National Congress in various parts of southern Africa, if he will now arrange for formal meetings to be held between the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the African National Congress in Britain.

Mrs. Chalker: There are no plans at present.

49. **Mr. Dykes** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next plans to arrange for contact between the African National Congress and United Kingdom Government officials following the recent meeting in Lusaka.

Mrs. Chalker: It is our intention that contacts at official level will continue as appropriate in pursuit of our objective of the suspension of violence and the beginning of peaceful dialogue in South Africa.

60. **Mr. Bowen Wells** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the outcome of the recent discussions between his officials and the African National Congress in Lusaka, Zambia.

Mrs. Chalker: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave earlier to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Central (Mr. Caborn).

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent requests Her Majesty's Government have received for a meeting with the London representatives of the African National Congress; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: There are no present plans for formal meetings.

Soviet Foreign Minister

43. **Mr. Tom Clarke** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects the visit of the Soviet Foreign Minister, Mr. Shevardnadze, to take place.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: Dates for Mr. Shevardnadze's visit have not yet been fixed. I hope that it will be possible to find a mutually convenient time before long.

Anti-ballistic Missile Treaty

45. **Mr. O'Brien** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's policy towards the extension of the anti-ballistic missile treaty.

Mr. Renton: We would like to see the ABM treaty reaffirmed and strengthened.

European Community (Majority Voting)

46. **Mr. Leighton** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what estimate he has made of the increased amount of majority voting in the European Economic Community Council as a result of implementation of the draft European Act.

Mrs. Chalker: We expect that, in future, Council decisions will be taken more frequently by majority voting, both under the large number of existing treaty provisions which allow for this and, in due course, under those provisions amended by the Single European Act. Precise estimates are not possible, since the decision whether to call a vote is one for the presidency of the day.

Libya

47. **Mr. Ron Brown** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about current relations with Libya.

Mr. Renton: As I told my hon. Friend the Member for Berkshire, East (Mr. MacKay) on 5 February at column *176*, we have at present no plans to resume diplomatic relations with Libya.

Saudi Arabia

48. **Mr. Heathcoat-Amory** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on relations between the United Kingdom and Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Renton: Relations with Saudi Arabia are excellent. My right hon. and learned Friend had a most valuable visit to Saudi Arabia on 13-15 January when he met the King, the Foreign Minister and the Governor of Riyadh. There have been a number of other visits in both directions in recent months, including the parliamentary delegation in which my hon. Friend participated. Further exchanges of visits are expected in the near future.

60. **Mr. Welsh** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations Her Majesty's Government have made to the Saudi Arabian authorities about inhumane punishments and other human rights violations in that country.

Mr. Renton: Appropriate representations are made when particular cases involving individual British citizens arise. This must, however, be seen against the background that the Islamic code of justice and the Saudi system of Government clearly appear to enjoy the adherence and support of the Saudi people as a whole.

Mexico and Venezuela (Debt)

50. **Mr. Fisher** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he

has held with Mexico and Venezuela concerning the impact of lower oil prices on their ability to service their overseas debt; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: We have expressed our concern about the instability of the oil market and the impact of falling oil prices on the economies of Mexico and Venezuela in the course of our contacts with their Governments. Although we recognise that cheaper oil should in due course benefit the world economy, its immediate impact on the export earnings of major oil exporting debtors such as Mexico and Venezuela cannot fail to be serious.

Nuclear Disarmament

52. **Mr. George Robertson** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects to respond to Mr. Gorbachev's recent proposals on the reduction and elimination of nuclear weapons.

Mr. Renton: Mr. Gorbachev's proposals of 15 January were conveyed to us in a message to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, who expects to reply soon.

64. **Mr. Nicholas Brown** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the Gorbachev proposals for the reduction and elimination of nuclear weapons.

Mr. Renton: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister expects to reply to Mr. Gorbachev soon. His proposals contain nothing new in the field of strategic nuclear arms reductions. The Soviet position over intermediate range nuclear missiles has changed; the United States took account of the change in new proposals tabled at the bilateral Geneva negotiations on 24 February. It may be possible to build on Mr. Gorbachev's recognition of the legitimacy of Western concerns over verification.

Nicaragua

53. **Mr. Andrew F. Bennett** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the current state of United Kingdom bilateral relations with Nicaragua.

Mr. Eggar: We have normal diplomatic relations with Nicaragua.

Latin America (Debt)

54. **Mr. Garrett** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with Latin American Governments concerning their debt payments.

Mrs. Chalker: The heavy debt burden borne by many Latin American countries continues to cause us concern and this problem is frequently discussed in the course of our contacts with their Governments.

Human Contacts (Conference)

55. **Mr. Lawrence** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what matters will be raised by the British delegation at the conference on security and co-operation in Europe meeting of experts on human contacts in Berne, Switzerland in April.

Mr. Renton: We expect to address all items in the mandate for the meeting, which deals, inter alia, with family reunification and contacts, travel, and tourism.

74. **Dr. Blackburn** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the British delegation to the Berne meeting of experts on human contacts in April under the auspices of the conference on security and co-operation in Europe will raise the subject of the reunification of families.

Mr. Renton: Yes. Reunification of families will be one of the main agenda items at the meeting.

European Commission

56. **Mr. Ron Davies** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if Her Majesty's Government will give details of their position at the European Commission session which considers how best to implement the package of measures agreed by the European Economic Community in September 1985; and if Her Majesty's Government will particularly give details on their position regarding the definition of oil.

Mrs. Chalker: We have fully implemented the package of measures concerning South Africa agreed by the member states of the European Community in Luxembourg on 10 September 1985. This package provides for the cessation of oil exports to South Africa. The United Kingdom has no such exports.

Turkey

57. **Mr. Boyes** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the European Economic Community Council last discussed Turkey.

72. **Mr. Hardy** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the European Economic Community Council last discussed the topic of economic and political relations with Turkey.

Mrs. Chalker: Turkey's relations with the European Community were discussed most recently at the Foreign Affairs Council on 17 February when there was general agreement that work should go ahead on a number of outstanding issues in the framework of the EC—Turkey association agreement, including the unblocking of aid already committed to Turkey, with the aim of holding an early ministerial meeting of the EC — Turkey Association Council.

Middle East

58. **Mr. Oakes** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what encouragement has been given by Her Majesty's Government to the Syrians to join the peace process in the middle east.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: In my talks with the Syrian Foreign Minister on 3 March I made clear our view that a just and lasting peace in the middle east can only be achieved through a negotiated settlement of the Palestinian problem which allows all the states and peoples of the area to live in security.

South Africa (North Sea Oil)

59. **Mr. Eastham** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what measures are being taken by Her Majesty's Government to ensure that no North Sea oil is reaching South Africa.

Mrs. Chalker: We have fully implemented the package of measures concerning South Africa agreed by member states of the European Community in Luxembourg on 10 September 1985. This package proovided inter alia for the cessation of oil exports to South Africa. The United Kingdom has no such exports.

British Council

61. **Mr. Kirkwood** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next expects to meet the chairman of the British Council to discuss the future funding of the council.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. and learned Friend has no immediate plans to do so.

Iran-Iraq War

62. **Mr. Walters** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the latest reports received from Her Majesty's ambassadors about the Iran-Iraq conflict.

Mr. Renton: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) on 24 February at column *448*.

Palestine

63. **Mr. Ernie Ross** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which resolutions of the United Nations Security Council and the United Nations General Assembly relating to the question of Palestine Her Majesty's Government accept.

Mr. Renton: The information requested is available in the Library of the House. We continue to support a just and balanced settlement in accordance with Security Council resolutions 242 and 338.

Uganda (Ministerial Visit)

65. **Mr. Peter Bruinvels** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the recent visit to Uganda by the Minister of State, the hon. Member for Wallasey (Mrs. Chalker) and on the talks held and the matters discussed.

Mrs. Chalker: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) on 19 February at column *172*.

Nelson Mandela

66. **Mr. Madden** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the European Economic Community Council has asked South Africa to release Mr. Nelson Mandela from prison.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The Twelve have consistently called upon the South African Government to release Mr. Mandela, most recently in the declaration on southern Africa which was issued after the meeting of Foreign Ministers of the Twelve in the Hague on 25 February.

European Community (Policy Department)

67. **Mr. Knox** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what further proposals he intends to place before his European Community partners for the development of Community policies.

Mrs. Chalker: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave him on 5 February at column *178*.

Strategic Defence Initiative

70. **Mr. Strang** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with his European counterparts about political aspects of the strategic defence initiative; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: The US strategic defence initiative research programme comes up from time to time in the discussions my right hon. and learned Friend holds with his European colleagues. We regard it as essential that all implications of strategic defence should be fully discussed and fully taken into account in assessing the outcome of the research programme.

Mr. Adnan Mansour Ghanem

Mr. Marlow asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will raise with the Israeli Government the treatment of Adnan Mansour Ghanem by the Israeli authorities in December 1985.

Mr. Renton: We deplore the Israeli practice of deportation and have made this clear to the Israeli authorities.

Embassy and Consulate Staff

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the cost of financing British diplomats and their staff and the upkeep of British embassies and consulates during the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Eggar: Direct expenditure on the diplomatic service in 1984-85, the latest available year for which complete statistics are available, was £350 million. Of this £214·5 million was directly attributable to the costs of British embassies and consulates overseas.

ENVIRONMENT

Companies (Blacklisting)

Mr. Michael Morris asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he proposes to take any action to seek to safeguard the right of companies which are blacklisted for political reasons to tender for direct labour work.

Mrs. Rumbold: Local authorities are already required to put most of their buildings and maintenance work out to competition. Any authority indulging in political discrimination in the award of contracts risks successful challenge in the courts.

Written Question (Cost)

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the cost of answering the question on local authority rent arrears by the hon. Member for

Lewisham, West (Mr. Maples) *Official Report*, column *221*, 19 February; and why the hon. Member was not referred to published sources available in the Library.

Mr. John Patten: The cost of answering the question was about £50. The information is collected regularly for the Department's own monitoring purposes. It was not possible to refer to published sources in the Library because that information was not, at the time, up to date.

Binswood Hall Playing Fields, Leamington Spa

Sir Dudley Smith asked the Secretary of State for the Environment why he did not call in Warwickshire county council's planning decision to sell off the Binswood hall playing fields at Leamington Spa for private housing development.

Mr. Tracey: My hon. Friend will be pleased to know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment has decided to call in the county council's application for his own determination.

Industrial Technology Park, Warwick

Sir Dudley Smith asked the Secretary of State for the Environment why he will not call in the planning decision by Warwickshire county council to locate an industrial technology park near to one of the main entrances to the county town of Warwick.

Mr. Tracey: The county council resolved to grant planning permission for the technology park at Heathcote on 9 January 1986. Having earlier decided not to intervene in the matter, it is not now open to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment to call in the proposal.

Nature Conservancy Council

Mr. Key aked the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what information he has as to how many Nature Conservancy Council field staff who are, or who have been, engaged in negotiating management agreements with owner-occupiers in respect of sites of special scientific interest, have had previous practical experience of productive land management or land economics; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what information he has on measures taken to train Nature Conservancy field officers in practical land management and land economics; and if he will make a statement.

(3) what qualifications are sought when recruiting field officers into the Nature Conservancy Council.

Mrs. Rumbold: I am advised by the Nature Conservancy Council that all its field staff are professionally qualified. Assistant regional officers responsible for day-to-day negotiation of management agreements must hold a degree in a science-related subject plus at least two-year post-graduate experience, preferably in a conservation related area. Regional land agents responsible for the substantive negotiation of management agreements are qualified chartered surveyors trained in practical land management and land economics.

In-house training for field staff includes courses in forestry, agriculture and valuations. In addition, they attend relevant external courses organised by professional bodies such as the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors.

Mr. Key asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has made any assessment of the effect on rural employment of constraints placed on otherwise productive operations within sites of special scientific interest; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: No overall assessment can be made easily. The management of such sites in the interests of nature conservation may involve more labour-intensive methods, for example, coppice woodlands or hay-meadows, but in some cases, for example, blanket bogs, less labour might possibly be required.

Mr. Key asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what percentage of the Nature Conservancy Council's total annual expenditure is devoted to management agreements in respect of sites of special scientific interest in woodlands.

Mrs. Rumbold: For the last completed financial year, the percentage was 1·6 per cent. (excluding staff costs and overheads).

Mr. Key asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what percentage of the Nature Conservancy Council's total annual expenditure in each of the past three years is devoted to staff and staff support costs; what is the percentage spent on management agreements; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: The information is:

	1982-83 per cent.	*1983-84 per cent.*	*1984-85 per cent.*
Staff and related costs	76	73·5	71·1
Payments under management agreements	2·8	3·5	7·7

Mr. Key asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many field officers have been employed by the Nature Conservancy Council in each of the past three years.

Mrs. Rumbold: The information is:

Position at:	*Assistant regional officers*	*Land agents*
1 April 1984	82	15
1 April 1985	85	17
Currently in post	126	25

Woodlands

Mr. Key asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what proportion of woodland sites of special scientific interest include areas of coniferous trees or conifer mix.

Mrs. Rumbold: The Nature Conservancy Council's best estimate is about 15 per cent.

Local Authority Services

Mr. Franks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) how many local authorities have put all or any of their services out to the private sector; how many have selected outside firms to operate work undertaken by former direct labour organisations as opposed to giving in-house organisations the work; and how many have put more than one service into the private sector;

(2) further to the reply to the hon. Member for Barrow and Furness, 29 January, *Official Report*, column *513*, if

he will publish in the *Official Report* that information on costs which he has estimated to accrue from the amount of work going to contractors from local authorities which put contracts out to competitive tender.

Mrs. Rumbold: This information is not collected by the Department of the Environment. The manpower costs in eliciting the information requested would be prohibitive. I can do no better than refer my hon. Friend to my earlier reply on 18 February, at columns 112-13.

Rates

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what were the average *(a)* water rates, *(b)* sewerage charges and *(c)* domestic rates in (i) England and Wales and (ii) Scotland in 1985-86.

Mr. John Patten: The information requested by the hon. Member is as follows:

Average rates 1985-86	*England and Wales* £·p	*Scotland* £·p
(a) Water supply	39·92	26·23
(b) Sewerage and environmental	45·93	*365·97
(c) Domestic	344·00	

*The breakdown into separate water, sewerage and domestic rates in England and Wales is not mirrored in Scotland. In addition to the domestic water rate, ratepayers contribute via the regional or general rate to public water, sewerage, coast protection, flood prevention and riverboard requisitions.

Radioactive Materials

Mr. Foreman asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the number of Government inspectors who are concerned with the regulation of radioactive materials and their wastes; what were the comparable numbers in December 1983; and if he will give details of the long-term epidemiological monitoring which is necessary to ensure that human health is protected from radiation hazards.

Mr. Waldegrave: The staff levels in 1983 and 1985 are shown in the table:

Inspectorate	*1983*	*1985*	*Vacancy*
MAFF			
Fisheries	3	3	1
Food Science Division	*3	4	0
Nuclear Installations Inspectorate	97	99	20
Radiochemical Inspectorate	12	16	1

*One vacancy.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services has established a Committee on Medical Aspects of Radiation in the Environment, which will be reviewing further epidemiological studies to be undertaken in response to recommendation 5 contained in the report of Sir Douglas Black's group which investigated the incidence of cancer in west Cumbria. The *Official Report* of 21 June 1985, at columns 251-52, gives details of the studies.

Haringey Direct Labour Organisation

Sir Hugh Rossi asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether, following his request for a special report on Haringey's DLO, he has reached a decision on that organisation's future.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The special report provided by the London borough of Haringey shows that Haringey's new build direct labour organisation made losses totalling some £5½ million over the period 1981-82 to 1984-85, with a loss in 1984-85 alone of some £3·2 million.

Having considered the report, I have today informed the borough, in accordance with my powers under section 17(5) of the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980, that with immediate effect its direct labour organisation shall no longer have power to undertake new building work except as necessary to complete work already awarded to it.

Local Government Reform

Mrs. Peacock asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has any proposals which would reduce the levies of the residuary bodies in the metropolitan areas for 1986-87.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I have received representations that steps should be taken to prevent the concentration of staff compensation costs in the first year from falling on the levies. I accept that argument. I have already announced that the residuary bodies may use the balances of the outgoing authorities to make compensation payments in 1986-87. If there are areas where balances alone are insufficient for the purpose, I am prepared to allow the residuary bodies to use the proceeds of the sale of surplus assets. In order that the residuary bodies may be certain that sufficient finance will be available for these payments without recourse to the levy, I will undertake now that if neither balances nor capital receipts suffice I will approve the requisite amount of additional borrowing by the residuary bodies in 1986-87.

Nuclear Installations Inspectorate

Mr. Frank Cook asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to issue a new publication describing the work of the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate to replace that issued in 1982; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: I have been asked to reply.

There are no plans to issue a new publication describing the work of the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate. Much of the information in the existing booklet is still valid.

Rate Support Grant

Mr. Sumberg asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he is yet in a position to give further guidance to local authorities about the recycling of rate support grant in 1986-87 as a result of the latest information on local authority budgets.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: In the debate on the RSG settlement in January I provided the House with purely illustrative tables showing the additional grant each authority in England could receive if £400 million of grant was available to be recycled in 1986-87.

On the evidence now available to me about local authority budgets in 1986-87, I am satisfied that there will be a grant underclaim of at least £500 million. I am willing to guarantee that authorities in receipt of grant at budgeted expenditure will receive at least the sums of grant shown in the following table, in addition to their entitlement

under the rate support grant settlement, as a result of grant recycling. All prudent authorities will wish to take this into account in reaching their decisions on budgets and rates for 1986-87. I have written to the local authority associations giving them this information.

Effect on grant entitlements of £500 million recycling

	Extra grant after recycling (£ million)
Greater London	
City of London	0·000
Camden	0·000
Greenwich	0·579
Hackney	0·705
Hammersmith and Fulham	0·876
Islington	1·004
Kensington and Chelsea	1·969
Lambeth	1·160
Lewisham	0·739
Southwark	1·123
Tower Hamlets	0·573
Wandsworth	1·115
Westminster	0·000
Barking and Dagenham	1·328
Barnet	3·119
Bexley	1·605
Brent	2·605
Bromley	2·546
Croydon	3·687
Ealing	2·934
Enfield	2·377
Haringey	1·630
Harrow	1·798
Havering	1·906
Hillingdon	0·000
Hounslow	2·771
Kingston-upon-Thames	1·463
Merton	1·541
Newham	1·837
Redbridge	1·837
Richmond-upon-Thames	1·610
Sutton	1·539
Waltham Forest	1·430
ILEA	0·000
London Fire and CD Authority	0·000
Metropolitan Police	9·836
Greater Manchester	
Bolton	2·111
Bury	1·409
Manchester	5·352
Oldham	1·747
Rochdale	1·514
Salford	2·301
Stockport	2·897
Tameside	1·673
Trafford	2·815
Wigan	2·318
Greater Manchester Police Authority	1·454
Greater Manchester Fire and CD Authority	0·681
Greater Manchester Transport Authority	1·292
Total Greater Manchester	27·565
Merseyside	
Knowsley	1·409
Liverpool	4·693
St. Helens	1·562
Sefton	2·441
Wirral	2·930
Merseyside Police Authority	0·840
Merseyside Fire and CD Authority	0·397
Merseyside Transport Authority	0·000
Total Merseyside	14·271
South Yorkshire	
Barnsley	1·313
Doncaster	2·004
Rotherham	1·614
Sheffield	4·449
South Yorkshire Police Authority	0·616
South Yorkshire Fire and CD Authority	0·277
South Yorkshire Transport Authority	0·000
Total South Yorkshire	10·272
Tyne and Wear	
Gateshead	1·482
Newcastle upon Tyne	2·894
North Tyneside	1·466
South Tyneside	1·050
Sunderland	2·183
Northumbria Police Authority	0·719
Tyne and Wear Fire & CD Authority	0·267
Tyne and Wear Transport Authority	0·503
Total Tyne and Wear	10·564
West Midlands	
Birmingham	13·506
Coventry	3·195
Dudley	3·290
Sandwell	3·549
Solihull	2·209
Walsall	2·788
Wolverhampton	3·125
West Midlands Police Authority	1·805
West Midlands Fire & CD Authority	0·856
West Midlands Transport Authority	1·602
Total West Midlands	35·925
West Yorkshire	
Bradford	3·623
Calderdale	1·260
Kirklees	2·489
Leeds	6·291
Wakefield	2·320
West Yorkshire Police Authority	0·968
West Yorkshire Fire & CD Authority	0·433
West Yorkshire Transport Authority	0·812
Total West Yorkshire	18·195
Shire Counties	
Avon	9·415
Bedfordshire	5·753
Berkshire	9·199
Buckinghamshire	7·403
Cambridgeshire	6·496
Cheshire	9·798
Cleveland	6·307
Cornwall	3·665
Cumbria	3·796
Derbyshire	8·609
Devon	8·669
Dorset	6·409
Durham	4·215

	Extra grant after recycling (£ million)
East Sussex	7·432
Essex	16·855
Gloucestershire	4·811
Hampshire	15·434
Hereford and Worcester	6·548
Hertfordshire	11·820
Humberside	7·035
Isle of Wight	0·959
Kent	14·113
Lancashire	10·703
Leicestershire	8·569
Lincolnshire	4·664
Norfolk	7·221
Northamptonshire	5·515
Northumberland	2·383
North Yorkshire	5·629
Nottinghamshire	9·648
Oxfordshire	5·928
Shropshire	3·475
Somerset	3·862
Staffordshire	9·209
Suffolk	5·816
Surrey	11·881
Warwickshire	4·956
West Sussex	7·656
Wiltshire	4·668
Avon	
Bath	0·000
Bristol	0·599
Kingswood	0·098
Northavon	0·171
Wansdyke	0·116
Woodspring	0·192
Bedfordshire	
North Bedfordshire	0·217
Luton	0·340
Mid Bedfordshire	0·137
South Bedfordshire	0·091
Berkshire	
Bracknell	0·190
Newbury	0·197
Reading	0·289
Slough	0·302
Windsor and Maidenhead	0·267
Wokingham	0·189
Buckinghamshire	
Aylesbury Vale	0·243
South Bucks	0·000
Chiltern	0·000
Milton Keynes	0·245
Wycombe	0·339
Cambridgeshire	
Cambridge	0·291
East Cambridgeshire	0·079
Fenland	0·096
Huntingdonshire	0·171
Peterborough	0·207
South Cambridgeshire	0·208
Cheshire	
Chester	0·174
Congleton	0·103
Crewe and Nantwich	0·122
Ellesmere Port and Neston	0·069
Halton	0·179
Macclesfield	0·222
Vale Royal	0·147
Warrington	0·261
Cleveland	
Hartlepool	0·119
Langbaurgh	0·211
Middlesbrough	0·163
Stockton-on-tees	0·273
Cornwall	
Caradon	0·068
Carrick	0·086
Kerrier	0·093
North Cornwall	0·070
Penwith	0·058
Restormel	0·101
Cumbria	
Allerdale	0·084
Barrow in Furness	0·067
Carlisle	0·101
Copeland	0·068
Eden	0·042
South Lakeland	0·097
Derbyshire	
Amber Valley	0·115
Bolsover	0·061
Chesterfield	0·122
Derby	0·315
Erewash	0·120
High Peak	0·089
North East Derbyshire	0·085
South Derbyshire	0·098
West Derbyshire	0·067
Devon	
East Devon	0·122
Exeter	0·195
North Devon	0·074
Plymouth	0·413
South Hams	0·065
Teignbridge	0·099
Mid Devon	0·052
Torbay	0·189
Torridge	0·036
West Devon	0·039
Dorset	
Bournemouth	0·284
Christchurch	0·062
North Dorset	0·058
Poole	0·215
Purbeck	0·063
West Dorset	0·099
Weymouth and Portland	0·075
Wimborne	0·083
Durham	
Chester-le-Street	0·040
Darlington	0·117
Derwentside	0·062
Durham	0·079
Easington	0·076
Sedgefield	0·066
Teesdale	0·021
Wear Valley	0·045
East Sussex	
Brighton	0·255
Eastbourne	0·150
Hastings	0·114
Hove	0·156
Lewes	0·113
Rother	0·093
Wealden	0·127
Essex	
Basildon	0·000

	Extra grant after recycling (£ million)
Braintree	0·152
Brentwood	0·103
Castle Point	0·117
Chelmsford	0·303
Colchester	0·261
Epping Forest	0·120
Harlow	0·000
Maldon	0·081
Rochford	0·101
Southend-on-Sea	0·284
Tendring	0·148
Thurrock	0·000
Uttlesford	0·082
Gloucestershire	
Cheltenham	0·176
Cotswold	0·090
Forest of Dean	0·064
Gloucester	0·171
Stroud	0·118
Tewkesbury	0·123
Hampshire	
Basingstoke and Deane	0·209
East Hampshire	0·109
Eastleigh	0·146
Fareham	0·131
Gosport	0·112
Hart	0·099
Havant	0·208
New Forest	0·206
Portsmouth	0·237
Rushmoor	0·123
Southampton	0·342
Test Valley	0·134
Winchester	0·126
Hereford and Worcester	
Bromsgrove	0·130
Hereford	0·071
Leominster	0·035
Malvern Hills	0·093
Redditch	0·115
South Herefordshire	0·054
Worcester	0·132
Wychavon	0·137
Wyre Forest	0·113
Hertfordshire	
Broxbourne	0·119
Dacorum	0·224
East Hertfordshire	0·167
Hertsmere	0·055
North Hertfordshire	0·179
St. Albans	0·231
Stevenage	0·000
Three Rivers	0·125
Watford	0·167
Welwyn Hatfield	0·000
Humberside	
Beverley	0·119
Boothferry	0·054
Cleethorpes	0·087
Glanford	0·089
Great Grimsby	0·148
Holderness	0·053
Kingston upon Hull	0·377
East Yorkshire	0·072
Scunthorpe	0·078
Isle of Wight	
Medina	0·086
South Wight	0·062
Kent	
Ashford	0·110

	Extra grant after recycling (£ million)
Canterbury	0·141
Dartford	0·098
Dover	0·120
Gillingham	0·000
Gravesham	0·121
Maidstone	0·173
Roschester upon Medway	0·267
Sevenoaks	0·131
Shepway	0·120
Swale	0·123
Thanet	0·156
Tonbridge	0·132
Tunbridge Wells	0·118
Lancashire	
Blackburn	0·124
Blackpool	0·227
Burnley	0·066
Chorley	0·088
Fylde	0·086
Hyndburn	0·067
Lancaster	0·136
Pendle	0·061
Preston	0·157
Ribble Valley	0·045
Rossendale	0·041
South Ribble	0·102
West Lancashire	0·125
Wyre	0·100
Leicestershire	
Blaby	0·098
Charnwood	0·227
Harborough	0·075
Hinckley and Bosworth	0·127
Leicester	0·431
Melton	0·053
North West Leicestershire	0·101
Oadby and Wigston	0·087
Rutland	0·038
Lincolnshire	
Boston	0·063
East Lindsey	0·122
Lincoln	0·118
North Kesteven	0·077
South Holland	0·063
South Kesteven	0·131
West Lindsey	0·075
Norfolk	
Breckland	0·118
Broadland	0·105
Great Yarmouth	0·116
North Norfolk	0·107
Norwich	0·216
South Norfolk	0·106
King's Lynn and West Norfolk	0·153
Northamptonshire	
Corby	0·083
Daventry	0·089
East Northamptonshire	0·092
Kettering	0·080
Northampton	0·375
South Northamptonshire	0·089
Wellingborough	0·083
Northumberland	
Alnwick	0·030
Berwick-upon-Tweed	0·029
Blyth Vally	0·065
Castle Morpeth	0·061
Tynedale	0·054
Wansbeck	0·065
North Yorkshire	

	Extra grant after recycling (£ million)
Craven	0·044
Hambleton	0·079
Harrogate	0·145
Richmondshire	0·042
Ryedale	0·076
Scarborough	0·101
Selby	0·092
York	0·155
Nottinghamshire	
Ashfield	0·107
Bassetlaw	0·000
Broxtowe	0·122
Gedling	0·116
Mansfield	0·076
Newark and Sherwood	0·113
Nottingham	0·556
Rushcliffe	0·130
Oxfordshire	
Cherwell	0·230
Oxford	0·279
South Oxfordshire	0·219
Vale of White Horse	0·243
West Oxfordshire	0·106
Shropshire	
Bridgnorth	0·062
North Shropshire	0·050
Oswestry	0·031
Shrewsbury and Atcham	0·118
South Shropshire	0·030
The Wrekin	0·153
Somerset	
Mendip	0·113
Sedgemore	0·101
Taunton Deane	0·111
West Somerset	0·065
South Somerset	0·177
Staffordshire	
Cannock Chase	0·112
East Staffordshire	0·136
Lichfield	0·129
Newcastle-under-Lyme	0·135
South Staffordshire	0·130
Stafford	0·170
Staffordshire Moorlands	0·097
Stoke-on-Trent	0·327
Tamworth	0·083
Suffolk	
Babergh	0·090
Forest Heath	0·056
Ipswich	0·219
Mid Suffolk	0·076
St. Edmundsbury	0·131
Suffolk Coastal	0·134
Waveney	0·119
Surrey	
Elmbridge	0·000
Epsom and Ewell	0·000
Guildford	0·253
Mole Valley	0·127
Reigate and Banstead	0·000
Runnymede	0·131
Spelthorne	0·021
Surrey Heath	0·112
Tandridge	0·115
Waverley	0·177
Woking	0·151
Warwickshire	
North Warwickshire	0·079
Nuneaton and Bedworth	0·117
Rugby	0·121
Stratford on Avon	0·149
Warwick	0·193
West Sussex	
Adur	0·080
Arun	0·162
Chichester	0·133
Crawley	0·000
Horsham	0·134
Mid Sussex	0·161
Worthing	0·154
Wiltshire	
Kennet	0·068
North Wiltshire	0·103
Salisbury	0·138
Thamesdown	0·169
West Wiltshire	0·122
Isles of Scilly	0·030

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Outgoers Scheme

Mr. Hunter asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the arrangements for the outgoers scheme for 1986-87.

Mr. Gummer: The proposal for a Community outgoers scheme is still being considered by the Council of Ministers. It is too early to give any indication of how the scheme, if adopted, would operate, but I am concerned that any such scheme should reflect the interests of all concerned and operate fairly throughout the Community.

The outgoers scheme for England and Wales remains open for the time being.

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate the commission has made of the increased production of other commodities if its proposals for a new outgoers scheme for dairy farmers is implemented.

Mr. Gummer [*pursuant to his reply*, 4 March 1986, c. *89*]: In the financial analyses of the proposed Community outgoers scheme and the price fixing proposals, the Commission has estimated that beef production will increase by around 120,000 tonnes in 1986-87. However, it anticipates a fall during subsequent years since there will be fewer calves produced by the dairy herd and therefore fewer adult cattle slaughtered at two to three years.

No quantitative estimate of the effects on other agricultural production is given.

Milk Quotas

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether progress is being made in permitting greater flexibility in the transfer and acquisition of milk quotas.

Mr. Gummer: I attach great importance to obtaining greater flexibility in the transfer of quota between

producers. We are actively considering what might be done for the 1986-87 milk year, and we hope to make an announcement shortly.

EC (Food Sales)

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent special sales of surplus food and wine have been agreed by the management committee of the EEC; and if he will specify the amounts of food and wine and the sale prices, respectively, expressed in pence per pound.

Mr. Gummer [*pursuant to his reply*, 27 February 1986, c. *643*]: At any one time CAP arrangements provide for a number of schemes to sell intervention stocks. These schemes tend to follow established patterns, but the following recent schemes have distinguishing features:

(i) *Beef: Regulation 2670/85 of 23 September 1985*

This regulation makes available beef bought into intervention after 31 December 1983, but at least three months before the time it is taken over by the purchaser. Purchase applications must be for a minimum of 40,000 tonnes (bone-in equivalent). Prices are as follows:

	ecu/100 kg	*p/lb*
Bone-in Beef		
Forequarters	108.0	30.3
Hindquarters	200.0	56.1
Boneless Beef		
Higher value cuts eligible for export refund	245.0	68·8
Lower value cuts eligible for export refund	141·0	39·6
Lower value cuts not eligible for export refund	47·5	13·3

Sales are to traders who must export the beef to one of the destinations for which an export refund is fixed. Information on quantities sold is not available.

(ii) *Beef: Regulation 2906/85 of 18 October 1985*

This regulation makes 39,900 tonnes of beef available for sale for processing within the Community with special provision for reduced prices if the processed beef is used as part of a food aid programme organised by a member state. Prices are:

	If for Food Aid		*Other*	
	ecu/100 kg	*p/lb*	*ecu/100 kg*	*p/lb*
Forequarters	115·0	32·3	153·0	43·5
Hindquarters	65·0	18·2	95·0	26·7

Information on quantities sold is not available.

(iii) *Currants: Regulation 352/86 of 18 February 1986*

This regulation makes 750 tonnes of 1984 crop currants available for sale for use in sauces and pickles. Prices are as follows:

ecu/100 kg	*p/lb*
35	9·8

None has yet been sold.

(iv) *Butter*

The European Commission has proposed the sale of intervention butter at a reduced price to certain countries, including the USSR, India and Pakistan. The butter will be at least 18 months old and the amount of the price reduction will be determined by competitive tender. Normal export refunds will apply. The first invitation to tender under these arrangements closes on 18 March. It is not possible to give any details of quantities or price or to say whether such sales will in fact take place until the results of the tender are known.

Liquid Skimmed Milk

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much liquid skimmed milk was subsidised for use as stockfeed in 1985 to date in the United Kingdom; and what was the cost of the subsidies involved.

Mr. Gummer [*pursuant to his reply*, 3 March 1986, c. *10*: The quantity of subsidised liquid skimmed milk used a stockfeed in the United Kingdom in 1985 was 514·8 million litres for which subsidy payments were £34·5 million. Figures are not yet available covering use during the current year.

EC (Agricultural Expenditure)

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the total amount of agricultural spending by the EEC which is permitted in terms of the strict budgetary controls agreed at the European Council; and what estimate has been made by the Commission of the likely expenditure in 1986 if its farm prices and other agricultural measures are agreed.

Mr. Jopling [*pursuant to the reply*, 4 March 1986, c. *89*]: The financial guideline, which forms part of the Council's conclusions on budget discipline, provides that expenditure relating to agricultural markets shall increase by less than the rate of growth of the own resources base. The guideline for 1986 is 20,619 mecu. This figure was fixed in relation to the Community of 10 member states, and the question of how the guideline calculation should be adopted to take account of the accession of Spain and Portugal is still under consideration by the Council of Finance Ministers.

The Commission has estimated that expenditure in 1986 for the 10 member states under the EAGGF guarantee section (other than fisheries) will be 21,235 mecu if its proposals on prices, related measures and supplementary stock disposals are agreed.

The equivalent figure, including expenditure in Spain and Portugal, is 21,802 mecu.

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to inform hon. Members of the detailed proposals in the 1986 farm price review of the EEC before the debate on the subject which is to take place on Monday 10 March; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer [*pursuant to his reply*, 4 March 1986, c. *89*]: Four documents containing the bulk of the Commission's detailed proposals were deposited in both Houses on 27 February, and the remaining document on 3 March. My Department has provided the usual explanatory memoranda. All these documents are available in the Vote Office. I am myself meeting the European Legislation Committee today to discuss the Commission's proposals; and I hope that this will put the Committee in a position to report to the House before the debate.

NATIONAL FINANCE

European Community Budget

77. **Mr. Deakins** asked Chancellor of the Exchequer when the European Economic Community Council will next consider its legal action against the Assembly over the 1986 budget.

Mr. Brooke: The Council lodged its formal application with the Court on 10 February. It will consider the

situation again once the European Parliament has taken the next step in the proceedings. The Parliament's defence has to be lodged by 12 March.

Government Departments (Costs)

Mr. Ralph Howell asked Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will set out the estimated costs of pay, accommodation and other similar services for each central Government Department in 1984-85, in the same manner as in the reply to the hon. Member for Norfolk, North on 2 March 1982, *Official Report*, columns *112-4*.

Mr. MacGregor: The 1984-85 outturn figures are being collected in the form requested, and I will write to my hon. Friend as soon as the information is available.

Car Tax

Mr. Neil Thorne asked Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received regarding the removal of the special 10 per cent. car tax.

Mr. Brooke: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 16 January at columns 1200-1201 to my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey).

Tax Offices (Access)

Mr. Alfred Morris asked Chancellor of the Exchequer if he is satisfied with access provisions for disabled employees and taxpayers to tax offices; if there is any action he will be taking to improve such access; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lawson: The Inland Revenue, in conjunction with the Property Services Agency, tries to ensure that all new tax offices have satisfactory access facilities for disabled people and that existing buildings are adapted to meet their needs so far as is practicable. If the right hon. Member has a specific problem in mind, perhaps he would write to me.

EC (Budgetary Controls)

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the operation of the strict budgetary controls on European Economic Community spending.

Mr. Brooke: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to him by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 10 February at column *309*.

In addition, my reply of 4 March, at columns *95-96*, to the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) sets out the latest position on the agricultural guideline.

Gold Bullion Market

Mr. Sedgemore asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will set up an inquiry *(a)* into the operation of the gold bullion market and *(b)* to seek to ascertain if any staff, directors or shareholders of Johnson Matthey plc or Johnson Matthey Bankers had any knowledge of or gained benefits directly or indirectly by virtue of gold smuggling and bullion frauds since 1980; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: No, since the Government have full confidence that the existing investigations into bullion-related fraud will be effective. The operation of the bullion and gold scrap market was considered in detail in the recent Customs review of the special VAT accounting scheme for gold dealers. As a result of this review, a number of measures to tighten up the scheme were announced on 4 March.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 6 March 1986

WALES

Welsh Development Agency (Tourism)

Mr. Barry Jones asked the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the amount of cash given by the Welsh Development Agency to specific tourist-related projects in Wales for each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: The Welsh Development Agency provides grant aid to tourist-related projects through its land reclamation and environmental improvement activities. The agency has approved the following expenditure on tourist-related land reclamation and environmental improvement projects since 1981:

	£
1981	278,000
1982	2,322,000
1983	2,316,000
1984	183,000
1985	908,000

The agency looks to the Wales tourist board to take the lead in identifying specific tourism development opportunities and is prepared to consider investing in viable tourist-related projects on a commercial basis.

Radioactive Discharges

Dr. John Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list all the non-nuclear industrial sites in Wales making authorised discharges of uranium and other radioactive materials to the sea.

Mr. Mark Robinson: There are no non-nuclear industrial sites in Wales in possession of an authorisation to discharge radioactive wastes direct to the sea.

Milk Quotas

Dr. Marek asked the Secretary of State for Wales whether any milk quota originally allocated to Wales will be transferred to England.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: Milk quotas were allocated to individual producers within the England and Wales Milk Marketing Board area.

Transfers of quota between producers are a matter for the parties concerned within the scope of the relevant regulations. There is no evidence of significant cross-border quota transfer between England and Wales.

Welsh Water Authority

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will now publish the figures of the Welsh water authority for *(a)* the total planned capital expenditure for 1986-87 and *(b)* the projected internal financial resources available for capital expenditure for 1986-87; and if he will compare both these to corresponding figures for 1985-86.

Mr. Mark Robinson: The Welsh water authority's total planned capital expenditure for 1986-87, as published in the recent Government's public expenditure White Paper (Cmnd. 9702), is £61 million; the projected internal resources are £45 million. The corresponding figures for 1985-86 were £53 million and £33 million respectively.

Welsh Bureau (Brussels)

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Wales whether his Department has been involved in recent discussions aimed at setting up a Welsh bureau in Brussels; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: My Department has not been involved in these discussions. I am satisfied with the Government's arrangements for representing Welsh interests in the Community.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Village Schools

Mr. Tom Cox asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what has been the number of village schools that have been closed each year since 1979 in Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire.

Mr. Dunn: The information requested is as follows:

	1979	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*
Norfolk	2	6	7	11	16	12	14	—
Suffolk	—	—	—	—	—	3	—	—
Cambridgeshire	—	1	7	7	1	2	5	—

Students

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the number of students who have entered full-time undergraduate and post-graduate courses at universities or polytechnics in each academic year since 1978-79.

Mr. Walden: First year student numbers on first degree and postgraduate courses in Great Britain were as follows:

(Thousands)

	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984
Postgraduate students	40·4	40·5	40·4	42·2	40·1	42·4	43·6
First degree students	123·1	127·0	129·3	134·9	135·3	132·1	133·8

Annual Report

Mr. Freud asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received in respect of the annual report to Parliament by holders of his office; and how many of these advocated discontinuance of the report.

Sir Keith Joseph: I am not aware of any such representations.

Mr. Freud asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what was the cost of his annual report to Parliament in each of the last three years; and how many copies of the report were produced in each year.

Sir Keith Joseph: The main cost to the Department arises from the time spent by officials in preparing the report and is estimated to amount to over £15,000 each year. The number of copies printed in each of the last three years is as follows:

Annual report	*Published*	*Total number of copies printed by HMSO*
1982	1983	2,000
1983	1984	1,800
1984	1985	1,700

Education Standards

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what evidence he has to indicate that higher education standards need to be raised, as stated in paragraph 1.7 of the Green Paper.

Mr. Walden: My right hon. Friend regards it as axiomatic that all educational institutions should at all times seek to pursue higher standards. Concern for the maintenance and enhancement of standards is reflected in various ways in the volumes published as part of the Leverhulme programme of study into the future of higher education, in the advice on future strategy for higher education published by the University Grants Committee and by the National Advisory Body for Local Authority Higher Education (now the National Advisory Body for Public Sector Higher Education) in September 1984, in the report "Academic Validation in Public Sector Higher Education" (Cmnd 9501) and in the work of the group established by the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals on the maintenance and monitoring of academic quality and standards.

Education and Employment

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what recommendations were submitted to him by the University Grants Committee in respect of links between higher education and employment before publication of the Green Paper.

Mr. Walden: The advice of the University Grants Committee to my right hon. Friend is set out in "A Strategy for Higher Education into the 1990s" published in September 1984, and in particular in section 3 of that report.

Assisted Places

Mr. Freud asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will list the four schools which have been given dispensation from the 60 per cent. requirement for the assisted places scheme in academic year 1985-86.

Mr. Dunn: The information is as follows:

Epsom College
Leeds Girls' High School
St. Peter's School, York
St. Swinthun's School, Winchester

Mr. Freud asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) of 25 February *Official Report*, columns *509-11*, if he will state the figure taken as the Inner London education authority secondary education unit cost; and if he will state the basis of that figure.

Mr. Dunn: The fee levels at assisted places schools were compared with an Inner London education authority secondary schools unit cost of £1,760 for 1983-84. This unit cost includes expenditure on the salaries and wages of all the staff employed in schools except on the preparation of school meals, and on most of the supplies and services provided to schools. It does not include the cost of school meals, central administration and inspection or debt charges.

Mr. Freud asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) of 25 February, *Official Report*, columns *509-11*, if he will state the value in respect of each of the listed assisted places schools of *(a)* charitable status, *(b)* rate relief, *(c)* value added tax concessions on school fees and *(d)* uniform, travel and school meal allowances.

Mr. Dunn: Information is not available as regards parts *(a)*, *(b)* and *(c)*. On *(d)*, for the school year 1984-85, average payments per pupil were £65.

Mr. Freud asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) of 25 February, *Official Report*, columns *509-11*, what information is available to his Department as to the social and academic intakes of the assisted places schools and the Inner London education authority schools, respectively; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dunn: Information in respect of individual pupils taking part in the assisted places scheme is not collected by the Department.

Mr. Freud asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) of 25 February, *Official*

Report, columns *509-11*, what information he has as to the level of parental contributions made to the assisted places schools and the Inner London education authority schools concerned, respectively; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dunn: Detailed information on individual parental contributions is not available. The average parental contribution for the school year 1984-85 was £333. The fee levels in the cited answer took no account of any remission under the assisted places schemes.

Mr. Freud asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) of 25 February, *Official Report*, columns *509-11*, how far the fee levels for the listed assisted places schools take into account charitable status and tax concessions on school fees; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dunn: The information requested is not available centrally.

Governing Bodies

Mr. Freud asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will now take steps to collect information in respect of those local authorities where people under the age of 18 years are permitted full governor status on governing bodies of educational institutions; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Dunn: There is no evident reason to collect information on present practice. In the Government's view, a school or college governorship is an office of public and pecuniary trust and thus may not be properly held by a minor. The Education Bill currently before Parliament proposes to put the matter beyond doubt.

School Costs, Intake and Achievement

Mr. Freud asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if any research is currently being funded by his Department into the differences in school costs, intake and achievement of pupils in selective and non-selective secondary schools; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dunn: The Department is not currently funding research which considers the differences in these respects between selective and non-selective schools. However, as my right hon. Friend announced in the House on 14 November 1984, at column 697, he is considering a number of proposals for wider ranging research into the factors affecting performance in schools including the organisation of the schools, along with other factors.

ENERGY

NEI Peebles Ltd

Mr. Ron Brown asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he has received recent representations from NEI Peebles Ltd about the electricity supply industry's ordering programme.

Mr. Goodlad: No. However I understand that this company and other transformer manufacturers have proposed in the NEDO heavy electrical machinery group, an accelerated transformer replacement programme to reduce electrical transmission losses in the public supply system. This proposal has been considered by the electricity supply industry not to be economically justified.

Radioactive Material

Mr. Frank Cook asked the Secretary of State for Energy at what stage the nuclear installations inspectorate is in preparing preconstruction licensing procedures for Land 2 disposal facilities.

Mr. Goodlad: The nuclear installations inspectorate of the Health and Safety Executive is in the process of preparing preconstruction licensing procedures for shallow land facilities for the disposal of radioactive waste.

Mr. Frank Cook asked the Secretary of State for Energy if the nuclear installations inspectorate has set down requirements for the design, commissioning, safety and operation of Land 2 disposal facilities.

Mr. Goodlad: The requirements for setting up and operating waste disposal facilities will, as with other nuclear installations, be formulated in the conditions attached to the nuclear site licence. These conditions, which will be on the same lines as those attached to existing nuclear site licences are in the course of development within the NII.

Electricity Prices

Mr. Stern asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list, per kWh at January 1986 prices, the estimated cost of electricity to be purchased from Electricite de France, and that produced at Hinckley B advanced gas-cooled reactor.

Mr. Goodlad: Information for Hinkley B AGR was published in the Central Electricity Generating Board's booklet "Analysis of Generation Costs 1983-84 Update". This showed costs ranging between 1·5p/kWh and 2·64p/kWh depending on the method of calculation. I shall arrange for the CEGB to write to my hon. Friend giving figures adjusted to March 1986 price levels.

Details of the CEGB's purchases of electricity from Electricite de France are commercially confidential but the board has stated that EdF will provide a commercial supply of electricity to the CEGB for two years at a cost of up to 25 per cent. cheaper than could be generated on average in the United Kingdom.

Oil Production

Mr. Bell asked the Secretary of State for Energy what information he has as to the oil production in million barrels per day for the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries in the years 1978, 1979, 1980, 1981, 1982, 1983, 1984 and 1985.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: Production of oil by members of OPEC is estimated by British Petroleum to have been as follows:

	Million barrels per day
1978	30·3
1979	31·5
1980	27·5

	Million barrels per day
1981	23·4
1982	19·9
1983	18·5
1984	18·3

Source: BP 1985 Statistical Review of World Energy.
Note: Production includes crude oil, shale oil, oil sands and Natural Gas Liquids.

No figures have yet been published for 1985. This publication is in the House of Commons Library.

Mr. Bell asked the Secretary of State for Energy what information he has as to how many barrels per day on average each individual Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries member country produced for the years 1978, 1979, 1980, 1981, 1982, 1983, 1984 and 1985.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: Information about individual OPEC countries' oil production is available from a number of sources; one which is readily available is the 1985 "BP Statistical Review of World Energy", page 5. Further information about crude oil production — ie excluding NGL's and some condensates — can be obtained from the OPEC Annual Statistical Bulletin for 1984. Both publications are in the House of Commons Library. Data for 1985 is not yet published.

Mr. Bell asked the Secretary of State for Energy how many barrels of oil were produced per day from the North sea for the years 1978, 1979, 1980, 1981, 1982, 1983, 1984 and 1985.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: Average United Kingdom production of crude oil and NGL's for the years requested is shown below. The figures are taken from the Brown Book, coverted to millions of barrels per day. 1985 total is provisional:

	Millions of barrels per day
1978	1·11
1979	1·60
1980	1·66
1981	1·84
1982	2·14
1983	2·38
1984	2·61
1985	2·66

Mr. Bell asked the Secretary of State for Energy what were the average prices of North sea crude oil for the years 1978, 1979, 1980, 1981, 1982, 1983, 1984 and 1985.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: Average price of North sea crude oil expressed as dollars per barrel:

	Dollars per barrel
1978	13·8
1979	19·8
1980	30·0
1981	33·8
1982	32·6
1983	29·5
1984	28·3
1985	28·2

Source: Sterling series converted at annual exchange rate to dollars.

Mr. Bell asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he has any plans to meet Sheikh Yamani, the Saudi Arabian Oil Minister, in the near future, to discuss oil prices and production levels; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Walker: No; and no.

Mr. Bell asked the Secretary of State for Energy when he last met the representatives of oil producers in the United Kingdom to discuss oil prices and North sea oil production levels.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: I frequently meet United Kingdom oil producers, both individually and as represented by the United Kingdom Offshore Operators Association and the Association of British Independent Exploration Companies to discuss matters of mutual interest.

Mr. Bell asked the Secretary of State for Energy how much in total has been invested in North sea oil production since 1964.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: Total investment in North sea oil and gas in the prices then ruling, together with exploration expenditure, between 1965 and 1985 inclusive was £36 billion.

Mr. Bell asked the Secretary of State for Energy what is the number of new oilfields which have been opened since 1978 in the North sea.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: Since the end of 1978, 18 new oilfields have commenced production in the United Kingdom sector of the North sea. A further nine fields have been approved and are now being developed but are not yet in production.

Mr. Bell asked the Secretary of State for Energy how many new oilfields are anticipated to be opened, annually, in the years 1986, 1987 and 1988.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: There are six new offshore oilfields and one condensate field which have been approved and which are currently scheduled to begin production before the end of 1988. Of these, two should produce their first oil in 1987, and five in 1988. In addition, a number of other fields are expected to come forward for approval, but it is not possible to say at present whether any of these will be producing by the end of 1988.

Mr. Bell asked the Secretary of State for Energy what information he has about the projected level of investments in North sea oil production for the years 1986, 1987 and 1988.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: The latest forecast produced by the industry of investment in North sea oil and gas production in 1986, 1987 and 1988 was published in the 20th report of the Process Plant Economic Development Committee in August 1985. The figures are:

£ million (fourth quarter 1984 prices)

	1986	1987	1988
Low estimate	2,836	1,405	717
High estimate	4,129	4,037	3,470

Mr. Bell asked the Secretary of State for Energy how many workers are employed in North sea oil production *(a)* on rigs, *(b)* in refineries and *(c)* in module yards.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: The latest estimates available are for September 1985, when some 29,000 people were

employed on installations on the United Kingdom continental shelf, including construction workers and personnel on mobile drilling rigs, service vessels, support barges and survey teams; some 20,700 in the United Kingdom refining industry, and about 10,000 people in module yards.

Mr. Bell asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will state the sterling value of oil exports for the years 1984, 1985 and the expected value for 1986.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: The sterling value of oil exports for 1984 and 1985:

	£ million
1984	14,852
1985	16,050

Source: Current Account of the UK Balance of Payments Press Notice 26 February 1986.

Net oil exports for the above years were £6·9 billion and £8·2 billion respectively. Forecasts of export value for 1986 are not available.

Oil Policy

Mr. Bermingham asked the Secretary of State for Energy what is his policy on oil in the light of current and projected price trends; and what discussions he has held with oil companies about the price implications of this policy.

Mr. Peter Walker: United Kingdom oil production levels are a matter for the producing companies, subject only to technical limits. United Kingdom prices are determined by the world market and the balance of supply and demand. I frequently meet the oil companies to discuss matters of mutual interest.

Gas

Mr. Irving asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement about gas imports and exports and the development of the gas resources of the United Kingdom continental shelf, following the privatisation of the British Gas Corporation.

Mr. Peter Walker: Gas imports and exports can have a major effect on the rate and pattern of the development of UKCS resources, and hence on wider national interest. The Government intend to ensure that this interest is adequately protected and that continuing gas supplies are available to customers in this country. Substantial gas resources are available, or potentially available, both from the UKCS and from overseas sources to enable the new company to meet the needs of its customers for many years ahead. The company will be able to import gas subject to the normal consent requirement for the laying of pipelines across the UKCS and, in appropriate cases, the conclusion of intergovernmental treaties. In addition, Sir Denis Rooke has assured me that the new gas company will consult the Government regarding its import plans as these develop.

There are at present only limited opportunities to sell new gas into Continental markets and access to these markets may add little in the short term to the boost which the Government's policies have already given to UKCS exploration and development. The Government are prepared, nonetheless, to consider applications for waivers on the landing requirement on a case-by-case basis. In doing this, it will take into account considerations relating to the security of the UK's gas supplies without any presumption that exports should not take place in present circumstances.

The Government remain firmly committed to maintaining the pace of UKCS development and intend to ensure, as they have since 1979, that adequate market incentives exist for the exploration, appraisal and development of new gas. There will be no question of the new company discriminating against indigenous gas supplies; or of UKCS gas producers putting at risk this country's security of supply. The Government will keep close watch on terms of trade between suppliers and the new company and will stand ready to act as necessary.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Financial Services Bill (Lord Chancellor)

Mr. Sedgemore asked the Attorney-General if the Lord Chancellor is to divest himself of his interest as a name at Lloyd's before the Financial Services Bill reaches the House of Lords for consideration.

The Attorney-General: No.

Mr. Mohen Nikbakht

Mr. Dickens asked the Attorney-General if he will initiate a prosecution of Mr. Mohen Nikbakht of Greater Manchester for having intercourse with a girl under the age of 16 years, namely, Elham Bahrami; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: I understand that the Greater Manchester police are making inquiries into the matter to which the hon. Member refers and will be submitting a report to the Director of Public Prosecutions. The question of criminal proceedings will be considered at that stage.

PRIME MINISTER

European Community (Food Exports)

Q62. **Mr. Teddy Taylor** asked the Prime Minister when the European Council last discussed the resources devoted from Common Market funds to the export of cheap food to the Soviet Union and east Europe; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: The European Council has not discussed this as a specific topic, at least in recent years.

Mr. Gallagher Daggitt

Q73. **Mr. Dalyell** asked the Prime Minister if, pursuant to her reply of 18 December, *Official Report*, column 160, she will clarify the role of Mr. Gallagher Daggitt of the Department of Education and Science in the strategic defence initiative participation office.

The Prime Minister: Mr. Gallagher Daggitt, who has been seconded to the strategic defence initiative participation office in the Ministry of Defence, has special responsibilities within the office for explaining to higher education institutions and the research councils the opportunities for their participation in the United States strategic defence initiative research programme; and for

liaising between the Ministry of Defence and the Department of Education and Science on strategic defence initiative matters.

Family Assistance

Q107. **Mr. Rathbone** asked the Prime Minister how the activities of the Treasury and the Department of Health and Social Security are being co-ordinated to help families.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Wells) on 24 February at column *409*. As he will see, the examples of co-ordination between the Government's fiscal and social security policies listed there are of particular relevance to families.

Merchant Fleet

Q114. **Sir David Price** asked the Prime Minister what steps she intends to take to seek to reverse the decline in the British merchant fleet.

The Prime Minister: Many of the factors that have led to the reduction in the British merchant fleet over the last decade are outside the control of either the industry or the Government. We are, of course, doing all that we can in international negotiations to create conditions that will give opportunities to British ships and encourage United Kingdom ownership of vessels, preferably under the British flag. At home we are working to reduce the burden of costs and marine regulations.

Social Policy

Mr. Galley asked the Prime Minister if she will list the main achievements of her Government in social policy.

The Prime Minister: This Government have ensured the continued development and improvement of the National Health Service. We have increased spending on the NHS by 21 per cent. in real terms, and taken steps to ensure better value for money from the resources available. More emphasis has been placed on the prevention of health and social problems.

As a result there have been considerable increases in services to patients. In England alone, comparing 1984 and 1978, there were:

—over 750,000 more in-patient cases;
—over 660,000 more day cases;
—over 3 million more out-patient attendances;
—over 750,000 more people treated by district nurses or visited at home by health visitors;
—more than double the number of patients being treated for chronic renal failure;
—over 1,750,000 extra sight tests;
—over 3,750,000 more courses of dental treatment.

The perinatal mortality rate has dropped from 15·4 in 1978 to 10·0 in 1984.

There are many thousands more doctors and nurses working in the Health Service. A major programme of capital investment is under way to restore the damage done by the 35 per cent. cut in capital spending under the previous Government. Capital spending increased from £365 million in 1978-79 to £793 million in 1984-85. In the years 1980-85, 35 major schemes, each worth more than £5 million, were completed. Almost 150 more hospital schemes — worth over £1,100 million — are currently being planned, designed or built.

In order to ensure continued improvements in services to the public, general managers have been appointed by all regional and district health authorities, and many units. Benefits for patients from the cost-improvement programmes put into effect by health authorities are expected to reach £150 million in the current year alone.

In the field of personal social services we have set up the Social Service Inspectorate. The inspectorate's work programme includes the inspection of home help services, community services for mentally ill people and social services for the care of children at risk of abuse. There have been significant improvements in provision. For example, the number of places in day centres for the elderly rose by over 20 per cent. between 1978 and 1984 and there was a 13 per cent. increase in the numbers of home helps.

In the social security field, the Government have maintained the protection of social security benefits against inflation. The uprating to be made in July 1986 will add a further £410 million to social security spending in a full year and take total spending to almost £43 billion in 1986-87. The retirement pension has been raised ahead of prices since 1979 and is being paid to more pensioners than ever before. Help with heating costs has been raised by around £140 million in real terms above the levels of support given in 1978-79. Spending on sick and disabled people has also gone up, by 30 per cent. in real terms over the last five years. At the same time inflation, which led to price increases of over 110 per cent. under the last Labour Government, has been brought under control. That is greatly to the advantage of pensioners and all those on fixed and low incomes.

We have completed the most fundamental and far reaching review of social security carried out since the war. This is now the subject of legislation before the House. Our proposals set out a programme for a modern system of social security that will be simpler to run and to understand; that will give new rights and new opportunities in pensions in addition to the reforms in the Social Security Act 1985; that will improve incentives to save and to earn more; and that will concentrate more help on those who need help most, notably low-income families with children.

We have introduced a range of measures to help the unemployed, particularly those who have been out of work for some time. The expanding community programme will provide 230,000 places this year for some 300,000 long-term unemployed people on projects of value to the community. The enterprise allowance scheme has so far helped 125,000 unemployed people to start their own business. We are developing new measures to help the long-term unemployed. A new job start allowance coupled with a special programme of counselling assistance to find a job or training is being piloted in nine areas. We are establishing a network of job clubs to help people help themselves get back to work. Overall we will be spending some £1,350 million on carefully designed, cost-effective employment measures in 1986-87.

Our principal concern in education has been to raise standards at all ability levels and to obtain better value for money throughout the education system. We have put great emphasis on the need for a closer relationship between the education service and the outside world, particularly industry and commerce.

In schools, this has involved pursuing the objectives set out in the White Paper "Better Schools", in particular

defining with greater clarity the objectives and content of the curriculum; financial support for a pilot initiative to promote technical and vocational education for 14 to 18-year-olds in schools and colleges; the support of a pilot programme for improving the education of lower attaining pupils.

Decisions have been taken to introduce a new system of examinations at 16, the General Certificate of Secondary Education, based on national criteria; to introduce the AS-level examination to broaden A-level studies; and to introduce, and to develop through specially financed pilot projects, records of achievement for all school leavers.

The Education Bill, now before Parliament, will reform school government, giving more influence to parents.

The Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education has been set up to review and evaluate initial teacher training courses and a programme of in-service training grants for school teachers; the Education Bill will make provision for new financial arrangements to make in-service training more effective.

More has been spent per pupil than ever before (a 16 per cent. increase in real terms in the four years to 1983-84) and the best ever overall pupil-teacher ratio of 17·8:1 has been achieved.

Education support grants to target resources on activities of particular current importance have been introduced and reports of formal inspections by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of individual schools and colleges are now published.

Positive and practical policies for meeting the widely varying needs of young people have been implemented through the work of the recently established National Advisory Council for the Youth Service.

A programme of in-service training grants for further education lecturers has been established, together with a range of measures aimed at increasing the responsiveness of the further education sector to the needs of employers. These include: the establishment of college-employer links projects; the introduction of the new certificate of pre-vocational education involving in its first year over 1,000 schools and colleges and over 15,000 students; the reassessment of the system through the review of vocational qualifications; and the encouragement of consultancy work.

A Green Paper on the future of higher education has been issued.

The number of home students in higher education has increased, including a 30 per cent. increase in the numbers on science and engineering courses. This reflects a 15 per cent. growth in the proportion of 18 to 19-year-olds entering higher education and an increase of 12 per cent. in the number of mature entrants. At the same time, measures to preserve and enhance quality, and to increase the cost-effectiveness of the system and its responsiveness to the needs of the economy, have been pursued.

The planned continuation of the significant shift towards science and engineering and other vocational subjects has taken place, with the industry itself contributing £24 million towards institutions included in the engineering and technology programme. Specific measures to link higher education and industry in collaborative projects include the appointment of more industrialists to educational bodies.

There has been a range of initiatives aimed at increasing the responsiveness of higher education to the needs of people needing updating and of the unemployed through the PICKUP and REPLAN programmes respectively. The PICKUP programme is helping to secure an increase in updating education of about 10 per cent. a year, especially in the areas of technology and business studies.

This Government introduced the first ever statutory charter of rights for public sector tenants, including the right to buy their homes. The number of owner-occupied dwellings has increased by 2·25 million in Great Britain since 1979 and owner-occupation is now 62 per cent.; the proportion of young people owning their own homes is now the highest in Europe. Home improvement grants have been made more widely available than ever before. Assistance has been given to the owners of defective houses previously in the puplic sector, and an urban housing renewal unit has been set up to help authorities tackle the problems of their rundown estates. Measures have been introduced to encourage lettings in the private sector.

We have given a new priority to crime prevention activity. We have encouraged a wide range of initiatives involving the police and the community. These initiatives have been supported through a crime prevention unit at the Home Office, through a standing conference on crime prevention, and most recently through a seminar which I chaired at No. 10. The active involvement of all concerned in practical measures to prevent crime is proving an effective way to deal with a wide range of criminal activity, as well as strengthening the relationship between the police and the community.

We have also ensured that adequate resources are devoted to fighting crime. Total manpower (police and civilians) in the police service has increased by over 17,000 since 1979. Total expenditure on the police service in England and Wales has increased from £1·1 billion in 1978-79 to £2·8 billion in 1985-86—an increase of one third in real terms. In addition, we have established a new framework for police powers and for handling complaints against the police, in the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984.

Since 1979 the prison service has been expanded by the recruitment of nearly 3,000 officers, and we have continued the major programme of new prison building and refurbishment of the existing prison estate. Under this programme some 2,000 new inmate places have been created since 1983 and a further 15 prisons are under construction or planned. At the same time, we have been taking steps to improve management and efficiency within the prison service and in particular to forge better lines of communication and accountability.

The Government have developed a comprehensive plan for tackling drug misuse. An information and education campaign has been launched; its outcome will be carefully monitored. Action is being taken to reduce supplies of illicit drugs from abroad; enforcement by Customs and the police has been strengthened. New powers to deter drug traffickers (including measures to confiscate their illicit proceeds) are being taken, and rehabilitation services are being expanded.

We have enabled local authorities to control the spread of sex shops and sex cinemas. We have also given assistance with measures designed to restrict indecent displays, extend licensing controls to commercial cinema clubs, and establish a system of classification for video

recordings aimed at dealing with the problem of "video nasties". In addition, we have supported legislation to penalise kerb crawling.

We have enacted legislation to deal with drunkenness at designated sporting events. Legislation has also been passed for data protection; to provide for the fourth television channel and for the Welsh fourth channel; to provide for the development of direct broadcasting by satellite and for cable television; and arrangements are being made for an experiment in community radio. We have given the franchise to many British citizens abroad and have extended absent voting rights to holidaymakers.

We have given firm support to the voluntary sector. Between 1979-80 and 1984-85 the level of Government grants given to voluntary bodies has risen in real terms by over 50 per cent.

We have operated a firm but fair immigration control, under which the number of immigrants accepted for settlement has fallen to the lowest figure since controls were first imposed on Commonwealth citizens in 1962.

We have taken steps to reduce the pollution of our rivers, estuaries and beaches. The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 was the first piece of major countryside legislation for more than a decade, and represents a significant step forward in the protection of landscape, flora and fauna. We have also taken the initiative in Europe in removing lead from petrol and paint, and we are steadily eradicating it from those water supplies where it is still a problem.

The derelict land programme has been greatly increased. Urban development corporations have been established in London docklands and on Merseyside to bring about the redevelopment of these areas. Twenty-five enterprise zones have been designated. In addition, we are spending substantial sums through various Government programmes on improving conditions in our inner cities. City action teams were established last year to bring together more effectively central Government action in the seven inner city partnership areas. New task forces are being established for eight small inner city areas with particular problems to target more effectively the help that is already being given and to try out new approaches, for which an additional £8 million has been provided. All these measures are having a marked impact on older urban areas in need of regeneration.

Salaries

Mr. Tom Cox asked the Prime Minister what has been the average yearly salary increase to teachers, police and the armed forces since June 1979.

The Prime Minister: The available information is as follows:

	Percentage increase in average gross weekly earnings of adult employees working a full week*			
	Teaching England and Wales: Burnham Committee: primary, secondary and special schools		*Police service Ranks below superintendent*	
	Males	*Females*	*Males*	*Females*
April 1979 to April 1980	17·6	17·9	30·1	28·2
April 1980 to April 1981	36·7	35·4	10·9	18·1
April 1981 to April 1982	1·3	1·5	14·9	13·9
April 1982 to April 1983	8·0	8·3	13·9	17·6
April 1983 to April 1984	4·8	5·1	10·3	8·4
April 1984 to April 1985	6·4	5·8	5·9	6·9

* For April 1979 to April 1983, males aged 21 and over and females aged 18 and over: for April 1983 to April 1985, males and females on adult rates.

Source: New Earnings Survey.

Wholly comparable information for the armed forces is not available, but the military salary index for all ranks of adult male United Kingdom service personnel has shown the following changes between successive financial years:

	Percentage increase
1979-80 to 1980-81	16·0
1980-81 to 1981-82	10·6
1981-82 to 1982-83	5·9
1982-83 to 1983-84	7·3
1983-84 to 1984-85	5·1
1984-85 to 1985-86	9·8

Source: Table 4.17 of Statement of Defence Estimates 1985.2.

Ministers of State (Status)

Mr. J. Enoch Powell asked the Prime Minister if the definition of the status of Ministers of State in relation to the respective departmental Ministers, as given by the hon. Member for Wallasey (Mrs. Chalker), *Official Report*, 13 December, column 1210, applies to all Ministers of State.

The Prime Minister: What my hon. Friend said on 13 December did not and was not intended to imply any change in the status of a Minister of State.

President Aquino

Mr. Parry asked the Prime Minister if she will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's relations with the new Government of President Aquino of the Philippines.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Renton) on 5 March, at column *174*, and to the statement on the Philippines by my hon. Friend on 26 February at column 945. Her Majesty's ambassador in Manila, Mr. McLaren, called on Mrs. Aquino on 27 February to convey my congratulations on her becoming President.

Engagements

Mr. Tom Clarke asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 6 March.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 6 March.

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House, I shall be having further meetings later today, including one with the National Pensioners Convention.

THE ARTS

Philharmonic Orchestra and Hall (Liverpool)

Mr. Hind asked the Minister for the Arts if he will give details of the latest proposals for financing the Liverpool philharmonic hall and Royal Liverpool philharmonic orchestra through the Arts Council and Arts and Libraries Office.

Mr. Luce: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave him on 25 February 1986, at column 479. The additional grant of £137,500 which the Arts Council will make available to the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Society will come from the £25 million in post-abolition funding which the Government are providing for the council.

News International Newspapers

Mr. Cartwright asked the Minister for the Arts, further to his reply to the hon. Member for Woolwich on 24 February, *Official Report*, column *413*, what would be the cost of sending a letter to each of the library authorities in England requiring them under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 to provide information as to the imposition of a ban on News International newspapers in their public libraries.

Mr. Luce: It appears that only a small minority of library authorities are applying a ban. To circulate all authorities would be a disproportionate response at this stage. I hope that the authorities concerned will take account of the views which both the Government and the Library Association have expressed, and end the ban quickly.

Export of Works of Art

Mr. Faulds asked the Minister for the Arts whether the total amount of tax satisfied referred to in his answer of 26 February, *Official Report*, column *593*, included the outstanding balance of £167,786 in respect of the Geoffrey Keynes collection.

Mr. Luce: The previous answer of 26 February referred to objects and property accepted since 2 April 1985. It did not, therefore, include the balance relating to the Geoffrey Keynes collection. This has, however, been paid from the sums available in the current financial year as indicated in the answer given to the hon. Member on 2 April 1985.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Housing Benefit (Rates)

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what figures are available to indicate the total amount of rates paid through housing benefit on each district in Northern Ireland in each of the past two years.

Mr. Needham: A breakdown of expenditure by district is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. However, the total amounts (rounded) of rates rebates paid under the housing benefits scheme in 1984-85 was £20,086,000 and the estimated expenditure for 1985-86 is £22,665,000.

Claimant Statistics

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what figures are available to indicate the number claiming supplementary benefit at each social security office in Northern Ireland; and what further figures are available to indicate the total number of dependants on those claimants.

Mr. Needham: The numbers claiming supplementary benefit at each social security office in Northern Ireland at 19 November 1985, the latest available date, are as set out. Information is not available to indicate the total numbers of dependants on those claimants.

Social Security Office	*Number of Claimants*
Andersonstown	6,898
Antrim	5,706
Armagh	4,639
Ballymena	5,758
Ballymoney	4,229
Ballynahinch	1,305
Banbridge	3,155
Bangor	4,355
Carrickfergus	2,920
Coleraine	5,726
Cookstown	3,432
Corporation Street	11,274
Downpatrick	2,281
Dungannon	5,595
Enniskillen	7,815
Falls Road	9,015
Holywood Road	8,031
Kilkeel	1,314
Knockbreda	6,377
Larne	2,887
Limavady	3,153
Lisburn	6,354
Londonderry	14,146
Lurgan	5,848
Magherfelt	4,584
Newcastle	1,709
Newry	9,244
Newtownabbey	5,722
Newtownards	3,980
Omagh	4,934
Portadown	3,856
Shaftesbury Square	5,989
Shankill	5,758
Strabane	6,176
Totals	184,165

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what figures are available to indicate the numbers claiming unemployment benefit, but not also receiving supplementary benefit, at each social security office in Northern Ireland; and what further figures are available to indicate the total number of dependants on those claimants.

Mr. Needham: The numbers claiming unemployment benefit, but not also receiving supplementary benefit, at each social security office in Northern Ireland, at 9 May 1985, this being the latest available date, and the total number of dependants on those claimants, are as set out:

Social security office	Number of claimants	Number of dependants
Andersonstown	575	35
Antrim	785	40
Armagh	540	30
Ballymena	735	55
Ballymoney	405	10
Ballynahinch	200	25
Banbridge	360	35
Bangor	800	75
Carrickfergus	605	45
Coleraine	685	35
Corporation Street	930	85
Cookstown	295	15
Downpatrick	385	20
Dungannon	545	30
Enniskillen	830	30
Falls Road	535	20
Kilkeel	280	65
Knockbreda	795	65
Holywood Road	1,060	50
Larne	350	30
Limavady	235	25
Lisburn	970	80
Londonderry	1,210	75
Lurgan	700	25
Magherafelt	455	15
Newcastle	180	20
Newry	710	35
Newtownabbey	1,255	50
Newtownards	755	130
Omagh	580	15
Portadown	620	35
Shankill	780	65
Shaftesbury Square	720	30
Strabane	315	20
Totals	21,180	1,415

Uprated from 20 per cent. sample.

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what figures are available to indicate the numbers of supplementary benefit claimants in each social security office in Northern Ireland who are not available for work on the grounds of incapacity or age.

Mr. Needham: The numbers of supplementary benefit claimants in each social security office in Northern Ireland who are not available for work on the grounds of incapacity or age, at 19 November 1985, the latest available date, are as set out:

Social Security Office	Unavailable on age grounds	Unavailable because of incapacity
Andersonstown	968	553
Antrim	1,276	407
Armagh	1,534	413
Ballymena	1,775	509
Ballymoney	1,300	427
Ballynahinch	529	146
Banbridge	1,139	277
Bangor	1,655	341
Carrickfergus	756	231
Coleraine	1,556	462
Cookstown	998	378
Corporation Street	2,770	833
Downpatrick	752	259
Dungannon	1,780	488
Enniskillen	3,043	815
Falls Road	1,663	762
Holywood Road	2,621	610
Kilkeel	483	141
Knockbreda	2,754	469
Larne	730	222
Limavady	759	232
Lisburn	2,081	584
Londonderry	2,832	1,075
Lurgan	1,530	527
Magherafelt	1,562	400
Newcastle	565	162
Newry	2,606	827
Newtownabbey	1,568	441
Newtownards	1,457	329
Omagh	1,528	597
Portadown	1,339	338
Shaftesbury Square	1,660	416
Shankill	1,696	567
Strabane	1,676	550
Totals:	52,941	15,788

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what figures are available to indicate the total number of people receiving housing benefit or housing benefit supplement in each district in Northern Ireland; and what further figures are available to indicate the number of these who receive supplementary benefit, family income supplement, unemployment benefit, and so on.

Mr. Needham: The numbers of people receiving housing benefit and supplementary benefit, including housing benefit supplement, in each district council area in Northern Ireland at 7 February 1986 are shown in the table. Information about the numbers of housing benefit recipients who receive family income supplement, unemployment benefit or other benefits is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

District Council Area	Housing Benefit Recipients	Number of Housing Benefit Recipients on Supplementary Benefit	
		Housing Benefit Supplement	Others
Antrim	4,489	102	2,936
Ards	6,428	201	3,635
Armagh	4,948	100	3,246
Ballymena	5,587	134	3,280
Ballymoney	2,716	54	1,723
Banbridge	3,089	58	1,717
Belfast	46,877	1,036	29,923
Castlereagh	5,470	163	2,728
Carrickfergus	3,384	115	1,986
Coleraine	6,187	188	3,845
Cookstown	3,569	57	2,626
Craigavon	9,329	218	6,140
Derry	12,586	320	9,124
Down	5,250	150	2,856
Dungannon	5,273	59	3,877
Fermanagh	6,162	73	4,245
Larne	3,220	75	1,993
Limavady	3,008	74	2,178
Lisburn	9,612	278	6,393
Magherafelt	3,940	74	2,689
Moyle	1,892	33	1,303
Newtownabbey	8,501	202	5,073
Newry	10,870	167	7,214
North Down	6,059	93	3,285
Omagh	4,825	64	3,098
Strabane	4,952	114	3,677
Total	188,223	4,202	120,790

Supplementary Benefit (Single Payments)

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what were the total numbers of single payments under supplementary benefit regulations made by each social security office in Northern Ireland in 1985; and what information is available to indicate the categories of these payments.

Mr. Needham: The total numbers of single payments under supplementary benefit regulations made by each social security office in Northern Ireland in 1985 are as set out. The additional information requested regarding the categories of these payments is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Social Security Office	*Number of Single Payments in 1985*
Andersonstown	*14,788
Antrim	11,701
Armagh	6,983
Ballymena	5,970
Ballymoney	5,608
Ballynahinch	907
Banbridge	3,470
Bangor	2,972
Carrickfergus	4,919
Coleraine	7,586
Cookstown	5,463
Corporation Street	*15,083
Downpatrick	*3,220
Dungannon	9,388
Enniskillen	7,553
Falls Road	21,003
Holywood Road	11,473
Kilkeel	*1,147
Knockbreda	5,062
Larne	4,264
Limavady	4,896
Lisburn	13,214
Londonderry	*16,683
Lurgan	*9,748
Magherafelt	4,739
Newcastle	2,244
Newry	*12,262
Newtownabbey	*10,428
Newtownards	2,804
Omagh	9,313
Portadown	5,392
Shaftesbury Square	6,089
Shankill	7,163
Strabane	11,558
Totals:	265,093

* Returns incomplete due to industrial action.

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the total value of the single payments made by each social security office in Northern Ireland in 1985; and what information is available to indicate the amount of money spent on each category of single payment.

Mr. Needham: The total value of the single payments under supplementary benefit regulations made by each social security office in Northern Ireland in 1985 is as set out. The additional information requested regarding the amount of money spent on each category of single payment is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Social Security Office	*Total amount paid in single payments** £
Andersonstown	†1,613,161
Antrim	1,384,461
Armagh	740,244
Ballymena	479,616
Ballymoney	512,021
Ballynahinch	86,334
Banbridge	299,745
Bangor	320,203
Carrichfergus	441,089
Cookstown	829,128
Coleraine	786,222
Corporation St.	†1,987,082
Downpatrick	†335,097
Dungannon	1,413,531
Enniskillen	685,700
Falls Road	1,945,540
Holywood Road	1,299,068
Kilkeel	†100,104
Knockbreda	522,886
Larne	337,899
Limavady	471,643
Lisburn	1,613,574
Londonderry	†2,261,626
Lurgan	†1,329,162
Magherafelt	732,800
Newcastle	226,683
Newry	†1,468,584
Newtownards	325,422
Newtownabbey	†915,364
Omagh	1,088,637
Portadown	563,699
Shaftesbury Sq.	984,419
Shankill	706,069
Strabane	1,710,029
Totals	30,516,842

* Rounded to nearest pound.
† Returns incomplete due to industrial action.

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the total number of appeals in 1985 relating to single payments under supplementary benefit regulations in each social security office in Northern Ireland; and what information is available to indicate how many appeals succeeded at review stage, at tribunal or at the commissioner.

Mr. Needham: Social security benefit appeals are heard at 21 centres throughout Northern Ireland, not at each social security office. The total number of appeals in 1985 relating to single payments under supplementary benefit regulations and the numbers of these which were successful at review stage and at tribunal are as set out:

Social Security Appeal Tribunal Area	*Number of Appeals received regarding single payments*	*Number of such Appeals allowed on review*	*Number of such appeals allowed by the Tribunal*
Armagh	72	1	29
Ballymena	209	52	27
Ballymoney	45	13	5
Banbridge	39	—	16
Belfast	1,959	528	305
Coleraine	192	56	44
Cookstown	108	33	17
Downpatrick	65	4	25
Dungannon	318	63	76
Enniskillen	75	28	8

Social Security Appeal Tribunal Area	Number of Appeals received regarding single payments	Number of such Appeals allowed on review	Number of such appeals allowed by the Tribunal
Limavady	55	12	8
Lisburn	22	—	5
Londonderry	430	58	120
Lurgan	142	35	26
Magherafelt	48	3	3
Newcastle	96	15	25
Newry	309	38	116
Newtownards	55	3	14
Omagh	161	51	58
Portadown	43	11	6
Strabane	374	47	53

Appeals to the Social Security Commissioner are normally heard in Belfast and various other towns in the Province. The number of Appeals in 1985 relating to single payments under supplementary benefit regulations which were successful at such hearings was 6.

Claimants (Appeals)

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what figures are available to indicate the number of claimants who had representation at appeal tribunals in each social security office area in Northern Ireland in 1985.

Mr. Needham: Security appeal tribunals sit at 21 centres throughout Northern Ireland, not at each social security office. The numbers of claimants who had representation at appeal tribunals in Northern Ireland in 1985 are as set out:

Social Security Appeal Tribunal Area	Number of Claimants who had representation
Armagh	45
Ballymena	61
Ballymoney	6
Banbridge	50
Belfast	481
Coleraine	66
Cookstown	47
Downpatrick	29
Dungannon	112
Enniskillen	39
Limavady	10
Lisburn	4
Londonderry	310
Lurgan	21
Magherafelt	18
Newcastle	35
Newry	351
Newtownards	37
Omagh	238
Portadown	34
Strabane	215

Prisoners (Strip Searches)

Mr. Archer asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will give a monthly breakdown of strip searches conducted at Armagh prison during 1985 and January 1986 according to reason for search and giving for each month the total number of strip searches and the total number of inmates searched.

Mr. Scott: For the month of January 1986, I refer the right hon. and learned Member to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) on 25 February, at column *495*. The following table sets out the details of the searches conducted at Armagh prison during 1985:

Strip searches conducted at Armagh prison during 1985

Reason for search	Jan.	Feb.	March	April	May	June	July	August	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Total
First admission on remand or awaiting trial	6	8	9	5	10	4	6	2	5	11	5	11	82
First admission on sentence final discharge	23	23	24	9	11	10	13	15	11	12	9	4	164
Attendance remand courts	2	2	—	1	6	1	2	—	2	1	—	2	19
Attendance trial	—	1	1	—	—	2	—	—	—	1	—	3	8
Attendance appeal	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
Attendance bail court	2	8	6	3	3	3	3	2	—	12	4	10	56
Pre-release home leave	—	2	11	10	10	13	3	4	2	1	3	4	63
Compassionate home leave	—	—	—	—	2	6	—	—	—	—	—	—	8
Inter-prison visits	2	2	—	—	—	—	—	2	—	2	2	—	10
Visits to outside hospital	—	2	—	3	1	—	1	—	1	—	—	—	8
Pre-release programme (lifer)	—	2	8	21	21	14	—	—	—	—	—	—	66
Attendance at police station (section 16 Prison Act (NI) 1953)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	3	—	5
Total number of strip searches	36	50	59	52	64	53	28	25	21	42	26	34	490
Total number of inmates searched	26	31	35	21	27	21	22	14	14	23	16	21	271

Mr. Archer asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will give a monthly breakdown of strip searches conducted at the Maze prison during 1985 and January 1986 according to reason for search and giving for each month the total number of strip searches and the total number of inmates searched.

Mr. Scott: The information requested could be supplied only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Archer asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether there are any differences in substance or detail as between men and women prisoners in the procedures used in practice for strip searching in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Scott: Strip searches are carried out on male prisoners in a wider range of circumstances than on females, and the procedures differ in detail.

With male prisoners the search consists of a visual check of the upper and lower parts of the body in turn; no sheet or alternative prison clothing is provided, and the search may take place in a cell, search cubicle or room.

With female inmates the search consists of a visual check either of the upper and lower parts of the body in turn or of the entire body at the choice of the inmate; a top and skirt or a freshly laundered sheet is available for use by female inmates during the searches, which are carried out in a search cubicle affording some degree of privacy.

Mr. Archer asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether there are any differences in substance or detail in the procedures used in practice for strip searching in Northern Ireland compared to *(a)* England, *(b)* Scotland and *(c)* Wales.

Mr. Scott: I understand that the procedures used in Northern Ireland are similar to those used in Great Britain. However, the procedures in Great Britain are matters for my right hon. Friends the Home Secretary and the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Mr. Archer asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on what dates drugs were found during strip searches of prisoners in Armagh prison, the names of the drugs in each case, the quantities, and the sources from which they had been obtained.

Mr. Scott: The information is as follows:

Date and Quantity and Type of Drug	*Where found*
19 April 1983	
15 Valium (5) tablets 2 Serenided tablets	On the floor of the search cubicle under the prisoner's foot.
28 June 1985	
27 Libraxin (2·5 mg) tablets 12 Librium (5 mg) tablets 1 Buscafen (10 mg) tablet 3 Ativan (5 mg) tablets 4 Ativan (2·5 mg) tablets	In items of the prisoners' clothing and in parts of the reception area in which she had previously been.

Mr. Archer asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland at what level of seniority prison officers may, in practice *(a)* take decisions to strip search prisoners and *(b)* make suggestions to more senior officers that particular prisoners be strip searched, in Northern Ireland prisons.

Mr. Scott: The selection of prisoners for strip searching is done by an officer of at least principal officer rank. Where an officer suspects a prisoner of being in possession of illicit material, a special search may be carried out on the authority of the governor, deputy governor or chief officer.

Mr. Archer asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether, in the process of the transfer of prisoners from Armagh prison to Maghaberry prison they will be strip searched on leaving Armagh prison or on reception into Maghaberry prison.

Mr. Scott: It would not be appropriate, before the transfers of the women prisoners from Armagh to Maghaberry, to give information about any aspect of the security arrangements affecting the move.

Mr. Archer asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on what basis strip searches are conducted in Armagh prison; to what extent randomness is a factor; and what grounds prison officers require before conducting such searches.

Mr. Scott: Strip searching is an essential security precaution, whose purpose is to detect small items of contraband which can be concealed easily about the body and cannot reliably be detected by other means of searching.

Prisoners at Armagh prison are routinely strip-searched on admission into and when discharged from the prison, when going and returning from home leave and before going on inter-prison visits. On all other occasions, including attendance at court, the searches are carried out on the basis of random selection; this is done so as to avoid any readily discernible pattern of searching. Strip searches may also be carried out in any particular case where an officer has grounds for suspecting a prisoner of possessing any illicit item.

Nuclear Bunkers

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if a bunker connected with Gough barracks, Armagh, features in the Government's contingency plans for the event of actual or threatened nuclear attack.

Mr. Scott [*pursuant to his reply*, 5 March 1986, c. *171-72*]: Gough barracks does not feature in civil defence contingency plans.

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland why the Government have decided that the proposed new nuclear bunkers should not be sited in the area which houses the normal peacetime administration of Northern Ireland.

Mr. Scott [*pursuant to his reply*, 5 March 1986, c. *171-72*]: The risk of breakdown of public administration is considerably lessened by locating alternative administrative centres from the peacetime headquarters.

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement outlining the condition of Belfast in the event of nuclear attack as assessed by the Government in their consideration of the plans for the three new bunkers.

Mr. Scott [*pursuant to his reply*, 5 March 1986, c. *171-72*]: The Government cannot forecast targets which may be chosen for attack by a hostile power in the event of war. The extent of the destruction caused by a nuclear attack would vary with the scale and nature of the attack.

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the proposed arrangements following completion of the three new nuclear bunkers outlining what actual affairs will be managed or monitored from each of the bunkers.

Mr. Scott [*pursuant to his reply*, 5 March 1986, c. *171-72*]: It is intended that essential services to the community will be co-ordinated from three proposed civil defence centres should normal peacetime arrangements for these services be threatened or damaged during a war emergency.

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the latest estimate for the cost of building the three new nuclear bunkers; what proportion of this is accounted for by security costs; and what is the estimated cost of maintaining the bunkers once they have been built.

Mr. Scott [*pursuant to his reply*, 5 March 1986, c. *171-72*]: The latest estimate of the cost of building the

three proposed civil defence centres in Northern Ireland is £7·8 million. Included in this sum is a figure of £540,000 for site security. The cost of maintaining the centres when constructed has not been precisely determined, but it will be relatively low because the buildings will not normally be staffed in peacetime.

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what role the civil defence main control building in Mount Eden park, Belfast, will play in the new arrangements following completion o the three nuclear bunkers.

Mr. Scott [*pursuant to his reply*, 5 March 1986, c. *171-72*]: No decision has yet been taken on the long-term role of the building at Mount Eden park.

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when work will begin on the proposed three new nuclear bunkers in Northern Ireland; when it will be completed; and what role the Property Services Agency will have in the development of the three proposed sites.

Mr. Scott [*pursuant to his reply*, 5 March 1986, c. *171-72*]: Construction of the three civil defence centres is now scheduled to start in 1987 and to be completed in 1989. The buildings were designed by a project team from the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland and construction will be supervised by them. The Property Services Agency, although not directly involved in the project, has made available to the design team its considerable experience of similar buildings in Great Britain.

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statment outlining the restrictions or vetting to be imposed on the selection of contractors and employees at the sites of the proposed three nuclear bunkers; under what restrictions workers at the sites will operate; and if he will make a statement outlining what type of security measures will be taken around the sites to prevent public access or view.

Mr. Scott [*pursuant to his reply*, 5 March 1986, c. *171-72*]: Arrangements for contractors and their employees will be the same as for those employed for other Government building work. It is intended to provide commercial site security during construction. The public will, therefore, not be permitted access during construction, but no special measures are envisaged to prevent public view.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Manufacturing Industry

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry in which sectors of United Kingdom manufacturing industry there has been an overseas trade surplus in each of the past six years.

Mr. Alan Clark: In each of the following groups of the standard industrial classification (1980) there has been an overseas trade surplus in each of the years 1979-1984:

Group

222 Steel tubes
233 Salt extraction and refining
241 Structural clay products
244 Asbestos goods
248 Refractory and ceramic goods
251 Basic industrial chemicals
255 Paint, varnish and printing ink
256 Special industrial and agricultural chemicals
257 Pharmaceutical products
258 Soap and toilet preparations
260 Man-made fibres
311 Foundries
312 Forging, pressing and stamping
320 Industrial plant and steelwork
321 Agricultural machinery and tractors
323 Textile machinery
324 Machinery for food, chemical and process engineering industries
325 Mining, construction and mechanical handling equipment
328 Other machinery and mechanical equipment
329 Ordnance, small arms and ammunition
341 Insulated wires and cables
342 Basic electrical equipment
344 Electronic equipment, capital goods and telecommunications equipment
353 Motor vehicle parts
361 Shipbuilding and repairing
362 Railway and tramway vehicles
364 Aerospace equipment manufacturing and repairing
365 Other vehicles
371 Measuring, checking and precision instruments
372 Medical and surgical equipment and orthopaedic appliances
419 Bread, biscuits and flour confectionery
424 Spirit distilling and compounding
427 Brewing and malting
429 Tobacco
431 Woollen and worsted industry
434 Flax etc spinning and weaving
475 Printing and publishing
481 Rubber products

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry in which sectors of United Kingdom manufacturing industry there has been, since 1979, a trend towards a smaller overseas trade deficit or a larger overseas trade surplus.

Mr. Alan Clark: Trade balances tend to be erratic from year to year and steady trends are uncommon. The following groups of the standard industrial classification (1980) have shown a firmly established, but not necessarily regular, improvement in trade balances since 1979:

SIC Group

233 Salt extraction and refining
245 Working of stone and other non-metal minerals not elsewhere specified
256 Special industrial and agricultural chemicals
257 Pharmaceutical products
424 Spirit distilling and compounding
434 Flax etc spinning and weaving
464 Wooden containers
475 Printing and publishing

Electronics Industry

Mr. Richard Page asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will seek minimum levels of local content in electronic products of overseas manufacturers selectively assisted with inward investment projects.

Mr. Butcher: When offering selective financial assistance, the Government seek to maximise the overall national benefit, if appropriate including the level of local content envisaged.

Mr. Richard Page asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the level of Government

support for the microelectronics industry for 1984 and 1985; and what information he has on comparable figures for France, Germany and Japan.

Mr. Butcher: The level of Department of Trade and Industry support for the United Kingdom microelectronics industry was £26 million in the 1984-85 financial year and is likely to be about £35 million in the current year. Since these figures include assistance under investment, regional and collaborative research support programmes, we do not have comparable figures for other countries.

Import Substitution

Mr. Stern asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the effectiveness of his Department's encouragement to import substitution by smaller companies.

Mr. Alan Clark: Much of the Department's work to encourage innovation and improve the competitiveness of British industry has a reduction of imports as one of its effects. In addition, the Government encourage private sector initiatives aimed at identifying opportunities for United Kingdom companies, notably exhibitions of imported products arranged for that purpose. These are of particular benefit to the smaller company.

Oil Exports

Mr. Bell asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what percentage of all goods exported from the United Kingdom *(a)* in volume and *(b)* in value is accounted for by oil exports.

Mr. Alan Clark: The information is as follows:

United Kingdom exports of oil as a percentage of total exports
Balance of payments basis

	Percentage at 1980 prices	*Percentage at current prices*
1980	12·9	12·9
1981	15·5	17·9
1982	20·1	19·2
1983	22·0	20·6
1984	18·8	21·1
1985	22·4	20·6

Consumer Credit Act 1974

Mr. Gould asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to amend section 75 of the Consumer Credit Act 1974; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: Following the full implementation of the Consumer Credit Act in May 1985 I am keeping the operation of the Act as a whole under review but I have no immediate plans to amend section 75 or any of the main provisions of the Act.

Fisheries Council (Tariff Quotas)

Sir Michael Shaw asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the adoption of tariff quotas for fishery products agreed at the Fisheries Council in December 1985.

Mr. Alan Clark: As requested by the House of Commons Select Committee on European Legislation, I wish to explain the agreement by the Government to the adoption of tariff quotas for certain fishery products before the Select Committee had a proper opportunity to scrutinise them. The quotas were associated with a package of measures for the fisheries sector which included proposals for 1986 guide prices. The Select Committee had already recommended that the revised guide prices should be considered further by the House, but that this consideration should not delay their adoption. Their introduction to take effect from 1 January 1986 was of considerable importance to the United Kingdom fishing industry. When the Fisheries Council considered the above package on 16 December, it became clear that early adoption of the guide prices would be dependent on the acceptance of these additional, though short-term, tariff quotas which had been brought forward without warning at a late stage. In order to avoid delay, the United Kingdom agreed to the adoption of all the measures although the tariff quotas had not been scrutinised by Parliament. I regret that the normal parliamentary procedures were not followed on this occasion but, in the circumstances, I hope the House will understand why it was felt best in the overall United Kingdom interest to act in this way.

Cammell Laird

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the original deadline for bids for Vickers Cammell Laird yard; on what basis and on what terms an extension was granted and to whom; what steps he took to satisfy himself that such an extension would enable commercial confidentiality to be maintained for other bids; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Morrison [*pursuant to his reply*, 3 March, c. *43*]: Lazard Brothers, who are handling the sale of the warship yards on behalf of British Shipbuilders, originally invited bids by 12 noon on 25 February. As a result of a request from one bidder on 21 February, and with the agreement of all concerned, Lazards then told all bidders that they should receive bids by 5 pm on Tuesday 25 February. Lazards said they might reject any bid received after that time and date.

I understand that, shortly before 5 pm on 25 February, Lazards agreed to a request from one bidder to receive its bid shortly after 5 pm. Lazards have assured me that no other bid had been received when the request was granted, and that the confidentiality of any bids received was fully respected.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Arms Reductions

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent progress has been made in the discussion with the Soviet Union on arms reductions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: The United Kingdom fully supports the latest United States proposals put forward at the Geneva negotiations, which, with their earlier proposals of 1 November, provide a sound basis for agreement. The immediate Soviet response has been disappointing.

At the talks on mutual and balanced force reductions in Vienna, the East have regrettably failed to match their

words with serious deeds, by reviving old and inadequate verification proposals in their negative reaction to the constructive Western proposal of December 1985.

Libya (Technology)

Mr. Janner asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has received representations from the Government of the United States of America concerning contracts for the supply of technology by the United Kingdom to Libya; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: The Americans have invited us to adopt measures similar to those announced by President Reagan in January but have not made representations about specific contracts. We have assured them that we will do nothing to undercut the United States measures.

UNRWA (Arab Contributions)

Mr. Freeson asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what sums have been contributed by each of the Arab states towards the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for each of the last 10 years, in constant prices.

Mr. Renton: The information is not available in the form requested. The actual contributions by Arab states were as follows:

Contributions by Arab States to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency

Country	*1985*	*1984*	*1983*	*1982*	*1981*	*1980*	*1979*	*1978*	*1977*	*1976*
Bahrain	15,000	15,000	15,000	15,000	15,000	15,000	15,000	15,000	15,000	15,000
Egypt	7,299	7,000	7,299	7,000	8,580	8,580	4,290	8,580	4,290	—
Iraq	—	—	—	500,000	3,500,000	5,121,600	121,600	121,600	121,600	121,600
Jordan	715,233	1,024,000	829,000	749,000	740,003	355,219	268,473	259,008	260,612	252,037
Kuwait	1,100,000	1,100,000	1,100,000	2,100,000	2,100,000	2,100,000	2,100,000	2,100,000	600,000	1,600,000
Lebanon	16,290	44,000	58,562	56,000	62,860	78,184	93,139	75,000	96,620	106,504
Libya	—	927,000	1,431,990	1,250,000	4,250,000	1,250,000	4,000,000	1,000,000	1,000,000	600,000
Morocco	—	38,000	38,000	39,000	59,221	59,220	57,000	—	57,485	45,000
Mauritania	—	—	—	—	—	543	—	—	—	1,000
Oman	25,000	25,000	25,000	25,000	35,000	25,000	25,000	25,000	25,000	25,000
Qatar	—	100,000	100,000	100,000	500,000	250,000	100,000	60,000	60,000	500,000
Saudi Arabia	2,200,000	3,200,000	1,200,000	6,200,000	6,200,000	5,000,000	3,500,000	6,300,000	3,341,091	11,200,000
Sudan	—	—	—	—	6,000	6,027	6,027	—	6,027	6,027
Syria	125,219	126,000	134,918	139,000	168,107	170,444	163,321	109,783	99,558	102,363
Tunisia	—	13,000	11,799	11,000	9,815	8,533	15,984	—	8,000	8,000
United Arab Emirates	—	800,000	—	800,000	800,000	670,000	—	270,000	270,000	270,000

Notes:

(a) Algeria, Djibouti, Somalia, Yemen Arab Republic and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen did not contribute during this period.

(b) Figures are given in US dollars.

(c) Source: Annual Reports of the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency to the General Assembly of the United Nations.

HOME DEPARTMENT

British Citizenship (Indian Subcontinent)

Mr. Dubs asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people from the Indian subcontinent *(a)* applied and *(b)* were registered as British citizens between 1980 and 1985.

Mr. Waddington: The available information on grants of British citizenship by previous nationality is given, for the years 1964 to 1984, in table 4 of Home Office statistical bulletin "Citizenship Statistics United Kingdom 1984" (Issue 21/85). Figures for 1985 will be published in August. Corresponding information on the nationality of applicants for British citizenship is not available.

Heathrow Airport (Armed Police)

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consultations took place with the Police Federation before the decision was taken to arm police officers at Heathrow airport an other airports in Britain.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I understand from the Commissioner that, for reasons of operational urgency, there was insufficient time for formal consultations with the Police Federation before the decision overtly to arm police officers at Heathrow airport was taken; local representatives of the federation were, however, informed as soon as possible thereafter. The only other airport at which police officers are overtly armed is Manchester international airport and I would refer the hon. Member to the reply given by the Prime Minister to a question from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) on 15 January at columns 578-9.

Police Resources

Mr. Forth asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give details of the additional resources made available to the West Mercia constabulary following his answer of 11 February, *Official Report*, column *361*.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn (Mr. Hargreaves) on 12 February at column 463. The budget for the West Mercia police is a matter for the West Mercia police authority.

Libyan Technicians

Mr. Janner asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Libyan technicians are at present training in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Waddington: I regret that this information is not available from immigration records.

Racial Harassment (Metropolitan Police Area)

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will provide figures detailing incidents of racial harassment in the Metropolitan police district, by borough, for each year since 1983.

Mr. Mellor: As stated in the reply to the hon. Member on 6 February at columns 229-30, the term "racial harassment" has no standard definition and no figures are available for it. I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that the available information on recorded racial incidents by borough is as given in the following table. The changes may reflect changes in the extent of recording rather than changes in the number of incidents occurring.

Racial incidents recorded in the Metropolitan police district by borough

Number

Borough	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*
Barking and Dagenham	28	19	28
Barnet, including that part of Hertsmere within the MPD	56	45	52
Bexley	30	18	41
Brent	53	70	120
Bromley	30	13	18
Camden	38	48	62
Croydon	51	40	71
Ealing	72	62	67
Enfield, including those parts of Welwyn, Hatfield and Broxbourne within the MPD	30	34	48
Greenwich	86	84	87
Hackney	31	29	37
Hammersmith/Fulham	13	13	11
Haringey	9	11	34
Harrow	14	51	58
Havering	5	22	18
Hillingdon (except parts in London airport)	2	11	63
Hounslow	56	62	79
Islington	31	60	57
Kensington and Chelsea	2	8	5
Kingston, including those parts of Elmbridge within the MPD	34	19	22
Lambeth	34	33	73
Lewisham	2	17	16
London Airport (parts of Spelthorne and Hillington)	4	3	0
Merton	28	20	56
Newham	99	140	229
Redbridge, including part of Epping Forest	24	21	71
Richmond, including those parts of Spelthorne within the MPD but not in London Airport	30	10	11
Southwark	28	29	49
Sutton, including those parts of Epsom and Ewell and Reigate and Banstead within the MPD	8	13	36
Tower Hamlets	234	414	277
Waltham Forest, including part of Epping Forest	29	20	66
Wandsworth	74	60	67
Westminster	11	16	16
Total MPD	1,276	1,515	*1,945

* Provisional; the total for 1985 is revised from the figure given in the *Official Report*, Vol 91, columns 229-30, following receipt of late reports of a few incidents.

Detained Persons

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will call for reports from chief constables detailing a breakdown of reasons for the detention of those persons held for over 24 hours under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, since 1 January; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will call for reports from chief constables as to how many persons have been detained under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, by district, since it came into force on 1 January for *(a)* up to 24 hours, *(b)* up to 36 hours, *(c)* up to 72 hours and *(d)* up to 96 hours.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Parliament has decided that chief officers of police should be required to publish an annual report of the numbers of persons kept in police detention for more than 24 hours and subsequently released without charge; the number of applications for warrants of further detention and the results of the applications; and, in relation to each warrant of further detention, the period of further detention authorised by it, the period which the person named in it spent in police detention on its authority and whether he was charged or released without charge. This is provided for in section 50 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984. Information on the operation of those parts of the Act for which chief officers of police are required to keep figures (under sections 5, 50 and 55) will be published in Home Office statistical bulletins. It is planned to issue the first of these in the middle of this year, giving statistics on the operation of the Act in the first quarter of 1986. We do not believe the additional statistical exercise would be justified.

AIDS

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the answers to the hon. Member for Leicester, East, *Official Report*, 3 March, column *49*, what information he has concerning (i) the number of prisoners diagnosed as having acquired immune deficiency syndrome and (ii) the number of prisoners who have been diagnosed as having HTLV III antibody positive or who are undergoing tests for viral infectivity.

Mr. Mellor: We have received no report of a current case of diagnosed AIDS in the prison population of England and Wales. Twenty one inmates are reported to have been diagnosed as HTLV III antibody positive and a further three as undergoing an HTLV III antibody test. Statistics relating to other tests are not kept.

Prisoners (Blood Tests)

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will require all prisoners to undergo a blood test at the time of admission to any prison establishment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: There is no statutory power to take blood in the absence of consent. A blood test for medical reasons is considered only if an inmate requests one or if the medical officer judges a test to be clinically appropriate in a particular case and the inmate concerned gives informed consent. One purpose of the medical examination and inquiry to which all inmates are subject on first reception is to establish whether there is a history or risk of infectious disease calling for further medical investigation.

Child Spouses

Mr. Dickens asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his policy on admitting child spouses to the United Kingdom.

Mr. Waddington: The present immigration rules provide for the admission of spouses subject to certain requirements. Immediate steps are being taken to change the immigration rules to prevent the entry as spouses of children under the age of 16.

Mr. Dickens asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department why Elham Bahrami was permitted to enter the United Kingdom from Iran as a spouse, despite being aged 12 years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waddington: Elham Bahrami was issued with a visa to come to this country at the British interests section of the Swedish embassy in Tehran under the immigration rules, after it had been established that her marriage was valid according to the law of Iran and would be recognised as valid under English laws because both parties to the marriage were domiciled in Iran. Immediate steps are being taken to change the immigration rules to prevent the entry as spouses of children under the age of 16.

Mr. Dickens asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many child spouses are known to have been allowed to enter the United Kingdom in each of the last five years.

Mr. Waddington: It has never been thought necessary to keep statistics of the age of spouses entering the country but immediate steps are being taken to change the immigration rules to prevent the entry as spouses of children under the age of 16.

Firearms

Mr. Hickmet asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement upon the availability of handguns, legally and illegally, and what his policy is in relation to the issue of licences for handguns.

Mr. Giles Shaw [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 February, c. *177*]: The information kept centrally about the number of firearm certificates issued by chief officers of police does not distinguish between those issued in respect of handguns and those authorising the possession of other weapons. The criteria for granting certificates were set out in the reply given to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Mr. Michie) on 11 February at column 393. Although there is no reliable estimate of the number of illegal handguns in circulation, the number of notifiable offences in which a pistol was reported to have been used in 1984 was 1,232. In the same year, 164 pistols were reported to have been stolen in burglaries and thefts.

Ulster Defence Association

Mr. Waller asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the chief constable of West Yorkshire on the progress of inquiries into, and charges arising from, the alleged illegal activities of members of extremist organisations and on the possible links between such organisations and the Ulster Defence Association; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw [*pursuant to his reply*, 24 February, c. *414*]: The chief constable of West Yorkshire informs me that his force investigates thoroughly offences such as racial attacks and incitement to racial hatred which are reported to it, and in doing so takes due account of the possible involvement of extremist organisations in such activities. Proceedings are brought where the evidence justifies it.

The Ulster Defence Association is not a proscribed organisation in any part of the United Kingdom, so that links with it and membership of it are not in themselves unlawful.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Contraceptive Advice (Young People)

Mr. Hayes asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he will issue revised guidance on contraceptive advice and treatment for young people under 16 years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hayhoe: This guidance is being issued today. It takes account of the recent House of Lords decision on the provision of contraceptive advice and treatment to girls under 16. It stresses the importance of involving parents when contraceptive advice is being sought by young people under 16 and states that it should be most unusual for a doctor or other professional to provide advice or treatment in relaton to contraception to such a young person without parental knowledge or consent. It acknowledges that there will, exceptionally, be cases where it is not possible to persuade a young person to allow her parents to be involved—for example, when family relationships have broken down. In such cases, a doctor or other professional would be justified in giving advice and treatment without parental consent or knowledge, provided he is satisfied on the following points:

i. that the young person could understand his advice, and had sufficient maturity to understand what was involved in terms of the moral, social and emotional implications;
ii. that he could neither persuade the young person to inform the parent, nor to allow him to inform them, that contraceptive advice was being sought;
iii. that the young person would be very likely to begin, or to continue having sexual intercourse with or without contraceptive treatment;
iv. that, without contraceptive advice or treatment, the young person's physical or mental health, or both would be likely to suffer;
v. that the young person's best interests required him to give contraceptive advice, treatment or both, without parental knowledge or consent.

I am placing a copy of the full text of the guidance in the Library.

Pregnancy Testing

Mr. Hayes asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many district health authorities do not provide a free pregnancy testing service during the suspected first eight weeks of a routine pregnancy.

Mr. Whitney: We do not collect this information centrally. Health authorities are aware of the importance of facilities being available to confirm pregnancy and thus encourage an early uptake of care.

Pensions and Benefits

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what were the total numbers of people in

the United Kingdom in receipt of *(a)* retirement pension only, *(b)* supplementary pension only, *(c)* retirement pension and supplementary pension, *(d)* all public sector pension schemes and *(e)* retirement pension and a public sector pension, for each year since 1973-74.

Mr. Major: The information is not readily available in the form requested, and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The following table sets out the details which are available.

Great Britain

Thousands

Year	*Retirement pension only* * †	*Retirement pension and supplementary pension*‡	*Supplementary pension only*	*United Kingdom public sector pension* ‖
1973	6,291	1,645	97	NA
1974	6,470	1,601	96	NA
1975	6,744	1,499	94	2,100
1976	6,939	1,478	95	NA
1977	7,041	1,489	102	NA
1978	7,143	1,523	107	NA
1979	7,285	1,523	97	2,300
1980	7,452	1,522	101	NA
1981	7,603	1,544	95	NA
1982	7,667	1,567	82	NA
1983	7,926	1,403	85	2,900
1984	7,956	1,409	NA	NA
1985	8,223	1,339	NA	NA

* Includes pensioners receiving Supplementary Pension by separate order book. These range from approximately 130,000 in 1973 to 170,000 in 1983.

† Includes those resident overseas.

‡ Combined Order Book cases.

‖ All bodies treated as public sector in the National Accounts. Figure includes widows.

NA —Not Available.

Sources:

RP & WB Biannual Enquiry

Supplementary Benefit annual statistical enquiry.

Occupational Pension Schemes 1979: Sixth Survey by the Government Actuary.

The great majority of public sector pensioners (excluding men between 60 and 65) will also be in receipt of a state retirement pension. No figures are available for the numbers also receiving supplementary pension.

Severe Weather Payments

Mr. Ron Brown asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he has received any recent representations from Scotland about the operation of the exceptionally severe weather payments scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: I met the members of the Scottish Labour group on 27 February to discuss, among other things, the subject of help with fuel costs during exceptionally severe weather. The matter was also touched on at a meeting between my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State with the hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. Wilson) and the right hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Stewart) on 11 February to discuss the wider issues of a "cold climate allowance". A number of letters have also been received.

Following revised guidance issued by the chief adjudication officer on 6 December the decision whether there has been a period of exceptionally severe weather in any particular area is one for the local adjudication officer, in the light of local weather conditions. I understand that all the local offices for the Scottish mainland have now decided that the weather has fulfilled the requirements of the relevant single payments regulation.

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many local Department of Health and Social Security offices have made additional payments to benefits claimants in each of the last seven years owing to exceptionally severe weather conditions; and what range of payments were made available.

Mr. Newton: No information is available for 1979 and 1980. The weather was not considered to be exceptionally severe during 1981, 1983 and 1984 and therefore no single payments in respect of additional fuel used during a period of exceptionally severe weather were made in those years.

In 1982 the weather was considered to be exceptionally severe in all local office areas in Great Britain. In 1985, it was considered to be exceptionally severe in a total of 288 local office areas in England and Wales, and this year all local offices except one (Lerwick) have declared the weather to be exceptionally severe in their area.

Information on the range of payments made during the relevant years is not available.

Limited List Prescribing

Mr. Michael Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether general practitioners were sent the revisions to the limited list before they came into operation on 1 December 1985; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hayhoe: I understand that most family practitioner committees were able to notify general practitioners of the changes before the effective date. My

Department is introducing revised arrangements to give all family practitioner committees more notice of any future changes.

Hospital Closures

Mr. Pavitt asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the minimum time allowed for the consultation stage of a hospital closure initiated by a district health authority; what is the usual time for the submission by the district health authority of its decision to the regional health authority; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hayhoe: There is no statutory minimum time allowed for consultation on a proposed hospital closure initiated by a district health authority. Circular HSC(IS)207 gives guidance from my Department to health authorities on reasonable practices to follow. This circular advises that health authorities should normally require comments from community health councils and other interested bodies within a period of three months after the issue of the consultation document. The aim, in a case where the community health council does not oppose the proposed closure, is for the district health authority to advise the regional health authority of its intention no later than six months after the date of issue of the consultation document.

Nurses

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list in the *Official Report* those health authorities where nurses have taken over any duties previously performed by National Health Service ancillary workers, since these services were put out to tender.

Mr. Whitney: This information is not collected centrally. It is the responsibility of health authorities to decide who will perform particular duties.

Nursing Care

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he has any plans for the privatisation of nursing care.

Mr. Whitney: We have no plans to do so.

Women (Dependent Children)

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list the number of women who are single, widowed, separated, with dependent children under 16 years of age for each of the years 1979, 1980, 1981, 1982, 1983, 1984, and 1985, respectively.

Mr. Whitney: This information is not routinely available. There are estimates for 1979 and 1982, which were given in my reply to the hon. Member on 2 December 1985 at column *127*.

Hospitals (Catering)

Mr. Speller asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will seek to make mandatory the post of catering manager or catering adviser in all hospitals above a specified size.

Mr. Hayhoe: Health authorities have responsibility for ensuring that they have effective management and advisory arrangements for their catering services. It is for authorities to determine within their overall management arrangements how best to achieve this.

Mr. Speller asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will take steps to bring the National Health Service hospital catering service within the scope of the Hotel and Catering Industry Training Board.

Mr. Whitney: There is already close liaison between the National Health Service training authority and the Hotel and Catering industry training boards on training initiatives and developments. We have no plans to introduce changes to these arrangements.

School Leavers (Benefits)

Mr. Wainwright asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the latest estimate for the number of 1985 school leavers who had their benefit cut as a result of leaving YTS prematurely or refusing to take up a place on the scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Major: It is not possible to distinguish between school leavers and others. The number of young people who had their supplementary benefit reduced because they had without good cause *(a)* refused, or *(b)* left prematurely, a place on the youth training scheme during the period 16 January 1985 to 14 January 1986 was : 338 and 5,427 respectively.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Wainwright asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many pensioner households in the area served by the Huddersfield benefit office lost housing benefit as a result of the changes which came into effect in November 1985; and how many of these lost *(a)* up to £1 a week, *(b)* between £1 and £2 a week, *(c)* between £3 and £4 a week and *(d)* more than £3 a week.

Mr. Major: I regret this information is not available.

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what information he has as to the proportion of council house tenants in *(a)* Inverclyde, *(b)* Strathclyde and *(c)* Scotland who receive housing benefit;

(2) what information he has as to the proportion of domestic ratepayers in *(a)* Inverclyde, *(b)* Strathclyde and *(c)* Scotland who receive housing benefit.

Mr. Major: I shall let the hon. Member have replies as soon as possible.

Supplementary Benefit

Mr. Wainwright asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing the number of people in *(a)* Yorkshire and Humberside, *(b)* West Yorkshire, *(c)* Kirklees and *(d)* the Huddersfield areas currently in receipt of supplementary benefit; how many of the claimants are retirement pensioners; and how these numbers compare with the corresponding figure for 1979.

Mr. Major: The table shows the number of people in *(a)* Yorkshire and Humberside *(b)* West Yorkshire *(c)* Kirklees and *(d)* Huddersfield, receiving supplementary benefit on 11 February 1986 — the latest figures available — and 15 May 1979 — the earliest figures available. It also shows how many of these were over pension age.

	15 May 1979		11 February 1986	
	all supplementary benefit claimants over pension age	*all supplementary benefit claimants*	*all supplementary benefit claimants over pension age*	*all supplementary benefit claimants*
Yorkshire and Humberside	169,720	287,678	157,587	479,999
West Yorkshire	69,654	124,925	65,099	197,423
Kirklees	12,004	19,055	10,321	31,262
Huddersfield	5,862	9,470	5,277	16,189

Speech Therapy, Waltham Forest

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what funds are allocated to the Waltham Forest district health authority by his Department through the regional health authority to improve the provision of speech therapy services at special schools in the area.

Mr. Whitney: Funds allocated to regional health authorities are not earmarked in respect of speech therapy services. It is the responsibility of the Waltham Forest district health authority to determine spending on those services from within its total allocation.

Health Regions (Litigation Costs)

Mr. McWilliam asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list by health region the costs to that region of litigation for all cases whether settled in or out of court over each of the last five years.

Mr. Whitney: The table shows the total amounts paid in compensation as a result of court decisions, legal advice or out-of-court settlements, as recorded in health authorities' annual accounts. The payments do not include authorities' legal costs which are treated as an administrative expense.

Region	*1980-81* £	*1981-82* £	*1982-83* £	*1983-84* £	*1984-85* £
Northern	136,793	119,431	184,381	188,609	141,399
Yorkshire	261,257	103,893	143,624	184,038	322,560
Trent	175,138	203,477	204,167	313,289	318,972
East Anglian	239,036	133,325	105,464	182,596	222,633
North West Thames	127,050	221,005	216,922	164,216	534,736
North East Thames	502,839	308,545	621,980	501,903	766,875
South East Thames	345,689	156,217	277,666	247,652	469,300
South West Thames	317,567	842,094	216,962	708,190	320,771
Wessex	191,039	124,796	122,498	692,553	181,534
Oxford	190,610	50,774	32,353	70,426	133,937
South Western	134,960	187,423	177,383	328,785	305,779
West Midlands	168,931	312,521	661,127	242,007	371,489
Mersey	202,608	128,885	125,638	392,275	266,350
North Western	435,294	539,395	431,446	563,997	545,479
Boards of Governors/Special Health Authorities	11,416	4,582	47,408	58,639	156,776
Total	3,440,227	3,437,363	3,569,019	4,839,175	5,058,590

National Insurance Contributions

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the Secretary of State for ocial Services wht is the normal practice regarding re-ssessment of previous years' liabilities under class 1 ational insurance contributions, primary or secondary, here a Department of Health and Social Security spector has re-classified a self-employed person as an mployee under the terms of the Social Security Acts.

Mr. Major: The normal practice is to assess earlier ability under class 1 when a person previously paying ass 2 contributions is re-categorised as an employee. owever, full account is taken of all the circumstances efore a decision is made to require payment by the mployer of any amount due. Rulings by the Department's ational insurance inspectors about liability to pay ontributions, including rulings on the class of ontributions due, are open to challenge by those affected they wish, and then become questions for formal termination by the Secretary of State under section 93 the Social Security Act 1975.

Students (Benefits)

Mr. Nicholas Baker asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what would be the cost of paying supplementary benefit to students from the first signing day for which they are eligible; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: Payment of supplementary benefit as a rule commences from the second day after the claimants' signing day. If students were to be paid from their signing day there would be some losers and some gainers but it is not possible to estimate the overall effect.

Community Nursing Services (Report)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services which of the recommendations in the report on community nursing services compiled by Mrs. Cumberlege he intends to implement; and what consultations he proposes to hold with general practitioners to discuss with them the recommendations relating to prescription of medicines by nurses.

Mr. Hayhoe: There will be wide consultation on the Report of the community nursing review when it is published, and that will include consultations with representatives of general practitioners.

Winwick Hospital

Mr. Hoyle asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the regional health authority's recommended complement of nurses for Winwick hospital; how many nurses it is currently below this total; what steps are being made to remedy this shortfall; how many temporary nurses are employed there; when their contract terminates; what steps are being taken to recruit temporary nurses and in what numbers; and if he will list the number of patients for each year from 1980 to 1986.

Mr. Hayhoe: Information on the number of patients in Winwick hospital for the years 1980 to 1985 (the latest date for which figures are available) are shown in the table.

I regret that the other information requested is not collected centrally and the hon. Member may wish to contact the chairman of Mersey regional health authority.

Resident patients at Winwick hospital as at 31 December

	Number
1980	1,543
1981	1,401
1982	1,324
1983	1,224
1984	1,182
1985	*1,106

* Provisional.

Bloomsbury Health Authority

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will establish an inquiry under section 84 of the National Health Service Act 1977 into the provision of services by the Bloomsbury health authority.

Mr. Whitney: No.

Greater London (Accident and Emergency Services)

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will establish an inquiry into the provision of accident and emergency services in Greater London.

Mr. Whitney: We have no plans to do so.

Greater London (Ambulance Services)

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will establish an inquiry into the provision of ambulance services in Greater London.

Mr. Whitney: We have no plans to do so. It is for the South West Thames regional health authority, which manages the London ambulance service on behalf of the Thames regions, to initiate action as and when it feels it is necessary.

Organ Transplants

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he has any plans to introduce legislation to require doctors to seek permission to remove kidneys and other organs from patients each time a life support machine is switched off; what advice he has received from the United Kingdom transplant service on this matter; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Whitney: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Eccles (Mr. Carter-Jones) on 4 March at columns *123-24*. No representations on this matter have been received from the United Kingdom transplant service.

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what figures he has for the current availability of kidney donations in relation to demand for transplant purposes.

Mr. Whitney: According to information supplied by the United Kingdom transplant service, the number of cadaver kidney transplant operations performed in the National Health Service in 1985 was 1,336 and the number of patients on the waiting list for kidney transplant on 1 January 1986 was 3,305. We are concerned to see the kidney transplant programme expanded, but this can only happen if the supply of donor organs increases. Ministers have taken a number of initiatives in the last two years to encourage more donations, for example I recently approached representatives of industry about this, and I am glad to say that they have agreed to co-operate with our efforts.

Hypothermia

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the number of people who have died in each year from 1979 to the latest available year from hypothermia *(a)* nationally, *(b)* in each social security region, and *(c)* in each standard economic planning region.

Mr. Whitney [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 December 1985, c. *321-322*]: I regret that there were some errors in my previous reply. The table in its corrected form is as follows.

Hypothermia deaths: number of mentions, England and Wales and Standard Region of usual residence—1979-1984

Year	*England Wales and Elsewhere*	*Wales*	*North*	*Yorkshire and Humberside*	*East Midlands*	*East Anglia*	*South East*	*South West*	*West Midlands*	*North West*	*Elsewhere*
1979	863	73	50	73	74	52	240	60	94	146	1
1980	596	41	34	41	53	34	182	46	54	111	—
1981	685	57	40	67	56	44	187	64	74	96	—
1982	664	53	47	57	48	33	200	47	76	103	—
1983	538	29	24	51	38	27	198	45	61	64	1
1984	555	37	25	65	55	25	185	44	51	66	2

EMPLOYMENT

Youth Training

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Paymaster General if he will make a statement on the future of the youth training board of the Manpower Services Commission.

Mr. Trippier: The Manpower Services Commission agreed at its meeting in October 1985 to extend appointments to the Youth Training Board to June 1986 so that the future role of the board could be considered in the light of proposals for the development of YTS. The commission will again consider the reconstitution of the board in the near future.

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Paymaster General, pursuant to the answer of 24 February, *Official Report*, column *452*, what encouragement the Manpower Services Commission proposes to give to managing agents to give trainee agreements contractual status; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: None. Managing agents will make their own decisions on this. It is, however, the Manpower Services Commission's view that the purpose of the training agreement is to ensure that all trainees have full and clear information about their training programme and their treatment while on it; and that contractual status is not essential for this purpose.

Telecommunications Courses (Libyan Citizens)

Mr. Janner asked the Paymaster General how many work permits have been issued for Libyan citizens to attend telecommunications courses in each of the last three years.

Mr. Lang: Work permits for training in telecommunications would be issued only under the training and work experience scheme. No work permits were issued to Libyan citizens in this category in 1985 or 1983. Three permits were issued in 1984 but statistics for that year do not specify what sort of training was involved. We also authorise industrial attachments required by sandwich courses, but statistics are not kept of the nationality of students or the type of training undertaken.

SCOTLAND

Forestry Commission

46. **Mr. Sean Hughes** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he is proposing to reduce the Forestry Commission holding of woodland.

47. **Mr. Evans** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the Government's plan to privatise the Forestry Commission.

49. **Mr. Hirst** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about the Forestry Commission.

Mr. Canavan asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans are being considered by his Department for the further privatisation of Forestry Commission assets.

Mr. John MacKay: I refer the hon. Members to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) on 20 February 1986 at column 347.

48. **Mr. Kirkwood** asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the implications for the long-term development of land use in the United Kingdom of the plan to dispose of some Forestry Commission land.

Mr. John MacKay: The Forestry Commission's disposals programme is based upon the statement made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Ayr (Mr. Younger) on 8 November 1984 at columns 6 and 7. The programme is a limited one and has no particular implications for the long-term development of land use in the United Kingdom.

Sheltered Accommodation

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the ratio of places available in Inverclyde, Strathclyde and Scotland as a whole in sheltered accommodation per 1,000 people aged 65 or over, for each years since 1979.

Mr. Ancram: The table below shows the numbers of bedspaces per 1,000 population aged 65 or over for the areas requested for each year since 1979.

	Scotland	*Strathclyde*	*Inverclyde*
1979	15·6	13·1	16·0
1980	19·3	15·0	19·6
1981	22·8	17·4	19·9
1982	29·7	25·1	26·3
1983	35·3	26·7	35·3
1984	41·1	32·1	38·4
1985	47·6	39·8	38·4

Mallaig Road

Sir Russell Johnston asked the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects his Department to complete planning of the section of the Mallaig road which runs into the village; and when the construction will be finished.

Mr. Ancram: I expect the statutory and design procedures to be completed in time for an autumn 1986 start, provided that funds are available. Construction should take approximately two years.

Radioactive Discharges

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list all the non-nuclear industrial sites in Scotland making authorised discharges of uranium and other radioactive materials to the sea.

Mr. Ancram: The non-nuclear industrial sites in Scotland including offshire oil installations which are authorised to discharge radioactive wastes to sea are listed below.

Name	*Premises*
(i) *Mainland sites*	
South of Scotland Electricity Board Longannet Power Station	Longannet Power Station
Scottish Agricultural Industries	Sandilands Chemical Works, Links Road, Aberdeen
(ii) *Offshore installations*	
Occidental of Britain Inc.	Flotta, KW15 1DA
Amoco (UK) Exploration Ltd.	Montrose 'A'
Chevron Petroleum (UK) Ltd.	Ninian
Occidental Petroleum (Caledonia) Ltd.	Piper 'A'
	Claymore 'A'

Name	*Premises*
Schlumberger Inland Services Inc.	Brent A, B, C, D
	Heather 'A'
	Murchison
Imperial Chemical Industries plc	Thistle 'A'
	Fulmar 'A'
Imperial Chemical Industries plc	Dixieland Field
	Beatrice
	Brae 'A'
Hamilton Bros. Oil and Gas Ltd.	Transworld 58
	Deepsea Pioneer
Atomic Energy Research Establishment	Beatrice 'A'
	Beryl 'A'
UK Atomic Energy Authority	Hutton North West
Mobil North Sea Limited	Beryl 'A'
Shell (UK) Exploration and Production	Brent 'A'
	Brent 'B'
	Brent 'C'
	Brent 'D'
	Dunlin Alpha
British Petroleum Development Ltd.	Forties 'A'
	Forties 'B'
	Forties 'C'
	Forties 'D'
Conoco (UK) Ltd.	Murchison

Peterhead Prison

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the circumstances of the attempt by two inmates of Peterhead prison to escape in January; and when the matter was reported to him.

Mr. John MacKay: No attempt to escape from Peterhead prison was made during January 1986. Several items which might have been used in an escape bid were found during a search by staff on 29 December 1985 and this was reported to the Scottish Home and Health Department on 3 January 1986.

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he is satisfied that there are sufficient prison officers available on each shift to supervise properly the activities of inmates in the tailor's shop at Peterhead prison; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John MacKay: I am satisfied that the prison governor is making proper arrangements for such supervision.

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will investigate the method of purchase and delivery of cloth materials to the tailor's shop at Peterhead prison; and what steps are taken to seek to prevent the misuse of these materials by inmates who are engaged on work in the tailor's shop.

Mr. John MacKay: The materials used in the tailoring workshop at Peterhead are purchased centrally and delivered to the prison by Scottish Office vehicles as cut parts for making up into garments. The cut parts are issued to the workshop from a lockfast store in sufficient quantities to manufacture a specific number of garments. In this way misuse can be identified and checked. Prisoners are searched each time they leave the workshop in order to prevent attempted pilfering of equipment or materials.

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has any plans to visit Peterhead prison.

Mr. John MacKay: My right hon. and learned Friend has no plans at present to visit Peterhead prison. However, it is my intention to visit in the near future.

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what further progress has been made with the plans for the new Peterhead prison; when the project will commence; what consultations have taken place with the Peterhead branch of the Scottish Prison Officers Association; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John MacKay: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Ancram) on 26 March 1985. The sketch design stage of the planning of the new Peterhead prison is very close to completion following which the final design plan will be agreed. The initial brief for the new prison was discussed with the Peterhead branch of the Scottish Prison Officers Association and their comments have been taken into account throughout the sketch design stage.

Scottish Development Agency

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table showing at 1985 prices Government expenditure on the Scottish Development Agency in each year since the agency was established and his estimate for each year until 1988.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Net public expenditure on the agency for the financial years 1976-77 to 1984-85, together with the estimated outturn for 1985-86 and the planned level for 1986-87, all at 1984-85 prices are shown below. Expenditure in 1975-76 has been omitted as the agency was in being for only a small part of that year. The public expenditure plans for the years after 1986-87 are not disaggregated to the level of specific provision for the agency.

1984-85 prices

	£ million
1976-77	35·4
1977-78	78·4
1978-79	93·4
1979-80	98·2
1980-81	100·9
1981-82	88·6
1982-83	110·0
1983-84	92·3
1984-85	76·6
1985-86	90·9
1986-87	86·7

The fact that these figures are net of expenditure financed from receipts is part of the explanation for the variations between years. In 1984-85, for example, receipts were very much higher than forecast and the agency did not need to draw down its grant-in-aid in full.

Mr. Dewar asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will place in the Library a copy of the guidelines under which the Scottish Development Agency presently operates.

Mr. Rifkind: The agency has guidelines relating to site development and factory building and industrial investment. Copies were placed in the Library of the House when they were issued in 1980.

Mental Illness Hospitals

Mr. Dewar asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many inpatient beds existed in mental illness hospitals in Scotland in each of the last seven years for which records are available.

Mr. Rifkind: This information is as follows:

Average available staffed mental illness beds (including beds at general hospitals with psychiatric units) at 30 September

	Mental illness	*Psycho-geriatric*	*Child psychiatry*	*Adolescent psychiatry*	*Total*
1978	15,379	1,995	139	64	17,577
1979	14,941	2,231	122	64	17,358
1980	14,127	2,742	107	64	17,040
1981	13,799	2,871	102	64	16,836
1982	13,518	2,961	103	64	16,646
1983	13,232	3,061	102	71	16,466
1984*	13,055	3,208	102	79	16,444

* At 31 March.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Food Additives

13. **Mr. Andrew F. Bennett** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he plans any new initiatives relating to the use of additives in food.

Mr. Gummer: Strict control of the use of additives in food is already maintained through the provisions in the Food Acts and by regulations made thereunder. Ministers seek the advice of the Food Advisory Committee on a continuing basis about the need, safety and control of food additives.

Environmentally Sensitive Areas

14. **Mr. Simon Hughes** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on progress to date on consultations towards the establishment of environmentally sensitive areas.

Mr. Jopling: As I explained in my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Mr. Chapman) on 4 March, my officials are in close touch with the Countryside Commission and the Nature Conservancy Council, which are now carrying out a detailed analysis of the short-listed areas in England and Wales in consultation with the various organisations concerned. They expect to complete this work around Easter and will be making recommendations to me and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales by the end of April.

Food Advisory Committees

15. **Mr. Meadowcroft** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what constraints are placed on members of food advisory committees in relation to disclosure of information.

Mr. Gummer: Members of the independent export committees who advise Ministers in these matters need to observe the appropriate status of official information passed to them in the course of their duties.

Outgoers Scheme

16. **Mr. Knox** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he hopes to announce the details of the European Economic Community outgoers scheme which the Commission has proposed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jopling: The Commission's proposed scheme was discussed for the first time by the Council of Agriculture Ministers last week. There was general agreement on the importance of reducing milk output, but there was no agreement on the best way of achieving this.

The question will be considered further.

Consumer Protection

17. **Mr. Patchett** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what further measures on consumer protection in food matters he proposes to introduce in the next 12 months.

Mr. Gummer: We expect to publish a number of proposals including new compositional standards for mince and for margarine and other fat spreads. Proposals requiring the fat content labelling of food and guidelines on nutrition labelling have already been circulated for comment.

Food Labelling

18. **Mr. Cohen** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he plans to introduce legislation on the full nutritional labelling of food.

Mr. Gummer: No. We are encouraging voluntary labelling of food with its nutritional content by the issue of guidelines and we are considering whether it is appropriate to require such information to be given in a prescribed form.

Agricultural Prices

19. **Mr. Latham** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will make a statement on progress in the current round of negotiations in the European Council of Agriculture Ministers relating to agricultural prices.

Mrs. Clwyd asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the latest position in the negotiations to fix prices under the common agricultural policy for the coming year.

Mr. Jopling: The Agriculture Council had an initial discussion of the Commission's 1986 CAP price proposals on 24 February; its next discussion is expected to be on 24 March.

30. **Mr. Jackson** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the European Commission's price proposals for 1986-87.

Mr. Jopling: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) earlier today.

Coastal Defences

20. **Mr. Rathbone** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the presently planned level of funding for coastal defences in 1986-87.

Mr. Gummer: I understand that water authorities and local authorities plan to undertake work on sea defences amounting to some £18 million in 1986-87 with the assistance of Government aid under the Land Drainage Act 1976. In addition, local authorities plan to undertake work combating coastal erosion amounting to some £20 million with the assistance of Government aid under the Coast Protection Act 1949.

Forestry Commission Land

21. **Mr. Adley** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if, in his plans to authorise the disposal of Forestry Commission land in England, he will ensure that local authorities have an absolute priority to acquire such land in their own areas.

Mr. Jopling: It is recognised that many public and private bodies, including local authorities, have an interest in acquiring particular areas of Forestry Commission woodland. In order to draw attention at the ealiest stage to any such areas the commission is considering for disposal, notices are placed in the *Estates Gazette* in respect of all woods larger than 5 hectares and all other land having a known conservation, recreation or amenity value. In the event of a body expressing firm interest in acquiring such an area, the commission will consider giving it preference of opportunity to purchase if the Government Department or agency responsible for the specific interest concerned can confirm that such a purchase would be particularly in the public interest. It would not be right to give local authorities absolute priority over all other parties irrespective of the circumstances.

Farm Workers (Wages)

22. **Mr. Strang** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he has issued any guidance to the Agricultural Wages Board about the Government's attitude to the level of any increase in the minimum rates for agricultural workers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jopling: No.

26. **Mr. Ashton** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the basic gross wages for a farm worker for a 40-hour week.

Mr. Jopling: In 1985 the average basic earnings of all regular whole-time men employed in agriculture in England and Wales were £107·40 for an average basic week of 39·8 hours.

Forestry

23. **Mr. Yeo** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will introduce measures to encourage the proportion of land devoted to forestry in England.

Mr. Jopling: It is the Government's policy that forestry should continue to expand with the greater proportion of new planting being undertaken by the private sector. Such expansion is encouraged through a range of measures, principally by the Forestry Commission's grant schemes and appropriate tax arrangements, and in ways consistent with the interests of other land users.

27. **Mr. Proctor** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many trees were planted in 1985 by the Forestry Commission in East Anglia; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jopling: Planting statistics are kept by financial years to 31 March. In the year to 31 March 1985 the Forestry Commission planted 621 hectares in east Anglia, all in Norfolk and Suffolk.

COMA Report

24. **Mr. Alan Howarth** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the latest progress of his Department's implementation of the recommendations of the COMA report.

Mr. Gummer: We circulated on 13 February for statutory consultation under the Food Acts prpoposals for the fat labelling of foods. Proposals for the strength marking throughout the European Community of all alcoholic drinks in percentage alcohol by volume are under discussions in Brussels. Changes to encourage the production of leaner carcases were introduced into the sheep variable premium scheme on 6 January 1986. Similar changes will be introduced into the beef scheme in the new marketing year.

Common Agricultural Policy

25. **Mr. Baldry** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will set out the immediate reforms to the common agricultural policy that Her Majesty's Government consider desirable.

Mr. Jopling: In the negotiations on the Commission's proposals for CAP prices and related measures we are seeking a package of measures to limit the production of surplus commodities. A central element must be a tough price policy to secure a better market balance.

Farm Surpluses (Storage Costs)

28. **Mr. Heathcoat-Amory** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the cost of storing farm surpluses in the United Kingdom for the most recent year for which figures are available.

Mr. Gummer: Expenditure on storage and related costs of intervention in 1985-86 is expected to total £110 million as shown in the spring Supplementary Estimate for class III, vote 1 (H.C. 213).

Cereals

29. **Mr. Deakins** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are the EEC Commission's plans for cereal policies in the coming year; and if he will make a statement.

40. **Mr. Hunter** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent discussions he has had with European Community partners about controlling cereal productions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: The Commission has proposed a package of measures for cereals including a price freeze, a co-responsibility levy on sales of cereals off farm and changes to the operation of the intervention system, including quality standards.

In initial discussions of these in the Council on 24 February, I pressed for a price cut instead of the co-responsibility levy, since the latter would as proposed be discriminatory in its application and does nothing to help users of cereals.

34. **Mr. Nicholls** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he supports the proposal of the European Commission to impose a co-responsibility levy on cereals; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jopling: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given earlier to the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Deakins).

Food Standards

31. **Mr. Loyden** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on his plans to improve the quality of food consumed in Britain.

Mr. Gummer: There is already comprehensive legislation regulating the safety, quality and labelling of food. Regulations are kept under review so that appropriate initiatives can be taken in response to new developments.

Cod Fishermen

32. **Mr. Austin Mitchell** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what special help he proposes for cod fishermen in Grimsby to compensate for reduced catches as a result of the new quotas, and for increased costs as a result of higher dock, landing and labour charges.

Mr. Gummer: The new quotas introduced in order to help fishermen by protecting their future livelihood. The common fisheries policy provides a successful means of conserving fish stocks and thus preserving jobs. The reduction in the cod quota for 1986, which was based on scientific advice, was necessary to protect the longer term viability of the stock and therefore the incomes of fishermen. Various structural measures exist within the common fisheries policy to help the industry adjust to changes in the availability of resources. Charges for entering ports and landing catches are a local matter.

Milk Quotas

33. **Mr. Nicholas Baker** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he can report on the prospective arrangements for milk quotas in 1986-87.

Mr. Jopling: I shall shortly be laying before the House the Dairy Produce Quotas Regulations 1986 which will provide, in England and Wales, for the further allocations of quota for 1985-86 which I announced in my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) on 25 February. The effect of the regulations in Scotland was explained by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in his reply of 4 March to my hon. Friend the Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Hirst). In other respects the Dairy Produce Quotas Regulations 1986 will not alter the existing quota arrangements for 1986-87. They will consolidate the previous regulations and amendments.

The Commission has made two proposals which could affect the quota arrangements for 1986-87. First, there is the proposed Community outgoers scheme, which I referred to in replying to my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, Moorlands (Mr. Knox) earlier today. Secondly, in the context of the price proposals, the Commission has proposed changing to six-monthly collection of the supplementary levy. While I recognise there could be difficulties for producers in this change (and I shall be seeking to minimise these difficulties), I believe it would reduce the risk of exceeding quota in the Community as a whole.

Breadmaking (Wheat)

35. **Mr. Torney** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which research he plans to undertake to produce an increased proportion of wheat suitable for breadmaking in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Gummer: Some 82 per cent. of the wheat milled in the United Kingdom in 1984-85 was home-grown, compared with 54 per cent. in 1979-80. My Department currently funds a significant amount of reseach and development to improve the bread-making quality of wheat, and increasing emphasis is to be given to this aspect of research in the future.

Pelagic Fisheries Licensing

36. **Mr. Wallace** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many representations he has received in the course of his review of pelagic fisheries licensing.

Mr. Gummer: Following the issue of a consultative paper on the review of the restrictive licensing arrangements in respect of the pelagic fisheries in October 1985, my right hon. Friends and I have received a total of 20 representations from industry organisations within the United Kingdom.

Community Budget (Agricultural Expenditure)

37. **Mr. Foulkes** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what initiatives he intends to take to bring down the proportion of the EEC budget spent on agriculture; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jopling: The financial guideline agreed by the Council in its conclusions on budgetary discipline provides

that expenditure related to agricultural markets should grow by less than the rate of growth of the Community's own resources. In pursuit of this aim, I will continue to press in the Council of Agriculture Ministers for measures which will restrain the growth of expenditure, in particular rigorous constraint on prices.

Farm Incomes

38. **Mr. Kennedy** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the projected level of agricultural income for 1986-87.

Mr. Jopling: Agriculture income in 1986-87 will depend on decisions to be taken following the CAP price fixing negotiation, the weather, and other factors. It would be premature to make a projection of the level.

European Community (Food Exports)

39. **Mr. Teddy Taylor** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will propose at the next meeting of the Council of Ministers that the supplies of cheap food at present being sent to the Soviet Union and East Europe should be made available to pensioners and low-income families in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: A major objective of Government policy towards the common agricultural policy (CAP) is to tackle the problem of costly surpluses at source by bringing about a better market balance of supply and demand.

While surpluses continue to exist, however, the problem of their cost-effective disposal remains. Several Community schemes already exist which enable food supplies to be made available at reduced prices. In considering any extension account has to be taken of the likely cost and effectiveness. The most economical way of disposing of stocks is often to sell them on the world market with the benefit of export refunds to bridge the gap between Community and world prices. Where there are surpluses for export the Government remain opposed to singling out particular countries for special treatment.

Beef Producers

41. **Mr. Colin Shepherd** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he is satisfied with the prospects for the beef sector of the agriculture industry.

Mr. Gummer: The beef sector has experienced two difficult years during which the imposition of milk quotas and the consequent increase in cow cullings coincided with a cyclical peak in production. Production is likely to continue at high levels until 1987 and, if there is a milk outgoers scheme, this will also affect the market.

I shall be concerned to ensure that the beef sector continues to receive adequate support.

Departmental Land

42. **Dr. Michael Clark** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much land and property is owned by his Department; what is his policy for its disposal; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jopling: My Department owns and manages 3,237 hectares of land and 291 dwellings. These comprise experimental centres, research establishments, fishery lands, former Land Settlement Association managed properties and tenanted farms. My policy is to sell all Ministry property and land that has been identified as surplus to requirements. This policy is being vigorously pursued.

Mutton and Beef

43. **Sir John Farr** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will estimate the amount by which the price in the shops for mutton and beef has been reduced in pence per lb. by the variable premium system.

Mr. Gummer: At its maximum level (which applied for all but four weeks of 1985) the beef variable premium is worth 16·25p/kg on eligible carcases at the deadweight stage. This is equivalent to 10p to 10½p per lb at the retail level on beef from carcases which have benefited from premium.

So far as lamb is concerned, the rates of variable premium paid during 1985 ranged between 5·1p/kg and 84p·4/kg at the deadweight stage, with an average of 51p/kg. This would be equivalent to about 26p per lb at the retail level on lamb from certified carcases. Variable premium does not apply to mutton.

The actual effect on retail prices of the premium arrangements depends on butchers' pricing policies for various cuts and varieties of meat.

Beef Variable Premium

44. **Mr. Livsey** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on his negotiations in Europe to retain the beef variable premium.

Mr. Gummer: The Commission's price fixing package for 1986 proposed a number of changes in the support arrangements for the beef sector. In the negotiations, my right hon. Friend will be concerned to ensure that beef producers continue to have adequate support. As to the beef variable premium scheme, we shall continue to maintain that this has advantages for producers, traders and consumers alike.

River Mersey (Silt Disposal)

45. **Mr. Parry** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he is satisfied with the operation of the licence for silt disposal from the River Mersey, with regard to the level of mercury in the river.

Mr. Gummer: I am satisfied that silt from the River Mersey may be safely disposed of at sea under the terms set out in the licences of which I announced the renewal on 17 February.

English and Welsh Ports (Grants)

Dr. Roger Thomas asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proportion of Sea Food Industry Authority grants is allocated to English and Welsh ports.

Mr. Gummer: These grants are not proportionally allocated but are made available throughout the United Kingdom for approved projects. In the current financial year 574 projects in England and Wales have approval, and this represents 42 per cent. of the total.

Intervention Board for Agricultural Produce

Sir Richard Body asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to what extent consideration has been given to alternative sites for the offices of the Intervention Board for Agricultural Produce; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jopling: In the absence of plans to move the board, no consideration has been given to alternative sites.

Feed Wheat

Sir Richard Body asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many tonnes of feed wheat were grown in the United Kingdom and subsequently put into intervention stores between the beginning of the 1985 harvest and the latest convenient date.

Mr. Gummer: 1·1 million tonnes of wheat were taken into intervention in the United Kingdom between the start of the 1985 harvest and 28 February 1986. All this is believed to be of United Kingdom origin.

Sir Richard Body asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food wht has been the average price received for feed wheat when sold out of intervention stores between the beginning of the harvest and 13 December 1985.

Mr. Gummer: The weighted average price of all home and export sales over this period of wheat bought in at the common intervention price was £83·71 per tonne.

Sir Richard Body asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what has been the average price paid by the United Kingdom taxpayer for each tonne of feed wheat taken into intervention stores between the beginning of the 1985 harvest and 13 December 1985.

Mr. Gummer: The weighted average price paid for wheat taken into United Kingdom intervention stores over this period was £117·67 per tonne.

Sir Richard Body asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether any tonnes of feed wheat have been taken out of intervention stores between the beginning of the 1985 harvest and 13 December 1985 to be given away free; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: No.

Environmental Schemes (Grants)

Mr. Key asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what grants are available under the agriculture improvement scheme for environmentally positive schemes including the planting of trees and hedges and the building of traditional walls, banks and dykes; if he will quantify such grants; if he will state the value of such grants disbursed since they were introduced; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jopling: Grants have been available since 1 October 1985 under the agricultural investment scheme for environmentally beneficial investments as follows:

Description	*Rate of grant (per cent.)* Basic	LFA
Bracken control (other than soil cultivation)	15	30
Dykes—using materials traditional in the locality	30	60
Heather burning—or regeneration by cutting	15	30
Hedges	30	60
Manure stores for poultry (not integral with poultry house)	15	30
Shelter belts (with 50 per cent. or more of broadleaved trees)	30	60
Walls—using materials traditional in the locality	30	60
Waste disposal (agricultural effluents and waste)	30	60

I regret that no information is available on the grants paid so far on these investments.

Sheep Annual Premium

Mr. Maclennan asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish the list of *(a)* breeds of ewe and *(b)* areas to be covered which Her Majesty's Government provided to the European Commission in connection with the extension of sheep annual premium to untupped shearlings; and when these submissions were first made.

Mr. Jopling: After the Council of Ministers agreed last May, as part of the 1985 price-fixing, to extend the annual premium arrangements

"to certain mountain breeds of ewes, raised in well-defined regions, which are not covered by the present definition of eligible ewes",

my officials gave the Commission the following details of the breeds and areas which we considered should be covered:

Breeds: Herdwick, Swaledale, Cheviot, Blackface, Shetland, Soay and crosses between any of these.

Areas: *Cumbria*—land defined as "severely disadvantaged" under the Hill Livestock (Compensatory Allowances) Regulations 1984 made in accordance with directive 75/268.

Scotland—land defined as "hill sheep land" under the same regulations.

When, in December, the Council of Ministers decided to restrict the concession to the Herdwick breed and to the Lake District, I made it quite clear that I considered this to be a breach of the agreement reached in May, and accordingly voted against the proposal. I shall continue to press for a suitable extension of the definition.

Food Imports

Mr. Greenway asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much of United Kingdom food was imported in 1975, 1980 and 1985; at what cost; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: United Kingdom imports of food were valued at £3·6 billion in 1975, £5·1 billion in 1980 and £7·5 billion in 1984. Figures for 1985 are not yet available. Food imports represented 50 per cent., 48 per cent. and 52 per cent., respectively, of the estimated value of all food consumed in the United Kingdom.

Since 1975, the volume of food imports has remained broadly unchanged. Within the total, the volume of temperate foods imported has fallen by 15 per cent. At the same time food exports have increased by 50 per cent.

These figures reflect the success of the United Kingdom agricultural and food industries in taking advantage of the opportunities presented by membership of the European Community.

Sellafield

Mr. Frank Cook asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he is satisfied that the discharge from Sellafield on 23 January complied with the as low as reasonably achieveable requirement in the site authorisation issued by the Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: I have been asked to reply.

I am advised that the discharge from Sellafield on 23 January did not contravene any limit or condition contained in either of the authorisations granted by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and by my Department relating to the discharge of liquid waste containing radioactive materials by British Nuclear Fuels.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Manpower Statistics

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people were working in the National Health Service, local government, the Civil Service and nationalised industries in 1985; what was the total public expenditure on these services for the year; and if he will publish these numbers and costs both as a total and broken down between the four sectors mentioned.

Mr. MacGregor: Numbers employed (full-time equivalents) in the public sector at mid-1985 were as follows:

Central Government	*Numbers (thousands)*
NHS	1,026
Civil Service	596
HM Forces	326
Other	198
Local authorities	2,272
Public corporations:	
Nationalised industries	1,124
Other (excluding trading funds)	117
Total	5,659

Public expenditure figures for 1985-86 are set out in detail in Cmnd. 9702—"The Government's Expenditure Plans 1996-87 to 1988-89".

Cash Limits (Revision)

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give revised cash limits for 1985-86 which take account of the decision by some Departments not to seek supplementary provision to cover the carry-forward allowed under the end-year flexibility schemes.

Mr. MacGregor: Under the end-year flexibility schemes announced in 1983, some 38 1985-86 cash limits were increased to allow for the carry-forward of underspend in 1984-85. In the case of four voted cash limits, the relevant Departments have not sought parliamentary approval for the extra provision in a Supplementary Estimate. In addition, one non-voted local authority capital cash limit does not now qualify in full for the earlier increase following later outturn information. To keep the control figures in line with provision, the cash limits are accordingly being reduced; a list is shown in the following table.

Revisions to 1985-86 cash limits resulting from the carry-forward of capital underspend in 1984-85 not being required: Voted cash limits

Class	*Vote*	*Accounting Department*	*Description of expenditure*	*Current cash limit £000*	*Decrease £000*	*Revised cash limit £000*
VI	4	Department of Transport	Driver and vehicle licensing	105,229	284	104,945
XIII	9	Department for National Savings	Economic and Financial administration	153,262	162	153,100
XIII	12	Her Majesty's Treasury	Central management of the Civil Service: computers and telecommunications	17,137	180	16,957
XVI	1	Welsh Office	Civil defence, tourism, roads and transport, housing, other environmental services, education and science, arts and libraries, and centrally funded health and personal social services, Wales	191,252	4,793	186,459
SO/LA1		Scottish Office	Capital expenditure in Scotland by local authorities on roads and transport, water and sewerage, general services, urban programme, police and social work, schools, further education and teacher training	415,749	5,359	410,390

VAT

Mr. Janner asked the Chancellor of the Exchquer what recent representations he has received about the value added tax burden on charities.

Mr. Brooke: Since April 1985 my colleagues and I have received some 370 representations about the value added tax burden on charities. These have been carefully considered but I cannot anticipate my right hon. Friend's Budget statement.

National Insurance Contributions

Mr. Yeo asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the proportion of gross domestic product represented by employers's national insurance contributions in 1985-86 or for the latest year for which figures are available; and what was the comparable figure in 1978-79.

Mr. MacGregor: The proportion of gross domestic product represented by employers' national insurance contributions fell from 4·6 per cent. to 3·7 per cent. between 1978-79 and 1984-85 (the latest year for which GDP figures are available). The figures include national insurance surcharge, (abolished during 1984-85) but exclude amounts recovered for statutory sick pay (introduced in 1983-84).

EFTPOS (Banking Law)

Mr. Gould asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he has any plans to seek to amend United Kingdom banking law as it relates to the interests of the personal customers of financial institutions using electronic funds transfer at point of sale.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The Government propose to include in early legislation to strengthen the system of banking supervision a minor technical amendment to the Consumer Credit Act 1974. This will remove a possible constraint on the development of a nationwide system for electronic funds transfer at point of sale. The Government have no plans to include in this legislation any further amendments to UK banking law in relation to EFTPOS.

Banking Supervision (White Paper)

Mr. Gould asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he has consulted the National Consumer Council about the proposals announced in annex 1, paragraph 5, of the White Paper "Banking Supervision".

Mr. Ian Stewart: The National Consumer Council is aware of the Government's proposals for amendment of the Consumer Credit Act, as set out in paragraph 5 of annex 1 of the White Paper "Banking Supervision" (Comnd 9695). The NCC have requested further details of the proposed amendment in relation to electronic funds transfer at point of sale, and these will be provided at the appropriate time.

Mr. Foulkes asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list for each country in the European Economic Community the percentage value added tax take-up entailed by the budget approved by the Council of Ministers.

Mr. Brooke [*pursuant to his reply*, 4 March 1986, c. *94*]: As laid down in article 203 of the treaty of Rome, the council's readings constitute stages in the process of agreeing a budget with the European Parliament, the other part of the budgetary authority. The VAT own resources rates to be applied to member states are only established when the budget is finally adopted by the European Parliament.

DEFENCE

Service Manpower

Mr. Best asked the Secretary of State for Defence what are the current shortages of manpower in each of the three armed services.

Mr. Lee: Overall the services have over 97 per cent. of their officer, and over 99 per cent. of their other ranks, trained strength requirements. The information broken down into each of the armed services is as follows:

Service Category	*Shortfall (−) or Excess (+) in trained strength per cent.*
Officers	
Royal Navy	−3·0
Royal Marines	−3·9
Army	−1·9
RAF	−2·9
Total	−2·5
Other ranks	
Royal Navy	+0·8
Royal Marines	−2·7
Army	+1·0
RAF	−3·1
Total	−0·3

BAOR

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the total cost of the upkeep of the British Army in Germany during the last financial year.

Mr. Stanley: Outturn costs are not collected by geographical deployment areas, but table 2.3 of volume 2 of the "Statement on the Defence Estimates 1985" (Cmnd. 9430-II) shows provision over the period 1979-80 to 1985-86 for the British Army of the Rhine and Berlin.

Falkland Islands

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what has been the total cost to date arising from the Falkland Islands campaign at current prices;

(2) what has been the total military expenditure in the Falkland Islands since 1982.

Mr. Stanley: Total defence expenditure on the Falkland Islands up to the end of financial year 1985-86 is estimated to be £2·6 billion at current prices, including the cost of recovering the islands following the Argentine invasion, residual campaign costs since, and the extra cost to the defence budget of establishing and maintaining the garrison. Of this figure, campaign costs represent some £1·5 billion.

Gurkha Soldiers

Mr. Alton asked the Secretary of State for Defence what provision is made for Christian Gurkha soldiers to worship during their recruit training at the training depot of the Brigade of Gurkhas in Hong Kong.

Mr. Lee: Gurkha soldiers serving in Hong Kong are able to worship at whatever church they wish. No special provision is made for Christians at the training depot of the

Brigade of Gurkhas but there are two local Army churches, one Church of England and the other Roman Catholic, which they may attend.

Mr. Alton asked the Secretary of State for Defence what was the number of Gurkha soldiers serving with the British Army who received a compassionate discharge for each year since 1970; and on what grounds.

Mr. Lee: The information requested is as follows:

	Number
1970	—
1971	—
1972	1
1973	2
1974	4
1975	8
1976	3
1977	4
1978	6
1979	6
1980	6
1981	3
1982	3
1983	4
1984	6
1985	8

The grounds for discharge were domestic problems, involvement in legal or property disputes or further education requirements.

Mr. Alton asked the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has as to the number of Gurkha soldiers at present serving with the British Army who have become Christians during their military service; and how many of these have changed their religious affiliation on their service documents.

Mr. Lee: One.

Nuclear Waste

Mr. Michael McNair-Wilson asked the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his reply on 28 February, *Official Report*, columns *709-10*, if he will clarify the concept of improving the conditioning of intermediate level wastes; and whether this work is to be carried out at the Atomic Weapons Research Establishment, Aldermaston, or by a team from the establishment working elsewhere.

Mr. Lee: The work on improving the conditioning of intermediate level waste referred to is examining methods of treating such wastes and containing them within a possible depository. The work involves the nuclear industry, the Radiochemical Inspectorate of the Department of the Environment and the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate of the Health and Safety Executive. The Atomic Weapons Research Establishment, Aldermaston, is involved in aspects of this work, but there are no plans for a team from the establishment to do such work elsewhere.

Strategic Defence Initiative

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether his Department was informed about the visit by Mr. Clarence Robinson, from the United States Department of Defence, to firms engaged in strategic defence initiative-related work in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norman Lamont: No official approach was made. I am informed that Mr. Robinson returned to the United States of America without visiting any United Kingdom companies.

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Defence what account was taken in negotiations leading to the conclusion of the memorandum of understanding on the strategic defence initiative between the United States Government and Her Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom of the application of territoriality to the exploitation of any research programmes which might result.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Full account was taken of this issue and the resulting arrangements satisfactorily safeguard United Kingdom interests.

Army Personnel (Statistics)

Mr. Alton asked the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has as to the number of *(a)* Hindu, *(b)* Christian and *(c)* other Gurkhas serving with the British Army.

Mr. Lee: The information requested is as follows:

	Number
Hindu	7,893
Buddhis	297
Christian	16

Mr. Alton asked the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has as to the number of (i) Christian and (ii) Hindu: *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* non-commissioned officers serving with the British Army.

Mr. Lee: Excluding the Brigade of Gurkhas, the information requested is as follows:

	Numbers
Officers:	
Christian	16,131
Hindu	33
Non-Commissioned Officers:	
Christian	76,951
Hindu	28

Civil Defence

Mr. Strang asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give a further breakdown of the item "local administration communications etc. in United Kingdom" under "other support functions" in table 2.3 in the "Statement on the Defence Estimates 1985", Vol. 2.

Mr. Stanley [*pursuant to his reply*, 3 March 1986, c. *70-71*]: The item includes the movement of service personnel and freight, HMSO and property repayment services, communications and other miscellaneous administration and support costs.

TRANSPORT

Commissioners of Irish Lights

Mr. John David Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Transport if, pursuant to his reply of 27 February, *Official Report*, column *649*, he will now list the present country of residence of the members of the Commission of Irish Lights.

Mr. Ridley: I am not responsible for these appointments.

Motorways (Lighting)

Mr. Cartwright asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the lengths in miles in each case of motorway and dual carriageway trunk road for which assurances have been given at public inquiries or at stages in the planning process that lighting would not take place.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The information requested could be obtained only at disproportionate cost to the Department.

Traffic Surveying Equipment

Mr. Cartwright asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the locations of permanent automatic traffic counting installations; which of these are now in operation; what types of traffic measurements the installations can produce; how long it takes the measurement to become available for those requiring the information; and if he will place a copy of a technical report describing the monitoring method and programme in the Library.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I shall write to the hon. Member.

National Bus Company

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for Transport what changes in the pattern of bus services he expects to follow the sale of the National Bus Company.

Mr. David Mitchell: The sale of NBC's operations will further the Government's policy of promoting fair competition in the bus industry. I believe this will give bus operators new incentives and the opportunity to provide the pattern of services which best responds to the wishes of passengers.

Security Tests (Plastic Pistols)

Mr. Freeson asked the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is taking to detect the presence of plastic pistols at airports and other security sensitive points for which he is responsible.

Mr. Ridley: My officials follow up all reports of the manufacture of such weapons with the Metropolitan police firearms branch. No operational firearm that is completely plastic or non-metallic has been identified to date. Such weapons as have been examined all have sufficient metal content to register on the metal detectors in use at United Kingdom airports. I am keeping the position under review, however.

Unlike most other states we search a significant proportion of passengers by hand at United Kingdom airports after they have passed through the metal detectors, and this acts as a deterrent against the carrying of realistic non-metallic replica firearms or other kinds of non-metallic patential weapons.

Derbyshire (Loss at Sea)

Mr. Shersby asked the Secretary of State for Transport (1) why a public inquiry has not been held into the disappearance at sea of the Derbyshire in 1980; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what consideration has been given by his Department to the existence of fatigue cracks in the Derbyshire and her five sister ships built between 1971 and 1976; what discussions have taken place with British Shipbuilders; and what advice is currently being given by his Department with a view to ensuring greater safety at sea and the avoidance of loss resulting from fatigue failures.

Mr. Ridley: I am awaiting a report concerning the disappearance at sea of the Derbyshire, and an announcement will be made shortly.

Light Dues

Mr. Hill asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement about light dues.

Mr. Ridley: My Department has had extensive consultations with the three general lighthouse authorities (Trinity House, the Northern Lighthouse Board and the Commissioners of Irish Lights), the Lights Advisory Committee and—in respect of matters bearing on the Commissioners of Irish Lights—the Irish Department of Communications. In the light of these exchanges, I think it would be desirable if light dues in the United Kingdom in 1986-87 were increased by 5 per cent. and I have laid an order before the House for this purpose. The light dues to be levied by the Commissioners of Irish Lights in the Republic of Ireland are the responsibility of the Irish Minister of Communications.

I am conscious of the need to maintain the competitive position of our shipping industry and of our ports and, following my consultations with the general lighthouse authorities, I have asked them to reduce their expenditure by about £1·7 million in 1986-87.

ENVIRONMENT

Local Government

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the number of local government personnel in England in *(a)* education, *(b)* planning, *(c)* police, *(d)* fire services, *(e)* social services, *(f)* consumer services, *(g)* library and recreation and *(h)* other services, respectively, during the years 1960, 1970, 1980, 1981, 1982, 1983, 1984 and 1985, respectively; and what was the total cost in salaries and wages in each case.

Mrs. Rumbold: The available information is given in the table together with the notes.

Local authority manpower and manpower costs by service England (except England and Wales for 1960-61)

	1960-61	1970-71	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85	1985-86
Education								
Manpower (FTE)	—	—	923,100	896,000	881,700	877,100	870,600	865,900
Cost (£ million)	414	1,101	6,442	7,149	7,591	7,989	8,315	—
Planning								
Manpower (FTE)	—	—	20,400	20,100	19,600	19,800	19,800	19,800
Cost (£ million)	—	18	167	173	185	202	213	—
Police								
Manpower (FTE)	—	—	149,300	153,800	154,800	155,700	155,900	155,900
Cost (£ million)	74	265	1,509	1,797	2,018	2,235	2,569	—
Fire services								
Manpower (FTE)	—	—	38,700	38,400	38,600	38,800	39,100	39,200
Cost (£ million)	19	51	331	393	436	477	506	—
Social services								
Manpower (FTE)	—	—	195,700	197,900	198,800	203,100	207,600	211,300
Cost (£ million)	69	206	1,209	1,350	1,485	1,612	1,709	—
Consumer services								
Manpower (FTE)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Cost (£ million)	—	4	32	36	40	42	44	—
Libraries, museums and recreation								
Manpower (FTE)	—	—	105,600	104,000	103,400	105,500	106,800	107,700
Cost (£ million)	—	68	481	524	565	605	676	—
Other services								
Manpower (FTE)	—	—	518,200	504,200	490,200	492,700	492,000	491,700
Cost (£ million)	395	818	3,339	3,626	3,856	4,011	4,200	—
TOTALS								
Manpower (FTE)	—	—	1,951,000	1,914,400	1,887,100	1,892,700	1,891,800	1,891,500
Cost (£ million)	971	2,531	13,510	15,048	16,176	17,173	18,232	—

Notes to the table

1. The manpower figures are from the "Joint Manpower Watch" as at June of each year and are given in terms of full-time equivalents. They are not available for 1960-61 or 1970-71.
2. Separate manpower figures are not available for consumer services. They are included in the manpower figures for other services.
3. The manpower costs include wages and salaries, employers' national insurance contributions, superannuation, allowances, training and other expenses. The 1960-61 figures are for England and Wales. For the remaining years they are for England. The 1984-85 figures are provisional.
4. Separate figures for the manpower cost of planning, consumer services and libraries, museums and recreation are not available for 1960-61. These items are in other services for that year.
5. Except as indicated in 2 and 4 above other services include local transport, housing (including housing revenue account) administration of justice, employment services, environmental services, miscellaneous rate fund services and trading services.
6. There are differences in the way in which the data sources attribute manpower and manpower cost figures to services. The cost figures do not therefore precisely relate to the manpower figures.

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the total amount paid in wages and salaries to all persons employed in local government in 1979, 1980, 1981, 1982 and 1983, respectively; if he will show the 1982 figure and the 1983 figure as percentages of the 1979 figure; and what information he has as to how much was paid in each case to *(a)* chief and senior officers and *(b)* all other personnel, excluding manual workers, and *(c)* manual workers, showing in each case 1982, 1983, 1984, and 1985 figures as a percentage of 1979 figures.

Mrs. Rumbold: The following is the available information on local authority employee costs in England:

	£ million	Percentage of 1979-80
1979-80	10,950	—
1980-81	13,510	—
1981-82	15,050	—
1982-83	16,180	148
1983-84	17,170	157
1984-85	18,230	166
1985-86	n.a.	

The figures cover employee costs in rate fund services, trading services, and the housing revenue account, and include wages and salaries, national insurance, employers superannuation contributions and so on.

Outturn data held by the Department do not provide information on wages and salaries alone nor a breakdown of employee costs into (i) chief and senior officers (ii) manual workers, (iii) others.

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will state *(a)* the total expenditure on local government in 1979, 1984 and 1985 and *(b)* the average overall cost of local government staff; and if he will break down the average cost into pay, national insurance, personnel overheads, accommodation and rents, office services and superannuation and pension schemes and any other costs relating to staff for each year and *(c)* show the overall cost on staff as a percentage of total spending in each case.

Mrs. Rumbold: The available information is as follows:

	1979-80 England and Wales £ million	1984-85 England £ million
Gross revenue expenditure	25,265	36,740
Total employee costs	11,590 (46 percentage)	18,230 (50 percentage)

Total employee costs as a percentage of gross revenue expenditure are shown in brackets. Separate outturn information on wages and salaries, national insurance and the other elements specified in the question and estimates for 1985-86 are not available.

Nuclear Waste

Mr. Frank Cook asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will estimate the capital expenditure for each of the facilities proposed for the disposal of low and intermediate level wastes, by shallow burial, engineered trench disposal and deep cavity disposal, in terms of gross capital expenditure for construction and yearly costs for operation, maintenance and servicing, staff and transport costs.

Mr. Waldegrave: I understand from NIREX that the likely capital costs of waste disposal plus the first 10 years of operation expressed in pounds at 1985 prices will be:

(a) Engineered trench burial for low level waste and short lived intermediate level waste: £100 million approx

(b) Deep cavity disposal for longlived intermediate level waste: £200 million approx

Actual costs will depend partly on the type of rock at the disposal site.

Mr. Frank Cook asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will estimate the total costs related to the disposal of unit volume of waste, for each of the waste types, showing the costs per cubic metre of very low level, low level, low activity intermediate level and high activity intermediate level radioactive wastes.

Mr. Waldegrave: I understand from NIREX that the estimated costs of waste disposal expressed as £ per annum per cubic metre at 1985 prices will be as follows, but detailed design studies have not been carried out.

Type of Waste	Transport by Road	Transport by Rail	Disposal
Low level	50	170	350
Short lived intermediate level	360	660	1,800
Long lived intermediate level	840	1,300	at least 2,000

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list all the non-nuclear industrial sites in England making authorised discharges of uranium and other radio-active materials to the sea.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The non-nuclear industrial sites in England which are authorised to discharge radioactive wastes to sea are listed below.

Name	Location
Albright and Wilson Limited	Marchon Works, Whitehaven, Cumbria
British Petroleum Chemicals Limited	Salt End, Hull, Humberside
British Titan Products (Tioxide) Limited	Grimsby, Humberside
Beeching Group plc	Worthing, West Sussex
Central Electricity Generating Board	Eggborough Power Station, Goole, North Yorkshire
Glaxochem Limited	Ulverston, Cumbria
Imperial Chemical Industries plc	Billingham, Cleveland
Imperial Chemical Industries plc	Severnside Works, Hallen, Bristol
Norsk Hydro Fertilizers Limited	West Site Tank Farm, Avonmouth, Bristol
Pfizer Limited	Sandwich, Kent
S C M Chemicals Limited	Stallinborough, Grimsby, Humberside

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will review the current discharge authorisations from British Nuclear Fuels Ltd., Sellafield, to the Irish sea; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: As my right hon. Friend the Member for Woodford and Wanstead (Mr. Jenkin) informed the hon. Member on 18 December 1984 at columns 93-94, formal proposals to replace the existing liquid discharge authorisation for BNFL, Sellafield, are currently being prepared by the radiochemical inspectorate of my Department, jointly with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

It is now intended that, following the consultations which my right hon. Friend promised, the new liquid discharge authorisation should come into force on 1 July 1986.

Local Authority Expenditure

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the total expenditure by local authorities in England in each of the financial years since 1972-73 to the latest available date.

Mrs. Rumbold: The information is not available for England only for the period 1972-73 to date. Gross revenue expenditure of local authorities for England and Wales since 1972-73 is as follows:

	£ million
1972-73	8,004
1973-74	9,733
1974-75	11,734
1975-76	14,961
1976-77	17,133
1977-78	18,768
1978-79	21,410
1979-80	25,265
1980-81	30,338
1981-82	33,441
1982-83	36,142
1983-84	38,573
1984-85	38,735

Planning Decisions

Sir Dudley Smith asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many planning decisions on applications by local authorities he has called in for his decision for each of the years 1980, 1981, 1982, 1983, 1984 and 1985, respectively.

Mr. Tracey: The information is as follows:

Year	*Local authority proposals called in*
1980	45
1981	22
1982	11
1983	22
1984	12
1985	*18

* Provisional figure: statistical returns on planning cases for 1985 are not yet complete.

Sir Dudley Smith asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will now revise his approach to controversial planning decisions where he is asked to consider the matter and where a considerable number of responsible people in an area wish him to undertake such consideration.

Mr. Tracey: The degree of controversy is one of the factors which my right hon. Friend takes into account in considering requests for his intervention on particular planning proposls. Each case is considered on its merits, but in general he is prepared to call in proposals only if planning issues of more than local importance arise.

Local Authorities (Planning Permission)

Sir Dudley Smith asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many planning decisions by local authorities where they have granted themselves planning permission have been called in by him since he took office; how many have been reversed; and in how many cases he has refused to take action.

Mr. Tracey: Planning proposals by the local authority can only be called in by the Secretary of State before a decision is taken by the authority. However, provisional returns show that, in the period July-December 1985, six out of 20 local authority planning proposals required to be notified to my right hon. Friend were called in for his decision.

Sir Dudley Smith asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will examine the present arrangements for checking decisions of local authorities who have power to grant themselves planning permission.

Mr. Tracey: The procedures under which my right hon. Friend considers whether the local planning authority shall be required to apply to him for permission for a development which it proposes to undertake are kept under review. They operate in a generally satisfactory manner.

Sir Dudley Smith asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will introduce legislation to provide that local authorities with planning permission powers use such powers only when they have taken specific steps to satisfy themselves that the interests of the local population have been protected; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Tracey: Local authorities are already required by the Town and Country Planning General Regulations 1976 to give their development proposals the same publicity and to carry out the same consultations as for any planning application for similar development. They are also obliged to consult any other local planning authority for the area in which the land concerned is situated.

Planning Applications

Sir Dudley Smith asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many employees of his Department are engaged in examining and tendering advice on disputed planning applications; and how many have this work as their major employment role.

Mr. Tracey: The numbers of employees concerned are 695 and 555, respectively. These figures include 412 full-time inspectors and other staff, and 100 part-time fee-paid inspectors, dealing with planning and enforcement appeals to the Secretary of State.

School and Public Playing Fields

Sir Dudley Smith asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many school and public playing fields have gone to public or private development in the most recent five-year period for which figures are available.

Mr. Tracey: This information is not available centrally.

NIREX

Mr. Frank Cook asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress NIREX and its consultants have made with the design of the Land 2 disposal facilities; when the feasibility study, initial design stage and final design stages, respectively, are expected to be completed; and if he will make it his policy for each stage to be made public when it has been concluded.

Mr. Waldegrave: NIREX has already developed generic designs, illustrated in its third annual report. Alternative conceptual designs will be commissioned as relevant information from geological investigations of all the sites becomes available. These investigations will assess the feasibility of the sites and are expected to be complete during 1987. Thereafter, NIREX will undertake detailed design work. NIREX is prepared to make all designs publicly available. In particular, information on designs will be available to the public inquiry into any development proposals from NIREX and for consultation on the proposed terms of any authorisation for NIREX to dispose of waste at a facility.

British Nuclear Fuels Ltd.

Mr. Frank Cook asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if, pursuant to the answer of 31 January, *Official Report*, column *652*, he has yet received an explanation from British Nuclear Fuels Ltd. as to why on Thursday 23 January it chose to discharge this material into the Irish sea in preference to any other options that may have been open to it; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: Yes; a report was received within two weeks of the event. I am satisfied that British Nuclear Fuels considered a number of options before discharging

uranium-bearing liquid waste to the Irish sea, and that a safe and environmentally acceptable procedure was adopted.

Mr. Frank Cook asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if the discharge from Sellafield on 23 January contravened in any respect any part of the authorisation limits for the site as they applied at the date of the discharge; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: I am advised that the discharge from Sellafield on 23 January did not contravene any limit or condition contained in either of the authorisations granted by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and by my Department relating to the discharge of liquid waste containing radioactive materials by British Nuclear Fuels.

Delegations

Mr. Snape asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what criteria he uses in deciding whether to meet delegations himself or to arrange for them to meet other Ministers in his Department.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: My hon. Friends and I try to meet as many delegations as possible. The decision as to who should meet a particular delegation is taken according to the circumstances of each case and in the light of our respective work loads and the special responsibilities of my hon. Friends.

Rate Support Grant

Mr. Snape asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many delegations Ministers have met following the rate support grant allocation for 1985-86, distinguishing in each case which Minister in his Department met each delegation.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Since announcing the 1986-87 rate support grant settlement on 18 December my ministerial colleagues and I have met 37 deputations from authorities. I have had discussions about rate support grant issues with representatives from the councils of Buckinghamshire, Dorset, Hereford and Worcester, Surrey, Kirklees, Leeds, Wakefield, Calderdale, Wirral, Sefton, Bury, Liverpool, Dudley, Solihull, Harborough, Winchester and East Hampshire. My hon. Friend the Minister for Environment, Countryside and Local Government has met deputations from Hillingdon, the East Anglia Consultative Committee (which represents Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire), Essex, East Sussex, Hampshire, Hertfordshire, West Sussex and Cumbria. My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State has met representatives from Barnet, Havering, Redbridge, Sutton, City of Durham, Langbaurgh, Ribble Valley, Burnley, East Yorkshire, Vale Royal, Kingswood, Thanet, Derbyside and Norfolk. She also met a deputation from North Tyneside with my noble Friend the Minister of State, and a deputation from the West Yorkshire police authority with my hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey (Mr. Shaw).

Mr. Bellingham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he proposes to make any change to the cash limit for rate support grants to local authorities in England.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The Rate Support Grant Supplementary Report (England) (No. 2) 1985-86 was approved by the House of Commons on 20 January. It implements abatement of block grant for 1985-86 based on the latest information from local authorities on their budgeted expenditure. The total of grant abatement is reduced from £550 million to £435 million.

The cash limit for class XVIII, vote I, will be reduced by £30 million from £8,772 million to £8,742 million—which is broadly consistent with the above grant abatement. Expenditure on this vote is not classified as public expenditure.

Mr. Hayward asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will arrange for tables to be placed in the Library showing the rate support grant paid to local authorities in respect of each year since 1974-75.

Mr. Waldegrave: Yes. Two sets of tables have been placed in the Library: one set in respect of the years 1974-75 to 1980-81, the other for subsequent years. The two sets of figures are not fully comparable for reasons explained on the folders. The tables for 1983-84 onwards will be updated and later years will be added as information becomes available.

Green Field Sites

Sir Dudley Smith asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many planning decisions taken by his Department since 2 September 1985 have had the effect of preventing the development of green field sites; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Tracey: This information is not readily available, and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Allotments

Mr. Tom Cox asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has on which London borough councils provide allotments for local residents.

Mrs. Rumbold: The information that we have suggests that all London borough councils provide allotments with the exceptions of the inner London boroughs of Kensington and Chelsea, Tower Hamlets, Westminster and the City of London.

Conservation (Grants-in-Aid)

Mr. Key asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list, by category, grants-in-aid to the Countryside Commission and to the Nature Conservancy Council to encourage sound conservation practices in each year since 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: Grant-in-aid has been paid to the Countryside Commission only since 1 April 1982 as follows:

	£ million
1982-83	11·2
1983-84	12·5
1984-85	13·0
1985-86	15·3
1986-87*	17·7

* Proposed.

The commission has dual statutory purposes of conserving the natural beauty of the countryside and improving facilities for its enjoyment and it is not possible

to identify the amounts spent on conservation practices. The commission's annual reports, copies of which are available in the Library, do however, give an indication of how their expenditure is broken down.

Grant-in-aid to the Nature Conservancy Council is paid in support of its conservation functions generally. The figures since 1979 are as set out:

	£ million
1979-80	7·9
1980-81	9·4
1981-82	10·2
1982-83	11·5
1983-84	12·8
1984-85	18·1
1985-86	22·7
1986-87*	32·1

* Proposed.

General Development Order

Dr. David Clark asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to introduce legislation to amend the general development order; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Tracey: A number of changes to the general development orders came into force on 1 March. My right hon. Friend intends to lay before Parliament later this Session a new order which will consolidate, simplify and further amend the existing orders.

Consent Applications

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to reach decisions on all outstanding applications for consent under the Local Government Act 1985 by 31 March.

Mr. Tracey: I refer the hon. Member to my answer of 21 January 1986, at column *142*.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what is the number of outstanding applications for consent under the Local Government Act 1985 submitted by South Yorkshire county council; and how many have been outstanding for two months or more;

(2) what is the number of outstanding applications made by the Mersey county council for consent under the Local Government Act 1985; and how many have been outstanding for two months or more;

(3) what is the number of outstanding applications for consent under the Local Government Act 1985 submitted by Tyne and Wear county council; and how many have been outstanding for two months or more;

(4) what is the number of outstanding applications for consent under the Local Government Act 1985 submitted by West Yorkshire county council; and how many have been outstanding for two months or more;

(5) what is the number of outstanding applications for consent under the Local Government Act 1985 submitted by the West Midlands county council; and how many have been outstanding for two months or more;

(6) what is the number of outstanding applications for consent under the Local Government Act 1985 submitted by the Greater Manchester county council; and how many have been outstanding for two months or more.

Mr. Tracey: Details of outstanding applications for consent under section 9 of the Local Government (Interim Provisions) Act 1984, as amended by section 93 of the Local Government Act 1985, and sections 91 and 92 of the Local Government Act 1985, are set pout in the table:

Authority	*Number of applications outstanding*	*Number of applications outstanding for 2 months or more*
Greater Manchester Council	36	25
Merseyside County Council	6	0
South Yorkshire County Council	10	8
Tyne and Wear County Council	34	10
West Midlands County Council	29	13
West Yorkshire County Council	8	2

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many applications for consent under the Local Government Act 1985 made by the Greater London council have now been outstanding for more than two months; and if he will list them with the reasons for the delay in granting consent in each case.

Mr. Tracey: Fifty Eight current applications from the Greater London council for consent under section 9 of the Local Government (Interim Provisions) Act 1984, as amended by section 93 of the Local Government Act 1985 and sections 91 and 92 of the Local Government Act 1985, have been outstanding for over two months. A list of these applications is set out. This list could be provided in a more detailed form, with full reasons why decisions have not yet been issued, only at disproportionate cost. However, in at least 38 cases my right hon. Friend is awaiting further information requested from the council.

1985 Brent Carnival
5 Westminster Bridge Road, SE1
Accommodation for the Homeless
Agricultural Restoration
Anti-racist Activity
Anti-racist Awareness
Battersea Park
Burgess Park
Burgess Park
Burgess Park
Burgess Park
Car park at Feelon Place
Carrington House Support Team
Civil Defence Video Films
Cromwell Road/Ashburn Place
Dial-a-Ride
Disability Resource Team
East London Family Service Unit
Finsbury Park
GLC Arts and Recreation Department
Hockey Development
House Condition Survey
House Condition Survey
Housing Advisory Centre
Indemnity
Indemnity to Employees
Improvement of Properties in Brixton
Jubilee Gardens, Lambeth
LFB Training Centre
LFB Training Centre
Local Household Survey
Londoners Action Kit
Market Road Recreation Site
Market Road Recreation Site
Mile End
Mile End Park
Mile End Park
Mile End Park
Mile End Park
Neasden Rail Freight Depot
One Islington
Parliament Hill

Prince Regents Lane
Prince Regents Lane Recreation
Roundhouse Arts Centre
Sidworth Street, Hackney
Spar Housing Association
Sports Assistance
St. Hilda's East
St. Paul's Recreation Site
St. Paul's Recreation Site
Thames Road Civic Amenity Site
Tower Hamlets
Trinity College
Unit 1, Parkhouse Trading Estate
Victoria Park and Burdett Gardens
Woolwich Common/Nightingale Place
Yarnton Way, Thamesmead

Urban Housing Renewal Unit (Report)

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish his Department's urban housing renewal unit's report on its first six months' work.

Sir George Young: This account is a provisional working report to Ministers, which relates only to those authorities which had been visited by the unit before 19 December 1985. We will publish a full annual report during this summer.

Water Emergency Inquiry (Leeds)

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has received a copy of the Yorkshire water authority's report on the Leeds water emergency inquiry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: I shall answer this question shortly.

Landscape Areas Special Development Orders

Dr. David Clark asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on his proposals for landscape areas special development orders following his consultation paper of April 1985.

Mr. Tracey: An announcement will be made very soon.

Open Flue Gas Heating Systems

Ms. Harman asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will seek to introduce grants for landlords, both public and private sector, to cover the cost of replacing open flue gas heating systems in bathrooms.

Sir George Young: Grants are already available, other than to housing authorities, for the replacement of such appliances under the home improvement grant system as part of an overall scheme of improvement and repair of a sub-standard dwelling. We have no plans to introduce any more specific grants. Where council dwellings are involved, replacement of such appliances would be primarily a matter for the local authority, and, where appropriate, work would be eligible for housing subsidy.

Ms. Harman asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will introduce legislation obliging landlords, both public and private sector, to replace open flue gas heating systems in bathrooms.

Sir George Young: Responsibility for health and safety legislation in respect of gas water heaters is a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Paymaster General.

Kirklees and Wakefield Chamber of Commerce (Correspondence)

Mr. Wainwright asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will now reply to the letter and request of 5 February last addressed to him by Kirklees and Wakefield chamber of commerce about prospective local authority rate increases.

Mrs. Rumbold: I have answered this letter today.

Property in Lieu of Tax

Mr. Franks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether any further property has been accepted in lieu of estate duty or capital transfer tax.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Yes. Two sites have recently been accepted under these arrangements. One hundred and five acres at Coldharbour common, Dorking—in one of the most outstanding areas of the Surrey hills area of outstanding natural beauty—have been accepted and transferred to the National Trust.

In addition, 41 acres of woodland at Pond Wood, Buckinghamshire, within the Chilterns AONB, have been accepted and transferred to the Chequers estate.

The net cost was £61,500 (£12,500 for Coldharbour common and £49,000 for Pond Wood) and this was borne equally on the vote of my Department and that of the Office of Arts and Libraries.

Highway Maintenance (Bromley)

Mr. John Hunt asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he can now say how he proposes to deal with the issue raised by the London borough of Bromley regarding the level of grant payment for the upkeep of the highways to be transferred from the Greater London council to Bromley after abolition.

Mr. Waldegrave: I intend to deal with this matter in the first supplementary report for 1986-87 later this year. I intend then *(a)* to redetermine settlement multipliers for London boroughs to allow for the revised disaggregation of highway maintenance expenditure based on inherited road lengths and road usage; and *(b)* to redetermine multipliers to limit the grant losses faced by ratepayers arising from this change to the equivalent of a 2p rate. This is a temporary arrangement and will be removed in a subsequent supplementary report for 1986-87.

These changes will mean that Bromley will receive the proper amount of grant for taking over responsibility for highway maintenance in Bromley from the GLC.

Details of the redetermined multipliers, before the application of the limit on grant losses, are shown in the table. I am consulting the local authority associations about the basis for calculating the safety net.

Revised Multipliers: London

	Revised multiplier No limit on losses
Greater London	
City of London	0·707000
Camden	0·707000
Greenwich	0·541808
Hackney	0·567019
Hammersmith and Fulham	0·710590

	Revised multiplier No limit on losses
Islington	0·556172
Kensington and Chelsea	0·781920
Lambeth	0·561957
Lewisham	0·629303
Southwark	0·548738
Tower Hamlets	0·376481
Wandsworth	0·740898
Westminster	0·707000
Barking and Dagenham	0·795599
Barnet	0·778298
Bexley	0·796815
Brent	0·824677
Bromley	0·759661
Croydon	0·838416
Ealing	0·836716
Enfield	0·787557
Haringey	0·740096
Harrow	0·802436
Havering	0·801062
Hillingdon	0·781005
Hounslow	0·787482
Kingston-upon-Thames	0·780031
Merton	0·787337
Newham	0·853127
Redbridge	0·784438
Richmond-upon-Thames	0·784701
Sutton	0·803795
Waltham Forest	0·728424
ILEA	0·707000
London Fire and CD authority	0·749415
Metropolitan police	0·767730

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 7 March 1986

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Middlesex Guildhall

Mr. Lawrence asked the Attorney-General what work is being carried out on the Middlesex Guildhall building in Parliament square; whether it is intended to reopen it as a Crown court; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: The interior of the Middlesex Guildhall is being adapted in order to increase the number of courtrooms from six to seven and to improve the facilities available to the courts' users. The work is expected to be completed by the end of 1987 and it will reopen as a Crown court thereafter.

Law Commission Reports (Draft Bills)

Mr. Maclennan asked the Attorney-General on how many occasions draft Bills contained in reports of the Law Commission have been prepared by parliamentary counsel; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: All clauses and draft Bills included in reports by the Law Commission are prepared by parliamentary counsel. There have been 81 such reports to date.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Inflation

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he last met the Confederation of British Industry to discuss the current level of inflation.

Mr. Ian Stewart: My right hon. Friend last saw the CBI at the NEDC meeting on 5 March, but inflation was not discussed. With the current downward trend it is understandable that the CBI has not asked for such a discussion.

Tax Allowances

Mr. Cash asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received seeking special tax allowances or relief for individuals who work in United Kingdom enterprises which compete successfully with foreign goods or services.

Mr. Moore: We have received representations on a wide range of issues in recent weeks. I have noted my hon. Friend's interest in this particular suggestion.

Mr. Frank Field asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will express the value of personal tax allowances to a single person, married couple and two wage earners tax unit at each of the marginal rates of tax.

Mr. Moore: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Johnson Matthey Bankers

Mr. Sedgemore asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the scheme for the direct payment of value added tax by the buyers as opposed to the vendors of gold was introduced; if Johnson Matthey Bankers and the Bank of England have participated continuously and jointly in the scheme since its inception; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: The scheme was introduced on 1 November 1983. The Commissioners of Customs and Excise advise me that Johnson Matthey Bankers Ltd. was issued with a letter of authority to use the scheme from its inception. However, to disclose the extent of a company's use of the scheme would be a breach of the commissioners' normal principle of confidentiality governing the affairs of an individual taxpayer.

As a central bank it is not appropriate for the Bank of England to be a member of the scheme.

Taxation

Mr. Frank Field asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will express the percentage shares of tax paid for each year since 1977-78 by the following income groups: the top 10 per cent., 10 to 20 per cent., 20 to 30 per cent., 30 to 40 per cent., 40 to 50 per cent., 50 to 60 per cent., 60 to 70 per cent., 70 to 80 per cent., 80 to 90 per cent. and bottom 10 per cent., respectively;

(2) if he will express, in percentage terms, changes in the combined effect of tax and national insurance contributions in 1978-79, and the latest available date, taking 1956-57 tax year as the base for those on two-thirds average earnings, average earnings, twice, five and 10 times average earnings.

Mr. Moore: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Mortgage Interest Relief

Mr. Frank Field asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will detail the value of mortgage interest relief at the latest available date, giving the average relief per mortgagor, the numbers claiming relief, the total value of relief and the total number of taxpayers per income range for those with incomes under £3,000, £3,000 to £5,000, £5,000 to £7,500, £7,500 to £10,000, £10,000 to £15,000, £15,000 to £20,000, £20,000 to £25,000 and above £25,000.

Mr. Moore: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Gaston Schloh (European Court Judgment)

Mr. Jackson asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether the United Kingdom is implementing the Court of Justice judgment in the Gaston Schloh case (85/82).

Mr. Brooke: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

Bad Debts (VAT)

Mr. Robert B. Jones asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the provisions for extended relief from value added tax on bad debts arrangements introduced by the Finance Act 1985 will be brought into operation; and whether they will apply to any existing receiverships.

Mr. Brooke: A Treasury commencement order has been made and Value Added Tax (Bad Debt Relief) Regulations are being laid today before the House to bring the provisions of section 32 of the Finance Act 1985 into operation from 1 April next. The legal provisions will apply only where the debtor becomes insolvent on or after 1 April. Customs and Excise will, however, allow relief as an extra-statutory class concession where, on that date, the debtor is already in receivership provided that the receiver is able to issue a certificate that the assets of the company would be insufficient, on liquidation, to cover the payment of a dividend to the ordinary unsecured creditors. Concessionary relief will also be allowed in similar circumstances in Northern Ireland pending the introduction of equivalent legislation for the Province.

ENERGY

North Sea Oil and Gas

Mr. Eadie asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he proposes to take any action within the ambit of his responsibility by meeting the appropriate trade unions and organisations to discuss the threatened industrial dispute in the North sea oil industry.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: I understand that this matter is still under discussion between the employers and trade unions concerned. It would be inappropriate for me to intervene.

Mr. Eadie asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list the oil companies and contractors involved onshore and offshore in North sea gas and oil exploration.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: The latest published list of United Kingdom offshore licensees is given in appendix 2 of the annual report for the year 1984-85 published in accordance with the Continental Shelf Act 1964. I will write to the hon. Member with the information requested on onshore licensees. There is no list available of the many thousands of contractors involved in United Kingdom onshore and offshore oil and gas operations.

Mr. Eadie asked the Secretary of State for Energy how many times he has met the United Kingdom Offshore Operators Association (UKOOA) from the beginning of 1985 to the present time.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: My right hon. Friend and I frequently meet representatives of UKOOA both formally and informally, and will continue to do so, to discuss the many matters of mutual interest.

Mr. Eadie asked the Secretary of State of Energy what consultations his Department has had with operators in the North sea in relation to current health and safety practices.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: As required under legislation, my Department is holding formal consultations with North sea operators, on a number of matters including first aid, safety representatives and safety committees, reporting of accidents and various training guidance notes.

ENVIRONMENT

Land Management Agreement Payments

Mr. Maclennan asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how much the Nature Conservancy Council and the Countryside Commission have spent in cash and real terms on land management agreement payments to farmers for each year since 1980.

Mrs. Rumbold: The Nature Conservancy Council has paid the following amounts under management agreements with owners and occupiers of sites of special scientific interest:

	Amounts paid £	*Expressed in 1980-81 prices* £
1980-81	*39,018	39,018
1981-82	*60,550	54,994
1982-83	243,000	206,207
1983-84	361,000	293,238
1984-85	1,145,000	889,929

* Amounts paid under nature reserve agreements are not readily available for these years and are excluded. Such amounts are usually small but one payment in 1981-82 under a nature reserve agreement amounted to £278,734.

It is not possible to identify separately payments made to farmers. The Countryside Commission does not make payments direct to farmers under management agreements.

Local Authority Housing

Mr. Marlow asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has as to the average cost in inner city areas per unit of accommodation of *(a)* housing management and *(b)* housing repairs and maintenance for local authority housing.

Sir George Young: I shall answer this question shortly.

Croxteth Hall and Country Park

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussions he has had with the Liverpool city council and the chairman of the Merseyside Residuary Body on the future of Croxteth hall and country park; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Tracey: My noble Friend the Minister of State has had discussions with representatives of Liverpool city council about the future management arrangements for Croxteth. These are not matters for the chairman of the Merseyside Residuary Body.

It is disappointing that the city council, to which the estate was originally given and which has received an allowance for it in its RSG settlement for 1986-87, has not yet made known its intentions for the continuing and proper management of this important local amenity and so end the uncertainty of the staff.

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will visit the Croxteth hall and country park in Liverpool before making a property order under the Local Government Act 1985.

Mr. Tracey: The property order transferring the Croxteth estate to Liverpool city council has already been made.

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he is taking to secure the full adoption of the facilities of Croxteth hall and country park as required under section 7(2) of the Local Government Act 1985; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Tracey: I refer the hon. Member to the report under section 7(2) of the Local Government Act 1985, which was laid before the House on 25 February. This describes the steps taken by my right hon. Friend, including the provison of extra resources to the successor authorities and the Countryside Commission.

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will be replying to the letter of 11 February 1986 from the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby with reference to Croxteth hall and country park, Liverpool.

Mr. Tracey: A reply was sent on 5 March.

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the representations he has received about the future of the Croxteth hall and country park in Liverpool; what discussions he has had with representatives of the local community; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Tracey: I refer the hon. Member to my replies of 28 October 1985, at column *368*, and of 11 February 1986, at column *400*.

Voluntary Sector (Local Authority Support)

Mrs. Peacock asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has as to the 10 local authorities, in order, providing the greatest level of support for the voluntary sector.

Mrs. Rumbold: The 10 local authorities, in order, providing the greatest level of support for the voluntary sector are as follows:

	£ thousand
GLC	29,663
Islington	13,348
Kent	11,775
Birmingham	11,413
Lancashire	9,450
Hackney	9,175
Southwark	8,777
Lambeth	8,398
Surrey	7,549
Avon	7,196

The figures provided are for 1984-85 and include amounts paid in grants, fees and rate relief. These figures are available from "Charity Statistics 1984-85" compiled and published by the Charities Aid Foundation.

Chemical Leak, Belvedere

Mr. Evennett asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has received any representations following the recent chemical leak at Belvedere.

Mrs. Rumbold: I shall answer this question shortly.

Urban Programme

Mrs. Peacock asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give the total sums allocated by the Government to the urban aid programme for the years 1979 to 1985.

Sir George Young: Resource allocations, in cash, for the urban programme were as follows:

	£ million
1979-80	165
1980-81	202
1981-82	215
1982-83	270
1983-84	348
1984-85	348
1985-86	338

Homes Insulation Grants (Camden)

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if any application has been received from the London borough of Camden for supplementary grant under the 1985-86 homes insulation grant programme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: No application has been received from the London borough of Camden for an additional allocation under the homes insulation scheme. Local authorities were informed in DOE circular 7/85, issued in March 1985, that in addition to an initial allocation which had been made to individual local authorities, a reserve of £7 million had been established from which further allocations would be made in accordance with demand. Authorities were asked to apply in time to maintain their flow of approvals and to avoid their having to impose a moratorium on approvals. Many local authorities have applied for such additional allocations.

Norfolk Broads

Mr. Ryder asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will introduce legislation to establish a new authority for the Norfolk Broads.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Yes. The Government intend to introduce a Bill to set up a new statutory authority, with powers for the comprehensive management of the Broads, at the earliest practicable opportunity.

This is a nationally important area for landscape, nature conservation and recreation. We are convinced that if the steady decline of its ecology is to be reversed, the arrangements for managing the land and water resources of this unique area must be put on a durable statutory basis. The Government have therefore decided to give priority to legislation to this end, following advice to the local authorities wishing to promote such legislation that it is not suitable for introduction as a private Bill.

Subject to parliamentary approval of the Bill, the new authority will take over the existing powers of the present non-statutory Broads authority, and powers to control navigation over most of the Broads rivers system on 1 April 1988.

Water Emergency Inquiry (Leeds)

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has received a copy of the Yorkshire water authority's report on the Leeds water emergency inquiry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten [*pursuant to his reply*, 6 March 1986, c. 279]: I have received a copy of the report by the committee of inquiry on the Leeds water emergency of last December, which was published on 27 February 1986. The board of the Yorkshire water authority met on that day to consider the report and agreed an eleven-point action

programme in accordance with the report's recommendations. I welcome the comprehensive and frank nature of the report which commends the way the burst main was repaired and the measures taken by the authority, with assistance from others, to minimise loss of water supplies to consumers, but reveals shortcomings in maintenance and in emergency procedures. The chairman of the Yorkshire water authority has assured me that the lessons emerging from this incident will be fully learnt and applied.

WALES

Youth Training

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many young people in Wales who have followed Manpower Services Commission YTSs, as a percentage of the total number each year since their inception, have found full-time employment.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Information is not available on this basis. Until October 1985 the only information available came from a 15 per cent. sample survey of leavers between July and September 1984. This showed that three months after leaving, 49 per cent. had entered full-time employment. Since July 1985 a monthly 100 per cent. follow-up is carried out, the first survey results being available in October 1985. The results were as follows:

Month of leaving	*Percentage in a full-time job*
April and May 1985	43
April to June 1985	43
April to July 1985	45
April to August 1985	47
April to September 1985	46

Training and Employment

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many of the long-term unemployed people who have been on Manpower Services Commission schemes in *(a)* Gwynedd and *(b)* Wales have subsequently found full-time employment in each year since the schemes inception.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Available information relates to Wales as a whole and is contained in the MSC's second community programme follow-up survey, of November 1985, which covered entrants to the scheme between April and June 1983. This indicated that 21 per cent. of participants in Wales left to go straight into full-time employment.

Rates

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what percentage increase in domestic rates, on average, a household of *(a)* one adult, *(b)* two adults, *(c)* three adults and *(d)* four adults in Wales would face if the recommendations of the Green Paper "Paying For Local Government" were implemented;

(2) what percentage increase in domestic rates, on average, a household of *(a)* one adult, *(b)* two adults, *(c)* three adults and *(d)* four adults in Gwynedd would face if the recommendations of the Green Paper "Paying For Local Government" were implemented.

Mr. Nicholas Edwards: Had the transition to the proposed new system of local government finance begun in 1984-85 each adult would have been assumed to pay a community charge of £50. The yield from the charge would have been used to cut domestic rate bills by about half or approximately £100 per domestic hereditament.

Had the community charge replaced domestic rates entirely in 1984-85 the average charge per adult would have been £105.

The impact of the changes on households of different size, at the Wales level, is shown in tables 1 and 2. The effect of the changes in Gwynedd alone is shown in tables 3 and 4.

Table 1.

Local Domestic Tax Bill in First Year of Transition: Wales

Number of adults in household (1)	*Existing average rate bill* (2) £	*Community charge (£50) per adult)* (3) £	*Reduced rate bill** (4) £	*Total local domestic tax bill (col. 3 and 4)* (5) £	*Percentage change from existing rate bill* (6) *per cent.*
1	202	50	104	154	−24
2	202	100	104	204	1
3	202	150	104	254	26
4	202	200	104	304	50

* 49 per cent. reduction in average rate bills.

Table 2.

Local Domestic Tax Bill had Rates been completely replaced by the Community Charge: Wales

Number of adults in household (1)	*Existing average rate bill* (2) £	*Community charge (£105 per adult)* (3) £	*Percentage change from existing rate bill* (4) *per cent.*
1	202	105	−48
2	202	210	4
3	202	315	56
4	202	420	108

Table 3.

Local Domestic Tax Bill in First Year of Transition: Gwynedd County Area

Number of adults in household (1)	*Existing average rate bill* (2) £	*Community charge (£50) per adult)* (3) £	*Reduced rate bill** (4) £	*Total local domestic tax bill (col. 3 and 4)* (5) £	*Percentage change from existing rate bill* (6) *per cent.*
1	185	50	98	148	−20
2	185	100	98	198	7
3	185	150	98	248	34
4	185	200	98	298	61

* 47 per cent. reduction in average rate bill.

Table 4.

Local Domestic Tax Bill had Rates been completely replaced by the Community Charge: Gwynedd County Area

Number of adults in household (1)	*Existing average rate bill* (2) £	*Community charge (£106 per adult)** (3) £	*Percentage change from existing rate bill* (4) *per cent.*
1	185	106	−43
2	185	212	15
3	185	318	72
4	185	424	129

* The community charge in Gwynedd is about £10 lower when the income from second homes is taken into account.

Notes to tables:

All the tables illustrate the impact of the proposed changes had they occurred in 1984-85. The local tax figures shown are before rebates: those on low incomes would receive assistance with their local tax bills. In the case of Gwynedd the figures reflect the impact of the safety net grant at the local authority level.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Multi-fibre Arrangement

Mr. Haynes asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he supports the European Commission proposal to introduce the switching between the European Commission member states of multi-fibre arrangement quotas.

Mr. Alan Clark: I consider that it is necessary to introduce some greater degree of flexibility between the quotas of individual member states than in the past, taking into account the pressure for such flexibility from developing countries and the need to move towards the creation of an internal market.

Foreign-owned Companies

Mr. Watts asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the contribution to the British economy of foreign-owned British companies in terms of investment and the provision of employment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The contribution is significant. Available statistics relate to manufacturing industry only. The most recent figures are for 1982. Foreign-owned enterprises were only 2·27 per cent. of all enterprises, yet their capital expenditure represented 24·7 per cent. of the total and they provided 14·7 per cent. of total employment. Capital expenditure per employee in foreign-owned companies was nearly double that in United Kingdom-owned companies. These figures clearly illustrate the important role played by foreign-owned companies in our economy. The Government will continue to encourage beneficial inward investment into the United Kingdom.

Soviet Union (Fissile Material Exports)

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether the five-year economic and industrial trade agreement recently concluded with the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics includes provision for the export of fissile materials.

Mr. Alan Clark: The UK/USSR economic and industrial co-operation programme for the years 1986 to 1990 includes a reference to the enrichment of raw uranium in the USSR for British customers. This involves the temporary export of nuclear materials under licence. Both the enriched product and depleted remainder are returned to the United Kingdom.

Postal Franking Machines

Mr. Tim Smith asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the report of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission on postal franking machines is to be published; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: The report is published today.

The commission found that the market shares of Pitney Bowes and Roneo Alcatel constituted a monopoly situation in relation to the supply, maintenance and repair of postal franking machines. Despite entry into the market by other suppliers in recent years, the two companies still jointly retained 81 per cent. by volume of the market for new machines and 93 per cent. of the maintenance market.

The commission also found that Pitney Bowes, the dominant supplier of the two companies and the price leader, was enjoying comfortable profits, and that price competition from other companies in the market was affected by its market leadership. Prices of postal franking machines has stayed well ahead of those for office

machines generally and of the retail prices index and, in the commission's view, were higher than they needed to be or would be in conditions of more effective competition. The commission judged that the practice of Roneo Alcatel and Pitney Bowes of failing to provide customers with price lists also helped to restrain price competition and to focus it on selected discounts for the more insistent bargainers.

The commission noted that the Post Office imposes strict conditions on the design, use and maintenance of postal franking machines in order to protect its revenues from fraud or machine malfunction. However, the commission found that these conditions had the effect of preventing distribution through independent dealers as an alternative to direct selling by the machine suppliers, the development of any alternative maintenance services and a market for second-hand equipment.

The commission concluded that the pricing policies and certain other practices of Roneo Alcatel and Pitney Bowes taken together with certain Post Office regulations and practices have the effect of inhibiting competition.

The commission rejected as a remedy measures to regulate the companies' prices which, it concluded, might harm the smaller competitors and newer entrants to the market. Instead, it suggested that the Post Office be invited to change certain of its requirements; that assurances be sought from Roneo Alcatel and Pitney Bowes to remedy the uncompetitive practices identified in the report; and to open the market to approved dealers and maintenance organisations.

I accept the findings of this report. I am consequently asking the Director General of Fair Trading to hold discussions with the Post Office with a view to securing changes in its present regulations and practices to provide for some authorisation of independent maintenance sources and dealers in both new and second-hand machines and for relaxation of inspection specifications. I am also asking him to seek appropriate undertakings from Pitney Bowes plc and Roneo Alcatel to remedy the uncompetitive practice identified in the report and to open the market to authorised dealers and maintenance operators: notably on the provision of price lists; the supply of spare parts to third party suppliers and maintainers of machines; the maintenance requirements imposed on those buying and leasing machines; and on the ability of the leasing companies of machines to dispose of machines otherwise than by return to the original suppliers.

The commission drew attention to the need for the management of the two companies to maintain vigilance to prevent sales malpractices on the part of their salesmen. I attach great importance to such vigilance, and trust that if any such malpractices occur in the future the managements will take appropriate action against any of their staff who permit or use such tactics.

International Tin Council

Mr. Alan Howarth asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement about the current situation in the tin market.

Mr. Alan Clark: The Government regret that the protracted negotiations between the International Tin Council and its bank and broker creditors have now broken down, without reaching agreement to resolve the tin crisis.

We have constantly made it clear, following suspension by the ITC of its operations in the tin market on 24 October last with gross commitments exceeding £800 million, that the United Kingdom was prepared to accept its share of the liabilities of the ITC, and we called on all other members to do likewise.

It is especially unfortunate that the breakdown of negotiations has come at a time when substantial progress had been made towards resolving the tin crisis in an orderly fashion. Had the ITC member countries collectively shown a greater sense of urgency and responsibility from the outset, a solution might have been found. Discussions between members of the EC were protracted and formal negotiations by the ITC began only at the end of January. However, the final breakdown of negotiations was caused by the refusal of some producer countries to accept the proposals.

At this late stage it seems unlikely that a settlement can now be reached in order to secure a return to orderly trading in tin. If a substantial number of other ITC countries are prepared to make a new effort to resolve the crisis, the Government would, of course, be willing to join such discussions. But it must be clear, as it has been throughout the earlier discussions and negotiations, that the United Kingdom Government are not prepared alone to take over the responsibility for the ITC's debts.

The Government deplore the failure of certain other Governments to agree to meet their share of the commitments of the ITC. This failure undermines good faith and integrity in international financial dealings.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Farmers (Conservation and Amenity Payments)

Mr. Maclennan asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will itemise in cash and real terms Government payments to farmers for conservation and amenity proposals for each year since 1979.

Mr. Jopling: It is not possible to isolate all those payments made by agricultural departments to farmers which are of benefit to the conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty and amenity of the countryside.

Certain elements can, however, be identified. Farm capital grant expenditure in the United Kingdom on stone walls, shelter belts, hedges, waste disposal and bracken control amounted to £4,974,121 in 1985. This does not cover all the expenditure under the capital grants schemes which could be regarded as being environmentally beneficial.

In addition, farmers participating in the Broads grazing marshes conservation scheme received payments totalling £418,348·95 in 1985. Half of this sum was funded by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the remainder by the Countryside Commission.

Payments have also been made under other schemes which have a range of objectives. The conservation element of this expenditure cannot, however, be separatley identified.

I cannot, of course, comment on the payments which may have been made to farmers for conservation works by other Government Departments, local authorities or grant-in-aid bodies.

Liverpool (Ministerial Visit)

Mr. Parry asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will made a statement on the recent visit to Liverpool by the Minister of State, the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer).

Mr. Gummer: I visited Liverpool, at the invitation of the United Kingdom Seed Crushing and Oil Processing Association, to see its long-established edible oil industry. I was pleased to note the substantial investment in modernising this industry which has recently taken place in order to help secure its future.

PRIME MINISTER

Research and Development

Mr. Soames asked the Prime Minister what steps Her Majesty's Government are taking to improve the co-ordination of Government spending on research and development.

The Prime Minister: Steps to improve the co-ordination of Government spending on research and development are regularly considered by the Chief Scientific Adviser, Cabinet Office, by departmental chief scientists and, as appropriate, by Ministers.

Nuclear Waste

Mr. Michael Brown asked the Prime Minister if she will make a statement on co-ordination between the Department of the Environment and the Department of Energy on Her Majesty's Government's policy towards the disposal of nuclear waste.

The Prime Minister: Policy on civil radioactive waste management is a matter for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for the Environment, Scotland and Wales. They do, however, consult closely with the Secretary of State for Energy in view of his responsibilities for the nuclear and electricity generating industries, which generates much of the waste and which are responsible for dealing with their wastes in accordance with the Government's stated policy.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Hong Kong

Mr. Sims asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs to what extent representatives of Christian and other religious organisations are allowed access to detainees in the closed camps in Hong Kong; and what conditions are imposed upon them.

Mr. Renton: Representatives of the Christian churches and of any other religions professed by the residents of Hong Kong's closed camps may visit freely and may hold religious services for those who wish them. Whilst no formal restrictions are imposed upon these visits, proselytising is firmly discouraged by the Hong Kong Government, who are responsible for the management of the camps.

South Africa

Sir John Biggs-Davison asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment Her Majesty's Government made of the current situation in South Africa before deciding to call upon the Government of South Africa to lift the state of emergency prevailing in certain magisterial districts of the Republic; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: We are glad that President Botha has felt able to announce the lifting of the state of emergency, a step for which we had called together with out partners in Europe and the Commonwealth. We believe this should help to reduce tension and encourage prospects for dialogue. We shall continue to follow developments in South Africa closely.

Western European Union

Mr. Coleman asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what new posts have been created within the Secretariat-General of the Western European Union and within other organs of the Western European Union since the Rome declaration of October 1984; what responsibilities and salaries these posts carry; which of them have been filled and by whom; by what means new staff are being recruited; and what steps are being taken to keep *(a)* Parliament and *(b)* the Assembly of the Western European Union, informed of such developments occurring in the course of the Western European Union reinvigoration process.

Mr. Eggar [*pursuant to his reply*, 6 February 1986, c. *242*]: We are now able to supply the following information:

Places and Name of WEU Organisation	*New Posts (A-Grade)*	*Responsibilities*	*Starting Salaries (net monthly) £*	*Post filled or vacant*
London:				
Secretariat-General	A6	Head Political Affairs Division	2,369	Filled (Italy)
	A3/4	Head General Policy and Research Section	1,533 to 1,763	Filled (United Kingdom)
	A2/3	General Policy and Research	1,242 to 1,533	Vacant
	A4	Public Relations	1,763	Vacant
Paris:				
Agency I	1 Hors Grade	Director	3,145	Filled (Italy)
	5 Officials (A2 to A6)	Research/Study	1,242 to 2,369	All filled*

Places and Name of WEU Organisation	New Posts (A-Grade)	Responsibilities	Starting Salaries (net monthly) £	Post filled or vacant
Agency II	1 Hors Grade 4 Officials (A2 to A6)	Director Research/Study	3,145 1,242 to 2,369	Filled (United Kingdom) 3 Filled*; 1 Vacancy
Agency III	1 Hors Grade 4 Officials (A2 to A6)	Director Research/Study	3,145 1,242 to 2,369	Filled (France) Filled*
Joint Administration Offices	7 Officials (A2 to A6)	Administration, Security, Documentation, Translation, Interpretation and General Services	1,242 to 2,369	All Filled*

* Nineteen out of 20 A-grade positions in Paris have been filled. They have been allocated as follows:
Belgium: 3
Federal Republic of Germany: 4
Luxembourg: 1
United Kingdom: 2
France: 4
Italy: 3
Netherlands: 2.

The overall effect of recent changes on personnel in London is a reduction of one hors-grade (assistant secretary-general) post and one former A-grade post balanced by the creation of the four new A-grade posts.

The overall effect on WEU personnel of recent changes in Paris is the creation of one new director and a reduction of six A-grade officials.

Vacancy notices are issued to the national representatives in the Permanent council for onward transmission to their capitals; they are also sent where appropriate to other international organisations. Contracts for employment will in principle be of short-term duration in the first instance in view of the transitional period which extends to the end of December 1987.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Prisoners (Searches)

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many strip searches were made of female prisoners in Her Majesty's prison, Armagh, in February; if he will give the number of persons involved and the number of times each person was searched; whether any prison contraband, smuggled item or illegal correspondence was discovered in any search, indicating which items; in how many cases prisoners refused to be searched and had to be restrained while the search was being conducted; and if he will indicate the reasons for the search, namely, making an appearance at Armagh courthouse on remand, attending trial, inter-prison visit or other reasons.

Mr. Scott: During February 1986, a total of 29 searches were carried out on 18 prisoners; eight prisoners were searched once, nine were searched twice, and one prisoner was searched on three occasions. No prohibited article was found during these searches and no prisoner refused to be searched. Searches were carried out in the following circumstances:

	Number of searches
First admission or remand or whilst awaiting trial	3
First admission on sentence or on final discharge	21
Attending Armagh Remand Court	Nil
Attending other remand courts	2
Bail Court appearances	1
Appeal Court appearances	1
Visits to outside hospital	1
Total	29

Cervical Smear Tests

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the provision of cervical smear tests in each health area in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham: Cervical smears are tested at three centres in Northern Ireland. Some of the smears taken in the Western board area are tested at the Altnagelvin hospital laboratory. The remainder and all smears taken in the Northern, Southern and Eastern board areas are processed by the Eastern board. Most routine screening smears for cervical cancer are tested at the Belfast city hospital laboratory. The remaining screening smears, together with diagnostic smears, are processed at the Royal Victoria hospital laboratory.

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement explaining the reasons for the delay in re-starting smear tests in Northen Ireland and outlining what measures aimed at improving provisions of such tests have been taken during this delay.

Mr. Needham: An eight-week moratorium was applied from the beginning of 1986—not on the testing of smears but on the taking of routine screening smears. The testing of cervical smears taken up to the end of December 1985 has not ceased at any time. The moratorium on taking of routine smears has been extended to the end of April as the Eastern board was unable, during the original eight-week period, to reduce the backlog to a manageable level. Additional funds have been made available to cover the cost of overtime working and for the recruitment of extra laboratory staff to process smears.

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement outlining what financial, technical, medical staff, clerical, publicity and other resources are to be given to the provision of smear tests in Northern Ireland, indicating how these commitments compare with provision prior to the suspension of tests.

Mr. Needham: Arrangements are being made to provide additional laboratory accommodation in the Northern, Southern and Eastern board areas. Funds have already been allocated for additional consultants who will be involved in processing cervical screening smears. Extra medical laboratory scientific staff have been recruited. A further £50,000 has been provided for improvements to the service in the coming financial years.

Work is continuing to assess the full financial, computer and staffing implications of having in place by 1988 a comprehensive computerised call and recall system, together with adequate staffing and laboratory back-up, for cervical cancer screening. Additional health education and publicity will be provided as necessary to ensure maximum use of the expanded service, which should about double the present capacity.

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many women are presently on the waiting list for smear tests in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham: On 28 February there were 9,500 women in Northern Ireland waiting for the results of of tests on smears already taken. No list is kept of women waiting to have smears taken.

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will estimate how long it will take to work through the backlog of smear tests which has built up before and during the suspension, and outlining what special measures are being taken to facilitate the processing of the backlog of cases.

Mr. Needham: It is estimated that the current backlog of smears awaiting testing should be cleared by the end of April. Additional laboratory staff are being recruited to enable the service to deal with a greater number of smears.

Compensation Payments

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table giving the amount in 1985 of compensation payment made under the Criminal Damage (Compensation) (Northern Ireland) Order 1977 and earlier legislation.

Mr. Scott: The amount of compensation paid in 1985 was £16,807,617.

Royal Ulster Constabulary

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the estimated cost of the Royal Ulster Constabulary in the financial year 1985-86, giving separately figures for *(a)* salary and benefits, *(b)* transport and communication, *(c)* new construction, *(d)* other costs, *(e)* total gross expenditure and *(f)* total net expenditure after deduction of receipts.

Mr. Scott: The estimated cost of the Royal Ulster Constabulary in the financial year 1985-86 is set out in the table:

1 April 1985 to 31 March 1986

	£ million
A. Salary and benefits	237·7
B. Transport and communications	14·6
C. New construction	8·4
D. Other costs	36·1
E. Total gross expenditure	296·8
F. Total net expenditure after deductions of receipts	277·6

Sir John Biggs-Davison asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what information he has on the extent of intimidation of members of the Royal Ulster Constabulary and their families, particularly from loyalists hostile to the Anglo-Irish agreement; and how such intimidation is being countered.

Mr. Scott: Since the Anglo-Irish agreement was signed in November, 17 cases of intimidation of members of the Royal Ulster Constabulary and Royal Ulster Constabulary Reserve living in predominantly Protestant areas have been recorded.

In areas where intimidation has taken place, the police have increased their level of patrolling to provide vulnerable members of the force and their families with protection and reassurance. In addition, a special headquarters unit has been set up to monitor the situation and to assist the personnel involved in every way possible, including removal to new homes.

Prisoners

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will give details of the number of prisoners in prison in Northern Ireland as at 31 December 1984 and 1985, detailing the numbers by sex, in prison and in young offenders centres separately.

Mr. Scott: On 30 December 1984 and 29 December 1985 there were 2,038 and 1,861 prisoners, respectively, in Northern Ireland prison establishments. These figures include remand prisoners.

	Males	Females
30 December 1984		
Prison Population	1,842	28
YOC Population	161	7
29 December 1985		
Prison Population	1,651	31
YOC Population	177	2

Autocrime

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he expects the number of persons proceeded against for offences in relation to the taking of motor vehicles without their owner's consent in 1985 to become available.

Mr. Scott: The number of persons proceeded against for the unauthorised taking of motor vehicles in Northern Ireland in 1985 was 615.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many vehicles were recovered in each police division in Northern Ireland in 1985.

Mr. Scott [*pursuant to his reply*, 28 February 1986, c. *728*]: The information is as follows:

Royal Ulster Constabulary

Division	*Vehicles recovered*
A	658
B	3,265
D	786
E	420
G	114
H	169
J	253
K	66
L	43
N	256
O	66
P	172

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

National Advisory Body (Ministerial Letter)

Mr. Frank Field asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will place in the Library a copy of his letter of 14 October 1985 to the chairman of the Committee of the National Advisory Body for Public Sector Higher Education.

Mr. Walden: Yes.

Royal Greenwich Observatory

Mr. Cartwright asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what evidence he has received about the condition of the clocks at the Royal Greenwich Observatory on which the Greenwich time signal is based; what is the estimated remaining life of the clocks; and what is the likely cost of their replacement.

Mr. Walden: It is estimated that the six atomic clocks at the Royal Greenwich Observatory will fail within the next three years. To replace them would cost about £40,000 per clock, and to maintain the independent time scale would cost about £100,000 per annum in manpower and equipment. The need for an independent atomic time service is greatly reduced by the availability of the international atomic time scale by satellite, and the observatory proposes to obtain reference to precise time by this means in future. This will involve about £40,000 in capital equipment, and about £20,000 per annum running costs.

Mr. Cartwright asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what are his plans for the continuation of the Greenwich time signal in the event of the failure of the clocks at the Royal Greenwich Observatory on which it depends.

Mr. Walden: The need for the Royal Greenwich Observatory to maintain an independent atomic time scale has been greatly reduced by the availability of the international atomic time scale (UTC) via the Navstar—global positioning system (GPS) satellite service. When the clocks fail, the Observatory will continue to assist in the provision of the familiar "six-pips" Greenwich time signal by reference to the UTC.

Teachers' Superannuation Scheme

Mr. Cartwright asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what implications the judgment of the European Court of Justice in the Marshall case has for the future of the teacher superannuation scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chris Patten: As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made clear on 3 March, at columns *52-53*, the judgment of the European Court of Justice in the case of Miss Helen Marshall was concerned with the age at which she must leave work rather than with eligibility for retirement pension. There are therefore no implications for the teachers' superannuation scheme.

High Energy Particle Physics

Mr. Chope asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science on what date he intends to announce his response to recommendations of the inquiry into high energy particle physics in the United Kingdom chaired by Sir John Kendrew.

Mr. Walden: I cannot add further to my replies of 4 and 21 February at columns *114* and *355-56*, to my hon. Friend the Member for Solihull (Mr. Taylor).

HOME DEPARTMENT

Vietnamese Refugees

Mr. Best asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Vietnamese refugees with close relatives living in the United Kingdom were granted admission to the United Kingdom in the last 12 months for which figures are available prior to the change in criteria applied to all refugees, stipulating that normally only the spouse and minor children will be admitted.

Mr. Waddington: In the 12 months from May 1980 to April 1981, 1,230 dependants were accepted for admission and 390 were refused. These figures include a small number of Laotians and Kampucheans.

Mr. Best asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has of the potential number of relatives of Vietnamese refugees settled here who might wish to enter the United Kingdom for family reunification purposes.

Mr. Waddington: It is not possible to make a reliable estimate.

Mr. Best asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many grandparents of Vietnamese refugees settled in the United Kingdom have applied, or in respect of whom application has been made, for family reunification in the last 12 months for which figures are available; how many have been granted admission; and if he will make a statement;

(2) how many spouses of Vietnamese refugees settled in the United Kingdom have applied, or in respect of whom application has been made, for family reunification in the last 12 months for which figures are available; how many have been granted admission; and if he will make a statement;

(3) how many parents of Vietnamese refugees settled in the United Kingdom have applied, or in respect of whom application has been made, for family reunification in the last 12 months for which figures are available; how many have been granted admission; and if he will make a statement;

(4) how many siblings of Vietnamese refugees settled in the United Kingdom have applied, or in respect of whom application has been made, for family reunification in the last 12 months for which figures are available; how many have been granted admission; and if he will make a statement;

(5) how many children of Vietnamese refugees settled in the United Kingdom have applied, or in respect of whom application has been made, for family reunification in the last 12 months for which figures are available; how many have been granted admission; and if he will make a statement;

Mr. Waddington: I regret that this information is not available.

Mr. Best asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Vietnamese persons who have close relatives living in the United Kingdom have applied, or in respect of whom application has been made, for family reunification in the period of the last 12 months for which figures are available; how many have been allowed to come to the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waddington: In 1985 applications in respect of about 950 persons were received. In the same period applications (not necessarily relating to the same cases) were accepted in respect of 230 family members and refused of 600. These figures include a small number of Laotions and Kampucheans.

Crossbows

Mr. Murphy asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has recived seeking the introduction of regulations to control the ownership and use of crossbows; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Since January 1985 we have received 43 letters about crossbows from hon. Members, 31 from members of the public and one from the Association of District Councils. I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Drake (Miss Fookes) on 3 February at column 5.

Data Protection

Mr. Lilley asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what steps have been taken to inform holders of data bases of the requirement to register under the Data Protection Act;

(2) what steps have been taken to public the procedure by which holders of data bases should register under the Data Protection Act.

Mr. Waddington: The Data Protection Registrar commissioned a national advertising campaign about the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1984 at the end of last year, and a further campaign is to be launched shortly aimed at reminding those affected by the Act that they must register their data holdings by 11 May. In addition, the Registrar and members of his staff have given many talks to business organisations and others about the Act's provisions. The Registrar has issued a number of booklets about the requirements of the Act which are available free of charge.

Mr. Lilley asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps have been taken to inform associations, clubs and societies of any circumstances under which they might be required to register data bases under the Data Protection Act.

Mr. Waddington: The publicity campaigns commissioned by the Data Protection Registrar have been aimed at all data users who might be affected by the Data Protection Act 1984, including associations, clubs and societies. The Registrar has also given guidance to representative bodies in the voluntary sector.

Mr. Lilley asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he proposes to issue any guidance to Members of Parliament relating to the implications of the Data Protection Act for the keeping of records on computers relating to their constituents.

Mr. Waddington: No; but the general advice issued by the Data Protection Registrar will, I think, be found helpful to Members, and I understand that an article on the subject, written after consultation with the Registrar, is to appear in *The House Magazine*.

Dogs (Model Byelaws)

Mr. Wheeler asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will report on the progress of the pilot project to test the effectiveness of model byelaws designed to reduce the problem of dogs fouling in public places; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: On 2 September byelaws came into force in four local authority areas which make it an offence for a person in charge of a dog in parks, footpaths and other designated areas to fail to remove any faeces deposited by the dog. The local authorities are the London borough of Barking and Dagenham, Gosport borough council, North-West Leicestershire district council and Rochester upon Medway city council. Indications so far are that the level of compliance by dog owners in these areas has been high and in consequence parks and so on are noticeably very much cleaner. Towards the end of this year we shall assess the effectiveness of the scheme overall and whether the byelaws should be offered as models for adoption by other local authorities.

New Prisons

Mr. Madden asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans exist for building new prisons; when these establishments will receive their first prisoners; if he proposes to build any new prisons in west Yorkshire; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: The new prison building programme consists of 16 projects, of which three have already been completed. The following table indicates when these establishments are expected to receive their first inmates.

Name of establishment	Location	Projected date for reception of first inmates
Wayland	Griston, Norfolk	Occupied
Stocken	Stretton, Leicestershire	Occupied
Thorn Cross	Appleton Thorn, Cheshire	Occupied
Full Sutton	Stamford Bridge, Humberside	April 1987
Littlehey	Perry, Cambridgeshire	September 1987
Mount	Bovingdon, Hertfordshire	October 1987
Swaleside	Eastchurch, Kent	April 1988
Garth	Ulnes Walton, Lancashire	June 1988
Brinsford	Wolverhampton, Staffordshire	December 1989
Whitemoor	March, Cambridgeshire	April 1990
Bicester	Arncott, Oxfordshire	October 1990
Woolwich	Woolwich, Greater London	July 1991
Lancaster Farms	Lancaster, Lancashire	October 1991
Milton Keynes	Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire	March 1992
Doncaster	Doncaster, South Yorkshire	*1992
Ashford	Ashford, Middlesex	*1993

* Provisional.

Design work is planned to start on two further establishments in due course. The locations of these projects have not yet been finally determined. There are at present no plans to build new prisons in west Yorkshire, but major redevelopment is in progress or planned for the five existing establishments in the county.

Animal Experimentation

Mr. Stern asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any plans to control experiments on invertebrates.

Mr. Mellor: We have no present plans to do so. However, the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Bill contains a power to extend control to work on invertebrate animals.

News International, Wapping

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many special patrol group units were present at the picket outside News International premises at Wapping on 15 February; and how many of the special patrol group officers present were equipped with firearms.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I understand from the Commissioner that eight units of the special patrol group were deployed at Wapping on 15 February. None of the officers was equipped with a firearm.

Mr. Redmond asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis as to the cost to date of policing the industrial dispute at Wapping; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that the additional costs incurred by the Metropolitan police in policing the News International dispute at Wapping are estimated at some £200,000.

Industrial Disputes (Policing)

Mr. Redmond asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will introduce legislation to require the owners of businesses involved in industrial disputes whose premises require the attendance of the police there or nearby in connection with, or as a result of, the dispute to meet the full cost of the additional policing necessary; and if he will make a statment.

Mr. Giles Shaw: No.

Prisoners (Strip Searches)

Mr. Alton asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what rules, instructions and guidelines are applicable to the strip-searching and intimate searching of male prisoners in Her Majesty's prisons; if he will place copies in the Library; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what rules, instructions and guidelines are applicable to the strip-searching and intimate searching of female prisoners in Her Majesty 's prisons; if he will place copies in the Library; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: The following information relates to prison department establishments in England and Wales. Responsibility for establishments in Scotland and Northern Ireland rests with my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Northern Ireland.

The rules, instructions and guidelines relevant to these matters relate equally to male and female inmates.

General provisions on searching are contained in rule 39 of the Prison Rules 1964 and rule 43 of both the Youth Custody Centre Rules 1983 and Detention Centre Rules 1983, copies of which are available in the Library. These rules make it clear that prisoners (including remand prisoners) are to be searched on reception into a prison department establishment and subsequently as the governor thinks necessary. Standing instructions provide that the search on reception should be a strip search, and other times at which prisoners may be strip searched include before and after court appearances, before and after visits, at the time of cell changes and during wing and cell searches.

While an intimate search of a body orifice could be carried out under the provisions of the rules, no such search would be conducted without the consent of the inmate, or otherwise without special authorisation, which would be granted only in the most exceptional circumstances.

Detailed instructions on searching are contained in documents whose availability is restricted in the interests of security.

Merseyside Constabulary

Mr. Frank Field asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what were the figures for the authorised establishment of the Merseyside constabulary for each year since the force's foundation; what was the actual strength of the force in each of these years; and if he will express this data as a percentage of the country's population.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The information is as follows:

Merseyside Police

On 31 December	*Authorised establishment*	*Strength*	*Population of force area*	*Population per officer: Based on establishment*	*Population per officer: Based on strength*
1974	4,317	3,852	1,602,700	371	416
1975	4,342	4,059	1,588,400	366	391
1976	4,342	4,259	1,578,000	363	371
1977	4,451	4,238	1,575,500	354	372
1978	4,451	4,285	1,562,000	351	365
1979	4,451	*4,469	1,545,000	347	346
1980	4,452	*4,591	1,532,000	344	334
1981	4,607	*4,647	1,518,000	329	327
1982	4,607	*4,632	1,524,000	331	329
1983	4,607	4,604	1,511,000	328	328
1984	4,607	4,593	1,501,000	326	327
1985	4,607	4,554	1,491,000	324	327

* Including recruitment to posts authorised on a temporary supernumerary basis for special purposes, and 100 supernumerary constable posts authorised in 1979 in anticipation of the substantive increase in establishment approved in March 1981.

Voluntary Sector (Government Support)

Mrs. Peacock asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list, in order, the 10 largest beneficiaries of Government support to the voluntary sector in the years 1979 to 1985.

Mr. Waddington: I regret that because there is no central record of grant giving by Government Departments which distinguishes grants to particular organisations within grand totals, the information requested could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

British Nationality (Fees) Regulations 1984

Mr. Forth asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he intends to increase the fee levels set out in the British Nationality (Fees) Regulations 1984.

Mr. Hurd: Some increases in fees will be necessary in order to meet the forecast costs of dealing with citizenship applications from 1 April 1986. The revised fee levels are as set out:

	Present Fees £	*New Fees* £
Registration (adult or minor)	55	60
Naturalisation on grounds of marriage	55	60
All other naturalisations	160	170

These fee levels include an application fee, which is payable for all applications and which will remain at £10. Other fees payable to the Home Office, for renouncing citizenship and for copy certificates and other documents will also remain at £10. The fee for administering the oath of allegiance, which is payable to the person administering the oath, will be increased from £2 to £3 in order to bring it in line with fees for analogous work under the Commissioners for Oaths (Fees) Order 1984.

The existing arrangements for joint applicants will be unchanged: husbands and wives applying together for naturalisation will continue to pay the single fee, as will minor children of the same parent applying together for registration.

The fee levels have been set to provide sufficient income from the applications we expect to deal with next year to meet their forecast costs, after allowing for the cost of unsuccessful applications. These forecasts are summarised in the nationality fees budget income and expenditure account for the year ending 31 March 1987, a copy of which I have placed in the Library.

Regulations amending the British Nationality (Fees) Regulations 1984 are being laid before Parliament today with the intention that the new fee levels should come into operation on 1 April 1986. These will be the first changes in citizenship fees for two years.

South Yorkshire Police

Mr. Allen McKay asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the chief constable of South Yorkshire as to the number of people prosecuted in the last 12 months for which figures are available for the alleged illegal sale or renting of firearms.

Mr. Giles Shaw [*pursuant to his reply*, 14 February 1986, c. *565*]: The chief constable of South Yorkshire informs me that there is an outstanding case in which one person has been charged with offences under section 3(1) of the Firearms Act 1968 and a second person has been charged with offences under section 3(2) of the Act. There have been no other prosecutions under section 3(1) or (2) in the last 12 months.

SCOTLAND

Highlands and Islands Development Board

Mr. Maclennan asked the Secretary of State for Scotland in view of the current level of demand for development assistance, if he will make an immediate allocation to the Highlands and Islands Development Board of £1 million in the current financial year.

Mr. John MacKay: No. The board has reallocated its resources to meet the demand.

Holyrood Park (Orange Order Rally)

Mr. Ron Brown asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received from the Orange Order requesting the use of Edinburgh's Holyrood park for a demonstration and rally on 28 June 1986; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ancram: In a letter dated 11 April 1985 the Loyal Orange Institution of Scotland sought permission to hold a demonstration in Holyrood park to commemorate the 296th anniversary of the battle of the Boyne. In line with the current policy for the use by organisation of the royal park for such purposes, the application was refused. I have received no further representations on the matter.

North of Scotland Hydro-Electric Board (Report)

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what response has been made by the North of Scotland Hydro-Electric Board to the report on the board by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission which was published last autumn; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Rifkind: I have received the initial response of the North of Scotland Hydro-Electric Board to the report of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission published on 3 October 1985. It gives the board's comments on the commission's findings and describes the action it is taking to meet the recommendations. Copies of the board's response have been placed in the Library of the House.

I welcome the commission's findings that the board is not pursuing any course of conduct against the public interest and that the board does its job well, striking an appropriate balance between its requirements to supply electricity efficiently and economically and its environmental and social obligations. The commission found that the board's investment appraisal procedures are basically sound, that its financial and management accounting and information systems are sound and well run and that the management and operation of the board's generating function are of a high standard.

Nevertheless, the commission noted a number of areas where improvements in the board's performance should be made. These included cost and stock control and the way in which control is exercised within a delegated management structure. The board has undertaken to improve its efforts to control and reduce costs and has accepted many of the recommendations on delegation. In some cases the board is re-examining existing procedures in the light of the commission's findings.

I particularly welcome the board's positive and constructive approach to the priority issues identified by the commission. The board has confirmed its commitment to the refurbishment of the distribution system and to the development of an assessment system for allocating resources within the refurbishment programme. It has indicated that the management services function is to be strengthened; that a system of cost reduction targets to be set and monitored by the board is being instituted; that the development and introduction of management information systems designed to improve monitoring will continue; and that standard guidelines for investment appraisal and project management procedures will be drawn up.

My Department will maintain contact with the board in its task of implementing the commission's recommendations, and I have asked the board to report to me its progress and achievements by October 1986.

Western Isles

Mr. McQuarrie asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if the Government will press for an extension of the integrated development programme for the Western Isles.

Mr. Rifkind: The European Commission has informed us that it does not intend to propose a full extension of the integrated development programme (IDP) beyond May 1987. The Government agree that, in the light of progress already made, there is no need for a full-scale extension of the IDP. But we have asked the Commission to give some attention now to how some of the loose ends can best be tied up so that the IDP's significant achievements can be consolidated.

TRANSPORT

Untaxed Motor Vehicles

Mr. Tom Cox asked the Secretary of State for Transport what has been the number of people prosecuted for driving untaxed motor vehicles in each of the last three years.

Mr. Michael Spicer: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Devon, North (Mr. Speller) on 10 December 1985. The number of prosecutions so far in 1985-86 is 149,000 and the number of out-of-court settlements is 109,000.

Driving Tests

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for Transport how many people applied each year since 1980 for Ministry of Transport driving instruction tests; and if he will list the pass/fail rate.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The qualifying examination for the Department of Transport's register of approved driving instructors is made up of both written and practical parts. In May 1985 the practical test was split into two constituent parts of driving ability and instruction ability, taken separately.

The following figures represent attempts made; records do not distinguish between first and subsequent attempts by the same person.

Written

Year	*Attempts*	*Pass rate per cent.*
1980	4,821	71·3
1981	5,265	75·0
1982	5,894	47·5
1983	6,285	49·9
1984	8,308	52·1
1985	8,313	61·1

Practical

Year	*Attempts*	*Pass rate per cent.*
1980	4,697	48·6
1981	5,419	45·7

Year	Attempts	Pass rate per cent.
1982	4,981	44·6
1983	4,766	43·2
1984	6,221	41·1
1985	*10,798	47·2

*. Two-part examination from May 1985.

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for Transport if there are any plans to revise the Ministry of Transport driving instruction test; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The Department of Transport's qualifying examination for the register of approved driving instructors is kept under continuous review. The written part was completely revised in 1982 with the introduction of a multiple choice answer format. Four new papers in this format are being introduced in April this year to replace the original four introduced at that time.

The expected standard of the applicant's own driving ability was raised in 1984 and a higher standard for the instructional ability test was introduced in May 1985.

No further modifications are planned.

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he has plans to bring greater and more effective liaison between driving examiners and instructors.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Local liaison between examiners and instructors is necessarily limited to ensure impartiality of testing. The Department organises regular opportunities for instructors to visit the Department's driving establishment at Cardington, Bedfordshire, to see how examiners are trained. Senior officials meet instructors' representatives frequently.

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the number of people working at each driving centre in Hampshire each year since 1980.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The number of staff at centres in Hampshire at various dates between 1 January 1981 and 5 March 1986 are as shown. No figures are available for 1980.

	1 January 1981	8 November 1982	1 June 1983	1 April 1984	1 April 1985	5 March 1986
Aldershot	5	5	5	3	4	5
Basingstoke	*	2	2	1	3	4
Farnborough	5	5	4	4	4	6
Gosport	5	5	5	5	5	5
Portsmouth	6	7	7	7	6	7
Southampton (FHD)	4	6	6	5	5	5
Southampton (Maybush)	7	6	6	6	5	7
Winchester	5	3	3	3	4	4

* Opened 1 August 1981.

The number of people working at each centre alters and there will have been fluctuations both up and down in the periods between the figures quoted.

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for Transport how many representations he has received asking for a change in the way driving licences are issued.

Mr. Michael Spicer: I am afraid this information is not readily available. But there is little evidence of recent complaint about centralised issue of driving licences.

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for Transport how the Ministry of Transport driving instruction test compares to regulations in other European Economic Community countries.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: It is not possible to draw simple comparisons between arrangements for driving instruction in the various member states of the EEC because systems and conditions differ widely and are related closely to local licensing and testing practices. I am satisfied that the present examination for entry to the register of approved driving instructors is adequate.

Manchester International Airport

Mr. Couchman asked the Secretary of State for Transport what is the total value of European Economic Community grants and subsidies given to Manchester international airport since 1956.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Manchester international airport has been allocated grants totalling £10·6 million by the European regional development fund for airport development.

Mr. Couchman asked the Secretary of State for Transport what is the total value of Government subsidy given to Manchester international airport since it was formed in 1956.

Mr. Michael Spicer: I shall answer this question shortly.

Sir Fergus Montgomery asked the Secretary of State for Transport, if he will make a statement on the future ownership and control of Manchester international airport following the abolition of the Greater Manchester council on 1 April.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The 10 districts within the present Greater Manchester council (GMC) have reached agreement on the establishment of a joint committee to assume control of the operation of Manchester international airport (MIA) on 1 April. They have also agreed on the transfer to them from the same date of the GMC's interests in the airport. It is the districts' intention shortly thereafter to transfer MIA to a jointly-owned public limited company.

As I indicated in my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North-East, (Mr. Thurnham) on 6 December 1985, the Government continue to have

reservations about some of the details of the arrangements for the new company; but the districts have acknowledged that these arrangements will have to be brought into compliance with the requirements of the Airports Bill once it is enacted. We shall be ready to use our powers under the Bill to ensure that that is brought about.

Accordingly, I have today laid before the House the Local Government Reorganisation (Airports) Order, made under section 40(1) of the Local Government Act 1985, which, inter alia, will transfer the interests of the GMC in MIA to the districts in accordance with the agreement they have reached.

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the future ownership and control of Manchester airport.

Mr. Ridley: I refer the right hon. Gentleman to the reply my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale (Sir F. Montgomery) earlier today.

Plastic Firearms

Sir John Biggs-Davison asked the Secretary of State for Transport what consideration has been given to reports of the manufacture of lethal plastic firearms undetectable by X-ray inspection at airports, and so on; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Spicer: I have nothing to add to the reply I gave to the right hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Freeson) on 6 March 1986.

DEFENCE

Fleet

Mr. Best asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give the reasons why each of the Royal Naval ships listed in the answer of 5 February, *Official Report*, columns *183-4*, to the hon. Member for Northampton North, are to be withdrawn.

Mr. Stanley: I shall write to my hon. Friend.

Chemical Weapons

Mrs. Clwyd asked the Secretary of State for Defence what consultations will take place between the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe and Her Majesty's Government before deciding on a North Atlantic Treaty Organisation force goal on chemical weapons.

Mr. Stanley: A force goal requiring the United States to modernise its chemical weapons stocks with binary munitions is being discussed collectively within NATO in accordance with normal Alliance procedures.

Trident Base

Mr. Canavan asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will make a statement about his plans to locate the Trident nuclear base in Scotland.

Mr. Stanley: I refer the hon. Member to *(a)* the statement made by the then Secretary of State for Defence on 15 July 1980, at columns *1235-1236*; *(b)* the statement made by the then Secretary of State for Defence on the processing of Trident missiles on 9 September 1982 in Ministry of Defence news release 42/82, a copy of which is in the Library; *(c)* the notice of proposed development at the Clyde submarine base (Faslane and Coulport) and the associated environmental impact statement submitted in May 1984, copies of which are in the Library.

Helicopters

Mr. Ashdown asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many troop carrying helicopters with medium lift capacity are available to the British Army of the Rhine.

Mr. Stanley: In peacetime a squadron of Chinook aircraft is available in support of BAOR for its medium lift requirement; in a period of tension or war this squadron would be reinforced. It is not the practice to disclose numbers of operational aircraft.

Helicopter Pilots

Mr. Best asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give the comparative costs of training a helicopter pilot in *(a)* the Army, *(b)* the Royal Navy and *(c)* the Royal Air Force; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lee: The cost of training a helicopter pilot in the Royal Navy is approximately £500,000. The figures for the Army and the Royal Air Force are given in my reply today to my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley (Mr. Soames), but I would draw the attention of my hon. Friend to the caveats in that answer.

Air Staff Target 404

Mr. Best asked the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to make an announcement on Air Staff target 404 and to complete the review of the role of helicopters in the armed forces; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I have nothing to add to what my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement said on this subject in the debate on the Royal Air Force on 26 February, at columns 1033-35.

Royal Marines

Mr. Beith asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether, further to the answer of 27 February, *Official Report*, column *667*, relating to minimum height requirements, he will now also give the relevant figures in imperial units.

Mr. Lee: The equivalent imperial units (in inches) are obtained by dividing the figures given in my earlier answer by 2·54.

Nuclear-related Research and Development

Mr. Soames asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many people in his Department are employed in military nuclear-related research and development.

Mr. Norman Lamont: It would not be in the public interest to reveal numbers of staff employed in defence nuclear-related research and development.

Helicopter Pilots

Mr. Soames asked the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what is the cost of training an Army helicopter pilot;

(2) what is the cost of training a Royal Air Force helicopter pilot.

Mr. Lee [*pursuant to his reply*, 3 March 1986 c. *71*]: Helicopter pilots are trained in each of the three services for different operational requirements, and therefore straightforward financial comparisons could be misleading.

Further, all RAF pilots are initially trained with a view to fast jet service and only join the helicopter or multi-engine stream at a later stage.

However, the costs of training a helicopter pilot in the RAF and Army are estimated to be £940,000 and £200,000, respectively.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

1-3 The Sanctuary, London

Mr. Frank Field asked the hon. Member for Wokingham, as representing the Church Commissioners, if, pursuant to the reply to the hon. Member for Birkenhead, 3 March, *Official Report*, column *3*, he will detail the years during which the Church Commissioners spent the £163,000 on 1-3 The Sanctuary, London SW1.

Sir William van Straubenzee: The details are as follows:

Year	*£*
1975	18,160·48
1976	17,732·33
1977	7,128·00
1981	87,157·69
1985	33,227·53
Total	163,406·03

EMPLOYMENT

Leicester (Ministerial Visit)

Mr. Spencer asked the Paymaster General if he will make a statement on his recent visit to Leicester.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I visited Leicester on 28 February following our recently announced initiative to help the Highfields inner city area, and seven other similar areas, by setting up a task force to co-ordinate Government spending, improve the allocation of resources, and forge links with the local community. In the course of the day I met political leaders and officials of Leicestershire county and Leicester city councils, and had a valuable working lunch with representatives and residents of Leicester's Highfields workshop centre.

I also had the opportunity of briefly visiting a garage set up under the enterprise allowance scheme in the Highfields area.

North Sea Offshore Construction (Pay)

Mr. Eadie asked the Paymaster General if he will tabulate the information available on the movement of hourly rates of pay for all trades in North sea offshore construction in January 1981, 1982, 1983, 1984, 1985 and 1986, respectively.

Mr. Trippier: The available information on earnings in the construction industry does not enable those engaged in North sea offshore construction to be separately identified.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL FOR SCOTLAND

Horses (Docked Tails)

Mr. Greenway asked the Solicitor-General for Scotland if he will institute proceedings under the Docking and Nicking of Horses Act 1949 against the owners of the nine Clydesdale horses from Scotland shown at the 1985 Royal Show with docked tails; and if he will make a statement.

The Solicitor-General for Scotland: I understand that no horses with docked tails were entered for the 1985 Royal Show. On 22 August 1985, in Kilmarnock sheriff court, two persons were convicted of contraventions of the Docking and Nicking of Horses Act 1949 in respect of the docking of nine Clydesdale horses, but this case had no connection either with the Royal Show or the Royal Highland Show.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Dental Charges

Mr. Weetch asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if, further to the answer on dental treatment costs of 22 October 1985, *Official Report*, columns 283-4, the information requested is now available.

Mr. Hayhoe: Patients who pay charges will have borne on average approximately 60 per cent. of the cost of chargeable items included in courses of treatment completed in the year ending 31 March 1986.

Pensioner Households

Mr. Andrew Bowden asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish estimates of the number of pensioner households who do not take up housing benefit to which they are entitled.

Mr. Major: We expect to be able to publish estimates of take-up of housing benefit, based on the 1984 family expenditure survey, within the next two months.

Retirement Age

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services on what factors his Department bases its conclusion that any change in respect of a flexible age of retirement would need to be phased in over 10 years.

Mr. Major: The Department has no firm views on the length of time that would be needed, but certainly it would have to be sufficient to enable individuals affected to adjust their plans, and to enable occupational pensions schemes to make any necessary consequential adjustment. A period would also be needed to allow state earnings-related pensions to build up to ensure those retiring below the normal pension age had adequate pension provision.

Medical Technology

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what new medical technology he proposes to introduce into the National Health Service during the

next three years and at what cost; and what estimate he has made of the demands which are likely to be made on services within the National Health Service during the same period while introducing new medical technology.

Mr. Hayhoe: Funds are not allocated centrally to specific services except for designated supra-regional services. It is for health authorities to decide how best to develop their services, including the introduction of new medical technology, so as to meet the likely demand arising from demographic and other changes and the need to improve services in line with ministerial priorities, taking into account the overall resources expected to be available, including those generated through cost improvements. Data are not available centrally to work out separately the costs of and demand on services which arise from specific developments.

NHS Hospitals (Private Purchases)

Mr. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many National Health Service hospitals have purchased geriatric care services or provisions from private sector medical care establishments in each of the last seven years; and what costs have been incurred by the National Health Service each year as a result.

Mr. Hayhoe: Contractual arrangements to provide services to NHS patients in private establishments are made between the establishment concerned and the contributing health authority, not with individual NHS hospitals. No information is held centrally about the costs of contractual arrangements by specialty.

Information on the number of authorities with contractual arrangements for geriatric care are given in the table.

*Number of contracting health authorities**

Year	Number
1978	28
1979	27
1980	24
1981	24
1982	31
1983	28
1984	27

* District health authorities from 1982. Area health authorities prior to 1982.

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many private patients had appointments with consultants in National Health Service hospitals in the West Midlands region in each of the last seven years; what sums were paid to each authority in the region for the use of rooms for such consultations; and what was the length of the waiting lists for different categories of treatments in each authority each year during the same period.

Mr. Hayhoe: I am sorry I cannot give the hon. Member all the information she seeks. Some of it is not collected centrally. The hon. Member may wish to write to the chairman of the West Midlands regional health authority about information on sums paid to each authority in the region for the use of rooms for private consultations. I shall let the hon. Member have a reply to the rest of her question as soon as possible.

Hip Replacement Operations

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many hip replacement operations have taken place in health authorities in the west midlands region in each of the last seven years; and what was the range of length of hospital stay for such operations.

Mr. Whitney: I shall let the hon. Member have such information as can be obtained without incurring disproportionate cost as soon as possible.

NHS (Private Patients)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what revenue has been yielded to the National Health Service from treatment of private paying patients from European countries and middle east countries in the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Hayhoe: No figures are kept to distinguish the country of origin of private patients.

West Midlands Regional Health Authority

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what cash limits have been imposed by his Department on the West Midlands regional health authority in each of the last seven years.

Mr. Hayhoe: The cash limits against which West Midlands regional health authority's outturn expenditure has been measured in each of the last seven years are shown in the table.

£'000

Year	Revenue	Capital
1978-79	431,705	30,206
1979-80	517,133	38,679
1980-81	678,900	50,795
1981-82	750,712	61,358
1982-83	814,768	61,528
1983-84	859,277	70,993
1984-85	910,837	82,710

Note:
Figures exclude in-year transfers between revenue and capital.

NHS (Catering Services)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what percentage of the catering services within the National Health Service has been contracted out to the private sector each year since 1982.

Mr. Whitney: Following is the information requested, derived from the annual accounts of regional and district health authorities in England together with those of the special health authorities for the London postgraduate teaching hospitals.

Percentage of current expenditure on catering services paid to private contractors

	Percentage
1982-83	0·2
1983-84	0·2
1984-85	0·3

Note:
The figures are not strictly comparable over the whole period as value added tax on contracted out services became reclaimable by health authorities on 1 September 1983.

Draught-Proofing (Single Payments)

Mr. Cartwright asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many claims for single payments in respect of draught-proofing are currently outstanding at his Department's Woolwich supplementary benefit office; and what action is being taken to reduce the backlog.

Mr. Major: About 1,300 such claims are currently awaiting attention. Regional reserve staff are being assigned to Woolwich local office to assist with this work.

Benefit (Advice and Information)

Mr. Janner asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he expects to be able to make a statement on the outcome of the discussions between officials of his Department and interested groups relating to arrangements for the provision of localised information regarding the availability of advice and information about social security benefits.

Mr. Major: Officials are considering comments received from interested groups and are examining the feasibility of procedural options. I shall write to the hon. and learned Member in due course.

Single Payments (Huyton)

Mr. Sean Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many people are presently awaiting single payments in the Huyton office of his Department; and how many have been waiting for more than four weeks, eight weeks and 12 weeks, respectively.

Mr. Major: A recent count of claims for single payments in Huyton local office shows that 2,127 claims from 911 people were outstanding. Of these claims 775 had been in action for over four weeks and 229 had been in action for over eight weeks. There were no cases in action for over 12 weeks. In order to process single payment claims, it is often necessary to request additional information from claimants; this can add significantly to the time taken to determine them.

Mr. Sean Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the average length of time for which people presently have to wait for single payments in the Huyton office of his Department; and if he will break this figure down for claims relating to items of furniture, heating allowance and diet allowance, respectively.

Mr. Major: Information is not available to show the average length of time taken to process single payment claims.

Mr. Sean Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many claims for single payments have been made in each quarterly period for the last three full years for which figures are available at the Huyton office of his Department.

Mr. Major: This information is not available in precisely the form requested; statistics are collected on a four-weekly rather than a quarterly basis. And, prior to 11 April 1984, the number of unsuccessful claims was not recorded, only the number of payments made.

The following table covers the calendar years 1983, 1984 and 1985:

Single payments made by Huyton local office

Four weeks ended	*Number*
18 January 1983	299
15 February 1983	796
15 March 1983	761
12 April 1983	676
10 May 1983	862
7 June 1983	980
5 July 1983	1,043
2 August 1983	1,345
30 August 1983	864
27 September 1983	958
25 October 1983	949
22 November 1983	894
20 December 1983	1,154
17 January 1984	606
14 February 1984	1,169
13 March 1984	943
10 April 1984	861
8 May 1984	741
5 June 1984	1,154
3 July 1984	1,527
31 July 1984	1,570
28 August 1984	1,108
25 September 1984	1,318
23 October 1984	1,631
20 November 1984	1,801
18 December 1984	2,021
15 January 1985	979
12 February 1985	2,830
12 March 1985	2,393
9 April 1985	1,820
7 May 1985	1,446
4 June 1985	1,812
2 July 1985	1,565
30 July 1985	1,843
27 August 1985	1,582
24 September 1985	1,858
22 October 1985	1,659
19 November 1985	1,779
17 December 1985	1,620

Huyton

Mr. Sean Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will provide a breakdown for people awaiting single payments at the Huyton office of his Department, between the numbers claiming for items of furniture, diet allowance and extra heating allowance, respectively.

Mr. Major: Information is not available in the precise form requested. A recent count has shown that 970 single payment claims for furniture are outstanding at the Huyton local office, but, as one person can make several claims at any one time, information cannot be derived from this to show how many people are awaiting such single payments.

Mr. Sean Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what is the average period of delay experienced by claimants to the Huyton office of his Department for the hearing of tribunal appeal cases;

(2) how many people are presently awaiting the hearing of tribunal appeal cases at the Huyton office of his Department; and how many have experienced delays of three, four, five and six months, respectively.

Mr. Major: There are currently 123 social security benefit appeals outstanding at the Department's Huyton local office. The latest available statistics, which are for the quarter ended 31 December 1984, show that the average length of time from lodgement of a social security

benefit appeal to tribunal hearing, for the social security north-western region which covers the Huyton area, was 15·8 weeks. A breakdown of this figure is given in the table.

Equivalent figures are not available for localities smaller than a region.

Clearance rate (in weeks) from Lodgement to Hearing

Weeks	*Great Britain*	*North-Western*
1	9	2
2	19	1
3	167	23
4	722	82
5	1507	142
6	2150	238
7	2169	219
8	2182	280
9	1916	229
10	1733	261
11	1453	261
12	1319	255
13	1168	220
Over 13	9626	2158
Average	13·9	15·8

Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Bill

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many responses he has had to his Department's consultation paper on the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Bill from organisations of and for disabled people; if he will list the organisations concerned; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hayhoe: I shall let the right hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Copper 7 Contraceptive Device

Mr. Dobson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether his Department will review the safety of the Copper 7 contraceptive device.

Mr. Whitney: The Department has seen no evidence to suggest that women should stop using this device. There are therefore no plans to review its safety at this time.

Benefit Statistics

Sir Frederic Bennett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give the latest figures for the number of men aged 60 to 64 years, inclusive, who are currently unemployed and in receipt of unemployment benefit; and what is his estimate of the total cost to the Government.

Mr. Major: At May 1985 there were 46,900 men aged 60 to 64 years in receipt of unemployment benefit. The estimated annual cost of this benefit for this group is £79·9 million at that date.

Departmental Staffing Levels

Mr. Lewis Stevens asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement about staffing levels in his Department.

Mr. Fowler: A full review of the local office complement is currently in progress, and its results will be known about the end of the year. I am also arranging for an urgent review of social security tasks to be carried out to identify any further scope for reducing work load. The results of these two reviews will be taken into account in deciding the manpower requirements of the social security organisation after April 1987.

Meanwhile, to relieve present pressures and permit the new work which will be required in 1986-87 to prepare for two upratings, in July 1986 and April 1987, the manpower target for my Department as a whole at 1 April 1986 will be increased by 2,300, to 93,400; some 2,000 extra staff already in post in the local offices are being retained and a further 3,350 posts will be added during the following financial year to produce a new manpower target of 96,750 for 1 April 1987. For local offices, taking the two years together, the new targets will allow for an increase above complement of over 5,000 new staff. The provision includes an additional 500 staff for the extra effort against fraud which I undertook to initiate in the debate on the Address on 11 November last at columns 323-24. I should like to pay tribute to the efforts made by the staff and management of our offices, particularly those in inner cities, to maintain services to the public.

Psychiatric Service

Mr. Bermingham asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many local authorities social services departments provide a 24-hour emergency psychiatric service; and if he will list those which do not.

Mr. Whitney [*pursuant to his reply*, 17 February 1986, c. *70*]: I understand that at present Bexley, Gateshead, Barnsley and Kent do not have such a service. The last two authorities are known to be in the process of introducing one.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Hancock asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what proportion of domestic ratepayers in Portsmouth receive housing benefit.

Mr. Major [*pursuant to his reply*, 28 February 1986, c. *715*]: We estimate that the number of rate rebate recipients, based on the local authority's subsidy returns, as a proportion of the number of domestic ratepayers in Portsmouth is about 38 per cent.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 10 March 1986

WALES

Teachers

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Wales how many students qualified to be teachers left the University of Wales and the teacher training colleges of Wales at the end of each academic year since 1975; and *(a)* how many were qualified in each of the main subjects and *(b)* how many were qualified to teach their subject through the medium of Welsh.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The available information about the number of students qualifying in each year is given in the following tables. Information about the number able to teach through the medium of Welsh is not collected centrally.

Table 1—Students successfully completing full-time courses of initial teacher training

	*Higher and Further Education Colleges**		*University Departments of Education*
	Column 1	*Column 2*	
1976-77	1,933	1,569	727
1977-78	1,633	1,285	670
1978-79	1,205	1,008	656
1979-80	825	697	631
1980-81	770	629	688
1981-82	756	622	746
1982-83	602	600	633
1983-84	473	469	613
1984-85	490	490	587

* Column 1 includes students who successfully completed a Certificate of Education course and who subsequently went on to follow B.Ed. courses. Column 2 excludes those students who successfully completed a Certificate of Education course and who subsequently went on to follow B.Ed. courses.

Table 2—Successful students by area of training

	Higher and Further Education Colleges			*University Departments of Education*
	1982-83	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1984-85*
Trained for:				
Primary	215	195	287	100
Middle	195	92	16	—
Secondary/further education:				
Mathematics	29	23	27	56
Chemistry	—	7	—	36
Physics	—		—	24
Biological sciences	4		—	42
Combined science*	11	11	24	5
Welsh	—	—	—	29
English†	9	2	2	58
Other languages‡	—	—	—	78
History	2	1	—	41
Geography	—	—	—	41
Religious education	3	—	2	20
Craft, design and technology	22	31	32	3
Commercial and business studies‖	10	18	25	—
Art/art and light craft	32	34	23	—
Home economics/needlework	5	2	3	30
Music	18	9	5	19
Physical education	37	40	37	—
Other	10	8	7	5
(Total secondary/further education)	(192)	(186)	(187)	(487)
Total	602	473	490	587

* Including integrated or general science, or other specific sciences.
† Including drama and drama with English.
‡ Including combinations of languages and English as a foreign language.
‖ Including economics, social studies and liberal studies.

A483 (Traffic Statistics)

Mr. Harvey asked the Secretary of State for Wales what the level of traffic on the A483 between Chirk and Ruabon was when last counted in April 1983; and what are the comparable figures for traffic volumes on other principal two-lane roads in Wales.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The average weekday traffic flow on the A483 between Chirk and Ruabon in April 1983 was 13,100 vehicles for the 12-hour period between 0700 and 1900 hours.

Twelve-hour average weekday flows on other two-lane trunk roads in Wales with similar urban characteristics were:

A483 between Rossett and the English border, 11,500 vehicles in September 1981.

A494 between Mold and Ewloe, 8,200 vehicles in September 1983.

A4042 at Llantarnam (Gwent), 14,500 vehicles in September 1983.

Primary Schools (Anglesey)

Mr. Best asked the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of children on Anglesey in primary education speak Welsh as their principal language.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Assessments of fluency made by head teachers of primary schools in Anglesey in September 1984 indicate that Welsh was the home language of 35·3 per cent. of all pupils. A further 25·1 per cent. whose home language was not Welsh could speak Welsh fluently.

Assisted Places

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Wales how much has been spent on the assisted places scheme in each local authority area in Wales since the introduction of the scheme.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Details of expenditure under the assisted places scheme in each local authority area in Wales for the financial years 1981-82 to 1984-85 inclusive are given below:

Local Authority Area	*Expenditure*
	£
Clwyd	536,250
Dyfed	63,584
Gwent	120,993
Powys	113,783
South Glamorgan	326,609

There are no assisted place schools in Gwynedd, Mid and West Glamorgan.

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Wales how much was spent on the assisted places scheme in Wales in each year since the scheme was introduced.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Expenditure on the assisted places scheme in Wales in the financial years 1981-82, 1982-83, 1983-84 and 1984-85 was £101,742, £274,777, £455,156 and £626,876 respectively.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Family Planning Aid

Mr. Dorrell asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the expenditure from the overseas aid budget on population and family planning-related research projects from the health and population division's population research and development Vote for each of the years 1983, 1984 and 1985.

Mr. Raison: Expenditure amounted to £155,000 in 1983 and £270,000 in 1984. The final figure for 1985 is not yet available.

Mr. Dorrell asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what research projects related to population and family planning are currently being supported by the Overseas Development Administration.

Mr. Raison: A study on contraception usage in rural areas of Egypt; a study on attitudes towards child health and relationships to mortality in India; programme to test and develop materials on contraceptive methods for African countries; preparation of instructional materials for non-literate users of contraceptive foam in Pakistan; an analysis of the relationships between demographic variables and socio-economic development in Kenya.

Mr. Dorrell asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many applications for funding for family planning and population research projects have been received since March 1984 and from whom; which of these were accepted; how much funding was committed irrespective of the year of disbursement; which were rejected; and for what reason.

Mr. Raison: Nine applications for funding for family planning and population research projects have been received since March 1984. Three have been accepted: from the Program for the Introduction and Adaptation of Contraceptive Technology (PIACT)—£19,000; from the Centre for Population Studies at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine—£22,800; and from Cardiff University College Population Centre—£6,000. Five proposals are currently under consideration. They have been submitted by the Cardiff University College Population Centre; the University of Edinburgh; the International Planned Parenthood Federation; the Program for the Introduction and Adaptation of Contraceptive Technology; and the Population and Community Development Association of Thailand. One proposal, from an individual researcher, was rejected on technical grounds.

British Council

Mr. Caborn asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs why the administration of the British Council's book presentation for Namibia has been moved from Lusaka, Zambia to Pretoria, South Africa.

Mr. Raison: There has been no change in the arrangements for administering this scheme. It forms part of a small technical co-operation programme for Namibians within that territory which for some time has been administered by the British Council in Pretoria. A similar programme for Namibian refugees in Zambia continues to be managed by the council in Lusaka.

Food Surpluses

Mr. Craigen asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent consideration he has given to the disposal of food surpluses presently stored in the United Kingdom towards world famine relief.

Mr. Raison: The purpose of food aid is not to dispose of food surpluses but to help relieve famine and promote long-term development. The substantial food aid programmes of the European Community (up to 1·54 million tonnes of cereals and large quantities of other products in 1986) and of the British Government (110,000 tonnes of cereals annually) have the effect of reducing surplus stocks here to the extent that they are bought in the United Kingdom.

Tanzania

Dame Judith Hart asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on future aid to Tanzania.

Mr. Raison: Our capital aid programme to Tanzania includes assistance towards the maintenance of the Songea-Makambako road, the southern regions health project and rural development projects in Lindi-Mtwara and other areas. Technical co-operation for Tanzanian universities, for English language training and for the Tanzania harbour authority is also being maintained.

I have indicated that we are also ready to provide balance of payments support for the Tanzania Government once an economic programme is in place along lines advocated by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

Sudan and Somalia (Students)

Mr. Tom Cox asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the number of grants being given by his Department towards the education costs of studying in the United Kingdom to students from the Sudan and Somalia.

Mr. Raison: By 31 December 1985, 271 students from the Sudan and 57 from Somalia had been awarded grants during the financial year 1985-86 to study in Britain.

Population and Family Planning Projects

Sir John Farr asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the estimated cost and duration of bilateral population and family planning projects currently being supported by the Overseas Development Administration.

Mr. Raison: We are currently supporting the following bilateral population and family planning projects:

Botswana
Support to the Ministry of Health for provision of a technical co-operation officer for public health and family planning; £120,000; 1983-86.

Fiji
Support to the Central Statistics Office; £50,000; 1986-87.

India
Assistance to the Orissa family welfare project; £1·9 million; 1985-86.
Assistance to the Hyderabad slum improvement project; £70,000; 1985-87.
Assistance to an integrated family welfare project, Gujarat; £1·9 million; 1984-87.
Assistance to the Registrar General's office; £30,000 1984-87.

Kenya
Assistance to an integrated rural health and family planning project; approximately £900,000; 1983-87.

Malaysia
Support for a population training course at the Asian and Pacific Development Centre in Kuala Lumpur; £12,000; 1986.

Nepal
Asistance to community based family planning/maternal and child health activities; approximately £60,000; 1984-85.

Pakistan
Assistance to the implementation of the population welfare plan; £4·8 million; 1983-87.

Sir John Farr asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which countries received assistance for national family planning and population projects under the Overseas Development Administration bilateral aid programme in 1984.

Mr. Raison: British assistance for population-related activities was provided to the following countries in 1984:

Anguilla
Bangladesh
Botswana
China
Egypt
India
Kenya
Kiribati
Mauritius
Nepal
Pakistan
Vanuatu
Yemen Arab Republic
Zaire
Zimbabwe

In addition, we provided support for regional activies in Asia and the Caribbean.

Sir John Farr asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish a list of proposals for bilateral aid assistance to population-related activities which he is at present considering, setting out the countries involved and the estimated cost to the United Kingdom of the proposals.

Mr. Raison: The following proposals for bilateral assistance to population-related projects and programmes are under consideration:

Bangladesh
Assistance to a population and family health project; £8 million over five years.

India
Further assistance to the Orissa family welfare project; estimated cost up to £15 million over five years.

Pakistan
Assistance to establish reproductive health service centres; £1·8 million over five years.

Zimbabwe
Assistance to a family health project; approximately £1 million over five years.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Draize Tests

Mr. Stern asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will estimate the number of Draize tests carried out in the United Kingdom in the latest available year.

Mr. Mellor: The specific information requested is not available because Draize eye tests are not separately identified in the current returns on statistics of experiments performed on living animals. However, statistics are available on the number of experiments involving the application of substances to the eyes of rabbits, which are mainly Draize tests: in 1984, 7,751 such experiments were started in Great Britain.

The majority of these Draize tests are probably modified Draize tests; such modifications are designed to restrict the damage the test may inflict on the experimental animal—for example, using a small volume or a dilute solution of the substance to be tested, or washing out the eye shortly after the application of the substance. The Government are taking urgent steps to encourage the development of alternatives to the Draize test and to ensure that tests carried out in this country use as few animals and cause as little harm as possible.

The concern surrounding the use of Draize tests is well recognised. It is intended that, when the statistical return is revised to take account of the proposed legislation, this revised return should identify such tests separately.

Passport Office (Computerisation)

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish the operational requirements issued to the potential suppliers of the proposed computer system for the computerisation of passport details by the Passport Office; what details on passport holders will be stored in the system; and if passport photographs will be held in it.

Mr. Waddington: The operational requirement for the computerised passport issuing system is a formal, technical document. It was intended for the computer trade, and was freely available, having been advertised in accordance with GATT rules in the Supplement to the Official Journal of the European Communities No. S 216/29 dated 9 November 1985. I am sending a copy to the hon. Member.

The proposed computer system will hold only the following details of passport applicants: surname; forenames; title; sex; address; date, town and country of birth; passport number and type; previous passport number; credit card account number (for those paying by credit card); nationality and immigration status; names and dates of birth of any children included in the passport.

The operational requirement does not call for photographs of applicants to be held in the system.

Fire Service (Disciplinary Proceedings)

Mr. Stern asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will state the number of cases in the last five years of which he is aware in which disciplinary proceedings against an officer of the fire service led, wholly or partially, to the deprivation of pension rights.

Mr. Hurd: The power to withdraw pension is not available in disciplinary proceedings but arises under the Firemen's Pension Scheme Order 1973 on conviction of certain criminal offences. I know of no cases in the past five years in which the power has been exercised.

Police Officers (Submachine Guns)

Mr. Tony Lloyd asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether his authority has been sought for the overt carriage of submachine guns by police officers *(a)* at Manchester international airport and *(b)* at any other airport other than Heathrow; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw: No. The decision in relation to Manchester international airport is one for the chief constable of Greater Manchester.

Sunday Trading

Sir Raymond Gower asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what consideration he has given to the feasibility of limiting Sunday trading to a specified number of prescribed hours; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what consideration he has given to the feasibility of retaining some limits on the possible growth of Sunday trading by setting a modest maximum number of employees who may work in a shop or stores; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what consideration he has given to making the subject of deregulation of Sunday trading a matter for the decision of district councils; and if he will make a statement;

(4) if he has given any consideration to restricting deregulation of Sunday trading to sales of foods, drinks and medicines; and if he will make a statement.

(5) what consideration he has given to representations from members of the National Chamber of Trade regarding the possible effects of deregulation of Sunday trading on small shops; and if he will make a statement;

(6) if he has given any consideration to experience in countries where Sunday trading is limited to prescribed hours; and if he will make a statement;

(7) if he has given any consideration to limiting Sunday trading to shops or stores of a prescribed modest maximum floor space or area; and if he will make a statement;

(8) what consideration he has given to the implications for the demand for public transport services of the deregulation of Sunday trading;

(9) if he has given any consideration to experience in countries where Sunday trading is limited by reference to prescribed maximum floor space or area of premises;

(10) what is his estimate of the effect of deregulation of Sunday trading on road traffic in urbanised, densely populated areas of the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waddington: The Government have given the closest consideration to the views expressed both by the Auld committee and in another place on all the possible options for amending the Shops Act 1950. They have also taken into account the experience of other countries and the views of the Auld committee and others on the likely implications of changes in the law for small shops as well as wider social considerations including public transport and urban traffic. The Government's view—like that of the Auld committee—remains that there is no remedy for the present deeply unsatisfactory situation as convincing as the proposals for total deregulation of shop hours contained in the Shops Bill.

Sir Raymond Gower asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many representations he has received from persons or organisations in Wales in favour of deregulation of Sunday trading, and how many in opposition; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waddington: I regret that a separate record is not kept of representations from Wales and the information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mohsen Nikbakht

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the exact status of Mohsen Nikbakht; on what grounds he was admitted to the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waddington: Mr. Mohsen Nikbakht is an Iranian, born in 1959, who first entered this country in 1984 to attend a full-time course of study at the North Trafford college in Manchester. He was readmitted to the United Kingdom on 26 January of this year to continue his studies for which he has leave until 31 October 1986.

Elham Nikbakht

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what grounds Elham Nikbakht was admitted to the United Kingdom; and what is her exact status.

Mr. Waddington: I would refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to a similar question from my hon. Friend the Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth (Mr. Dickens) on 6 March at column 237.

Female Spouses

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many female spouses aged under 16 years are living in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waddington: I would refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to a similar question from my hon. Friend the Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth (Mr. Dickens) on 6 March at column 237.

Safety Standards (Infringement)

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many private actions were brought against farmers, landowners or employers of agricultural labour for infringement of safety standards or negligence following serious injuries in 1983, 1984 and 1985, respectively; and what was the percentage of convictions in each year.

Mr. Mellor: Records available to me which may be incomplete are shown in the table.

The information collected centrally does not distinguish private prosecutions.

It is not possible to say how many proceedings followed a serious accident.

Court proceedings under the Agriculture (Safety, Health and Welfare Provisions) Act 1956 as amended by the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1975.

England and Wales Number of defendants

	Proceeded against	*Found guilty*
1982	17	17
1983	13	11
1984	20	19

Immigration Control

Mr. Dubs asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department, further to the reply to the hon. Member for Battersea, 3 March *Official Report*, column 51, if he will immediately place in the Library his response to the Commission for Racial Equality's report on immigration control procedures.

Mr. Waddington: Copies were placed in the Library on 6 March.

Featherstone Prison

Mr. Rogker asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many cases of *(a)* escapes, *(b)* attempted escapes, *(c)* assaults on staff, *(d)* disciplinary offences and *(e)* the use of rule 43 have occurred at Her Majesty's prison Featherstone during the last 12 months; and to what extent he attributes the incidence of such cases to overcrowding.

Mr. Mellor: The following figures relate to 1985:

(a) five, involving a total of seven prisoners;
(b) one;
(c) none;
(d) 320 prisoners for a total of 480 offences (these figures are provisional);
(e) 29 prisoners on a total of 30 occasions.

The certified normal accomodation for Featherstone is 510 and the average population during 1985 was 546; this does not represent excessive overcrowding.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Dyslexia

Mr. Dickens asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is his policy on the detection and teaching of dyslexic children; what resources are devoted to the training of teachers in detecting and teaching dyslexic children; what priority he attaches to the early detection of dyslexia in children; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dunn: The Education Act 1981 concentrates on identifying each child's individual needs and on ensuring these needs are met. It deliberately seeks to avoid categorising children. Local education authorities and school governors have the responsibility for the detection and teaching of children with special educational needs, including those with special reading difficulties. Local education authorities should provide guidance to all maintained schools in their area of the arrangements for identifying, assessing and meeting special educational needs. It is important that any child with special educational needs should be identified as early as possible.

The criteria governing all courses of initial teacher training require that students should be introduced to ways of identifying children with special educational needs, helped to appreciate what the ordinary school can and cannot do for such children and given some knowledge of the specialist help available and how it can be enlisted. The Government have provided specific grants of about £2 million annually since 1983-84 to provide in-service teacher training to help teachers in mainstream schools to cope with many kinds of special needs.

Grammar Schools

Mr. Pawsey asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will give the total number of grammar schools in the United Kingdom; and what percentage this represents of all secondary schools in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Dunn: In January 1985 there were 194 grammar schools in the United Kingdom, accounting for nearly 4 per cent. of all public sector secondary schools.

Higher Education

Mr. Forman asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) if he will set out in tabular form the numbers obtaining minimum university entrance qualifications and entering university in each year from 1963 to the latest available date and differentiated as follows *(a)* those obtaining university entrance qualifications as a percentage of the relevant age group, *(b)* university

entrants as a percentage of the relevant age group and *(c)* university entrants as a percentage of those with university entrance qualifications;

(2) if he will set out in tabular form the numbers obtaining minimum entrance qualifications to public sector higher education institutions and entering such institutions in each year from 1963 to the latest available date and differentiated as follows *(a)* those obtaining entrance qualifications as a percentage of the relevant age group, *(b)* actual entrants as a percentage of the relevant age group and *(c)* actual entrants as a percentage of those with entrance qualifications.

Mr. Walden: The available information is given in the table using the Department's normal definition of participation indices for higher education. Information prior to 1970 is not readily available on the same basis.

Higher education: home domiciled students entering full-time and sandwich courses for the first time
Great Britain

Thousands

Year of entry	*(a) Qualified leavers*				*(b) Age participation index‖*			*(c) Qualified participation index¶*		
	Qualified Leavers*	*QLI†*	*Number of young entrants to‡* *University*	*Public sector*	*University*	*Public sector*	*All*	*University*	*Public sector*	*All*
1970	102·4	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
1971	108·1	14·5	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
1972	109·9	14·7	33·1	53·7	7·1	7·2	14·3	48·3	48·9	97·2
1973	111·9	15·0	32·6	52·0	7·0	7·0	14·0	47·0	46·5	93·5
1974	113·1	14·9	34·4	50·4	7·2	6·6	13·8	48·1	44·6	92·7
1975	115·3	14·8	37·0	49·8	7·3	6·4	13·7	49·4	43·2	92·6
1976	122·0	15·2	39·0	47·5	7·4	5·9	13·3	48·4	38·9	87·3
1977	125·5	15·3	42·0	42·8	7·6	5·2	12·8	49·4	34·1	83·5
1978	127·4	15·1	43·2	41·4	7·5	4·9	12·4	49·6	32·5	82·1
1979	128·6	14·7	44·8	43·2	7·4	5·0	12·4	50·4	33·6	84·0
1980	132·9	14·8	46·8	46·2	7·5	5·2	12·6	50·3	34·8	85·0
1981	137·5	15·0	45·6	54·3	7·2	5·9	13·1	47·7	39·5	87·1
1982	144·0	15·4	44·0	61·0	6·8	6·5	13·4	44·4	42·4	86·8
1983	151·8	16·2	61·8	62·1	6·6	6·6	13·2	40·7	40·9	81·6
1984	151·3	16·5	62·7	63·1	6·8	6·9	13·7	41·4	41·7	83·1

— Not available.

* Qualified leavers are those leaving school or further education colleges with at least 2 GCE A levels, or 3 Scottish Higher Certificates.

† The Qualified Leavers Index (QLI) consists of the proportion of the age group who obtained 2 or more A levels, or their Scottish equivalent.

‡ Aged under 21 in the year of entry.

‖ The Age Participation Index (API) is defined as the number of young home initial entrants expressed as a percentage of the "relevant age group", being the average of the number of 18 years olds and number of 19 year olds in the population as at 31 December of the year of entry. This measure has replaced the previously used age participation rate (APR) based solely upon 18 year olds.

¶ The Qualified Participation Index (QPI) is defined as the number of young home initial entrants whether qualified or not expressed as a percentage of the numbers of qualified school and FE leavers (this measure was known formerly as the qualified participation rate).

Research Councils

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what proportion of public money allocated to each of the research councils is spent in Wales.

Mr. Walden: The table shows the information requested.

Research Council	*Proportion of public money allocated in 1984-85* Per cent.*
AFRC	3·4
ESRC	1·4
MRC	1·7
NERC	11·8
SERC	1·5

* Expressed as a percentage that was spent in Wales.

Assisted Places Scheme

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how much has been spent on the assisted places scheme in England in each year since the commencement of the scheme.

Mr. Dunn: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) on 20 January at column 80.

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how much has been spent on the assisted places scheme in each local education authority in England in each year since the scheme was introduced.

Mr. Dunn: As regards 1983-84, I refer to the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock) on 10 December 1985 at column 568. I shall reply to the hon. Member giving figures for other years as soon as possible.

Deaf Children

Mr. Iain Mills asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the provision of education for deaf children by local education authorities in circumstances where a local education authority is not prepared to support financially a successful candidate to schools such as the Mary Hare grammar school for the deaf or Burwood Park school.

Mr. Dunn: Local education authorities are required by the Education Act 1981 to make appropriate provisions for the education of children with special educational needs. An authority is under no obligation to support financially the education of such children at non-maintained schools if it can make satisfactory provision at one of it own maintained schools. The Authority's decision in any individual case does not remove a parent's rights of appeal

to the Secretary of State under the provisions of the Education Act 1981, or of complaint under the Education Act 1944.

GCSE Examinations

Mr. Janner asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science which local education authorities and which examination groups have now requested a postponement of the introduction of GCSE examinations.

Mr. Chris Patten: For the local education authorities, I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave to him on 17 February at column *14*. Since then two further local education authorities, Birmingham and Stockport, have requested a postponement of the GCSE. Two of the five GCSE examining groups, the London and East Anglia group and the Welsh Joint Education Committee, have made a similar request.

Dr. Glyn asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has about the proportion of general certificate of secondary education syllabuses which are now available to teachers for preparation of teaching materials for the next academic year.

Mr. Chris Patten: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer which I gave to the hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Freud) on 27 February, column *647*.

Married Schoolgirls

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many married girls are currently receiving school education; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dunn: Such information is not collected centrally.

Repairs and Maintenance

Mr. Fatchett asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if, pursuant to his reply of 4 March, he will list the 32 local education authorities which have spent less in real terms in 1983-84, as measured by the gross domestic product deflator, on the repair and maintenance of schools and colleges, in comparison with 1982-83.

Mr. Dunn: The authorities are as follows:

Merton	Humberside
Suffolk	Lincolnshire
Kirklees	Barnet
Lancashire	South Tyneside
Walsall	West Sussex
North Tyneside	Redbridge
Hereford and Worcester	Durham
Birmingham	North Yorkshire
Calderdale	Isles of Scilly
Nottinghamshire	Sunderland
Salford	Enfield
Kent	Solihull
Manchester	Barking
Cheshire	Norfolk
St. Helens	Oxfordshire
Croydon	Cornwall

PRIME MINISTER

Mr. Ronald Pelton

Dr. Owen asked the Prime Minister whether the case of Ronald Pelton, arrested by the Federal Bureau of Investigation in November 1985 and who worked for a time at the Government communications headquarters, has been referred to the Security Commission.

The Prime Minister: No.

Southern Africa

Mr. Caborn asked the Prime Minister whether she has agreed a date and venue with the Commonwealth Secretary-General and the Heads of Government of Zambia, Australia, the Bahamas, Canada, India, the United Kingdom and Zimbabwe for the meeting envisaged in paragraph seven of the Commonwealth accord on southern Africa adopted in October 1985.

The Prime Minister: No. The review referred to in the Commonwealth accord will take place in the context of developments in South Africa and the work of the group of eminent persons which is currently visiting South Africa.

Syrian Prime Minister and Foreign Minister

Mr. Parry asked the Prime Minister (1) if she will make a statement on her recent meeting with the Prime Minister of Syria.

(2) if the question of human rights in Syria was discussed at her recent meeting with the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Syria.

The Prime Minister: I had a meeting with the Foreign Minister of Syria, Mr. Farouk al-Shara', on 3 March, at which we discussed the Arab-Israel problem and other regional issues as well as terrorism. I sought the continued help of the Syrian Government in securing the release of Mr. Alec Collett held hostage in the Lebanon.

Mr. Shara' also met my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and was left in no doubt about the strong feelings in this country on the question of human rights in Syria.

Public Libraries and Museums

Mr. Cartwright asked the Prime Minister which Minister is currently responsible for carrying out the duties conferred by sections 1 and 10 of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964; and by what instrument that responsibility was last transferred.

The Prime Minister: The Minister for the Arts exercises day-to-day responsibility for these functions. Currently he acts on behalf of the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, to whom the legal responsibilities were transferred by the Transfer of Functions (Arts, Libraries and National Heritage) Order 1984 (No. 1814). However the legal responsibilities will shortly be transferred to the Lord President of the Council, in line with the Minister for the Arts' position as Minister of State, Privy Council Office.

ENVIRONMENT

Association of Metropolitan Authorities Housing Committee

49. **Mr. Litherland** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he plans to meet the chairman of the Association of Metropolitan Authorities Housing Committee.

Mr. John Patten: I hope to discuss with him and the chairman of the Association of District Councils' housing and environmental health committee in the near future the additional allocations my Department is making available for capital schemes devised by local authorities in conjunction with the urban housing renewal unit; and to have a meeting with him and other representatives of the local authority associations about their proposals for reducing the level of rent arrears among their tenants.

BMX Cycle Track, Brixton

Mr. John Fraser asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what funding comes from his Department to the BMX cycle track in Brixton; and if he is satisfied with value for money for the project.

Sir George Young: The Department approved partnership funding for the BMX cycle track in Brixton in 1982. The scheme received a capital grant of £13,390, and a grant towards the annual running costs of £20,000.

The scheme has made a positive short-term use of an otherwise vacant council site. As the land is now required for housing, the organisers of this project, Brixton cycle club, are winding up its activities on the site.

I am satisfied that the project has provided value for money during the period of its urban programme funding.

British Nuclear Fuels Ltd.

Mr. Frank Cook asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will identify the section of the process at the British Nuclear Fuels Ltd. Sellafield works from which the matter discharged on 23 January originated; and if he will place in the Library a full and detailed flow diagram of the reprocessing operations overall, clearly identifying the location of the source of the discharged liquor.

Mr. Waldegrave: The section of the process from which uranium originated and was subsequently discharged on 23 January was the uranium finishing stage, where purified uranium solution is handled. A flow diagram of the overall reprocessing cycle will be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Frank Cook asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what filtering, mixing, dilution, conditioning and temperature adjustment was carried out on the relevant liquor before or during the operations at Sellafield to discharge it into the Irish sea on 23 January.

Mr. Waldegrave: In passing through the normal low active waste treatment stages, the uranium solution was diluted 25 times by water and other wastes, neutralised with ammonium hydroxide and screened to remove any flotsam, all at ambient temperature.

Mr. Frank Cook asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will place in the Library copies of the monitoring records for the marine environments, sea and beaches, following the sea discharge of 23 January; and if he will make a statement assessing the hazards to the health of members of the public residing in the immediate area of the Sellafield plant, as a result of this discharge.

Mr. Gummer: I have been asked to reply.

My Department's assessment is that the discharge in question is unlikely to have any significant effect on the people most exposed to radioactivity from Sellafield since it amounted to only about one millionth of the annual limit allowed by the International Commission on Radiological Protection. My Department already undertakes a substantial monitoring programme, the results of which are published annually and placed in the Library. No additional monitoring is required on account of this discharge.

St. Barnabas Community Centre, Bristol

Mr. John Fraser asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects the St. Barnabas community centre, Bristol, to be available for use by the local community; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: The centre was completed by Avon county council in November 1984 and has been available for use since then. However, the St. Paul's community association declines to use the building until certain defects are remedied and improvements made.

Recently the county council, whose responsibility this is, submitted an application to my Department for extra funding and this is being considered. I understand that the county council expect the centre to be in full use towards the end of this year.

Homelessness

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what analysis has been made of the causes of homelessness; and what steps Her Majesty's Government are taking to prevent homelessness occurring.

Sir George Young: A breakdown by reason for homelessness of households accepted by locl authorities under the Housing (Homeless Person) Act 1977 is contained in the tables published quarterly by the Department, copies of which are in the Library. I would refer the hon. Member also to the reply given on 30 January to a question by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker).—[Vol. 90, c. *610*.]

The results of the latest research into homelessness carried out for my Department were published under the titles "Single and Homeless" (HMSO 1981) and "A Place for the Family" (SHAC 1982). Copies of these are also in the Library. Further research into homelessness is currently in hand.

A wide range of Government measures have been introduced to increase the availability of accommodation in both the public and the private sectors and we are currently considering additional measures which might help to relieve the problem of homelessness in this and other ways. The provision of housing advice by voluntary bodies at national and regional level is assisted by grants from my Department under section 13 of the Act.

Transitional Grant Support

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for the Environment which projects run by voluntary bodies in the London borough of Waltham Forest will be eligible for transitional grant support after the abolition of the Greater London council; and what is the maximum amount in each case.

Sir George Young: My right hon. Friend has accepted the following projects as eligible for transitional grant support in the London borough of Waltham Forest, and for the maximum amounts specified. However, it is for Waltham Forest council to decide which of these organisations should receive support under the transitional grant scheme, and the precise sum to be allocated to each, up to the allocation limit of £267,000:

	£
Afro-Caribbean Educational Project (Children)	22,400
Waltham Forest Centre for the Unemployed	50,400
Indian Muslim Federation Advisory Service and Youth Activities	38,300
Circle Services Ltd.—Neighbourhood Home Improvement Agency	30,680
Waltham Forest Toy Library	26,800
Asian Arts Council	21,000
Waltham Forest Chinese Association	7,300
Waltham Forest Victim Support Centre	35,000
Hollycats Play Project	38,450
Waltham Forest Girls Project/Afro-Caribbean Educational Project—Women's Project	40,000
Waltham Forest Women's Centre	50,000
Total	360,370

Empty Properties (Wirral)

Mr. Frank Field asked the Secretary of State for the Environment on what grounds he has granted dispensation to Wirral councillors to vote on imposing a rate on empty property; and if he will detail the names and the party affiliation of those councillors requesting such dispensation.

Mr. Waldegrave: My right hon. Friend has granted dispensations under section 97(1) of the Local Government Act 1972 to councillors D. A. Fletcher, T. Higgins, G. C. Lindsay and C. Whatling, three of whom I am informed are members of the Conservative group and one of the Liberal group on the metropolitan borough of Wirral.

These dispensations were granted in accordance with my criteria set out in the Department's circular 105/73.

Community Councils

Dr. David Clark asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on his plans following the Leavett review of rural community councils.

Mrs. Rumbold: The review was undertaken on behalf of the Development Commission which is now developing plans to take the recommendations forward in consultation with my Department.

House Building (Essex)

Dr. David Clark asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has as to the acreage of land presently earmarked or zoned for building houses in Essex; and if he will express as a percentage of this the area of the site of special scientific interest land at West Mersea, Essex, in respect of which approval to construct houses has been granted after a planning inquiry.

Mr. Tracey: The Essex structure plan makes provision for 93,840 dwellings in the county between April 1977 and 1991. By mid 1985 about 60,200 dwellings had been constructed and there remained provision for about 33,600 dwellings. On the basis of a density of 30 dwellings per hectare, which it is the policy of the plan to achieve in estate housing development, this would amount to development of about 1,120 hectares of land. No decision has yet been given by my right hon. Friend on the planning applications in respect of the land at West Mersea to which the hon. Members refers. The area of the site in question is 0·32 hectares.

Dr. David Clark asked the Secretary of State for the Environment why he applied a section 29 order to land notified as a site of special scientific interest at West Mersea, Essex, in 1985; and if he will state the reason given by the inspector for his subsequent approval of an application to build houses on this land.

Mrs. Rumbold: The site, which had not at the time been notified as a site of special scientific interest, was under immediate threat. On the information then available the Secretary of State was satisfied that the site was of special interest and of national importance, and that it was appropriate to provide an extended period of protection for the area concerned by means of a nature conservation order. In the light of more detailed information available at the subsequent public inquiry, the Secretary of State concluded that the site could not be regarded as being of national importance as defined in section 29 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, and accordingly decided that the nature conservation order should be revoked.

The Secretary of State is currently considering the inspector's report on the related planning application and will announce his decision shortly.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

Dr. David Clark asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will review the guidelines and advice offered to his Department's inspectors at inquiries which deal with planning applications involving sites of special scientific interest; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Tracey: The planning inspectorate is kept well informed of developments in Government policy, including those relating to nature conservation.

Flower Meadows (West Mersea)

Dr. David Clark asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will take special measures to protect unimproved flower meadows such as that at West Mersea, Essex; and what information he has as to the acreage of meadows similar to that at West Mersea now left in Essex.

Mrs. Rumbold: I am satisfied that existing arrangements for notifying and protecting sites of special scientific interest, and for making nature conservation orders where appropriate, are adequate.

I am advised by the Nature Conservancy Council that there are approximately 52·6 hectares—130 acres—of grassland in Essex of the type found at the West Mersea site.

Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981

Mr. Freud asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether, in respect of those definitive maps and statements for which he has issued a direction to abandon a review under section 55(1) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, the surveying authorities concerned have now completed the duty imposed on them by section 55(5) of the Act to modify the maps and statements to give effect to his decisions and to changes made by the draft revised definitive map which were not opposed; and, where the duty has not been complied with by any particular authority, what steps he proposes to take to ensure that it is completed during 1986.

Mrs. Rumbold: There is no requirement for surveying authorities to notify the Department of modifications made to their definitive maps and statements to give effect to such matters. My right hon. Friend has no power to require that the duty be fulfilled within a specified period. We are, however, exploring the possibility of arranging meetings with surveying authorities to discuss progress being made generally in implementing the definitive map review procedures in the 1981 Act.

Council of Environment Ministers' Meeting

Mr. Moynihan asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Council of Environment Ministers' meeting on 6 March.

Mr. Waldegrave: I represented the United Kingdom at this meeting.

The Council agreed the text of a proposed directive extending the implementation of the 1976 directive (76/464/EEC) on the discharge of dangerous substances to water. It includes a set of standard articles, and an annex with details of emission limit values and environmental quality standards which will be required for DDT, pentachlorophenol and carbon tetrachloride. The Council asked that the Commission should, in bringing forward further proposals for substances for inclusion in the annex, respect the criteria set out in the parent directive—toxicity, persistence, bioaccumulation — and give priority to substances likely to be present in Community waters at levels which cause particularly important environmental problems.

The Council also agreed the principles of a proposed directive amending the 1984 directive (84/631/EEC) on the transfrontier shipment of hazardous waste. The amendments would control movements of hazardous waste to countries outside the Community for disposal.

The Council held a preliminary exchange of views on priorities for the fourth environment action programme.

The Council reached a substantial measure of agreement on a proposed directive on the use of sewage sludge in agriculture, and gave further consideration to proposed directives on the control of polluting emissions from large combustion plants and on the sulphur content of gas oil.

The Council took note of an oral report by the Commission on preparations for the European Year of the Environment, which starts in March 1987.

Water Charges (Disabled Persons)

Mr. Madden asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received from Yorkshire water consumer consultative committees concerning the assessment of water charges for disabled persons; what action he proposes to assist disabled persons; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: My right hon. Friend has received a letter which asks for rebates on water charges for disabled persons. It is the Government's view that assistance towards the financial needs for disabled persons is best provided through the social security system.

Countryside Commission

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he last met the chairman of the Countryside Commission; and what subjects were discussed.

Mrs. Rumbold: My hon. Friend the Minister for Environment, Countryside and Local Government and I met the chairman of the Countryside Commission on 3 February to discuss the report required under section 7(2) of the Local Government Act 1985.

Rate Support Grant

Mr. Adley asked the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to the statement by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Mrs. Rumbold), about additional rate support grant, 5 March, *Official Report*, column 321, what estimate his Department has made of the amount by which the rate announced by Dorset county council could be reduced directly as a result of the additional funds now being made available to Dorset, assuming the same level of expenditure and the same utilisation of balances.

Mrs. Rumbold: Dorset's share of the recycled grant is £6·409 million for 1986-87. This is equivalent to a rate poundage of 7p. The extent to which the council may be able to reduce its precept is dependent on the grant assumptions already made by the county.

Local Government Reform

Mr. Wareing asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the implications for Her Majesty's Government's policies towards the countryside of the abolition of the Greater London council and metropolitan counties and the consequent transfer of their powers relating to the countryside to successor authorities.

Mrs. Rumbold: I refer the hon. Member to the reply my hon. Friend gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) on 25 February at column 490.

General Development Order

Dr. David Clark asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list in the *Official Report* the changes in the general development order which came into effect on 1 March.

Mr. Tracey: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friends the Members for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) and for Corby (Mr. Powell) on 20 December last at column 369-70.

EMPLOYMENT

Labour Statistics

Mr. Hargreaves asked the Paymaster General what percentage of those registered as unemployed came from building and allied trades in *(a)* the borough of Hyndburn and *(b)* the north-west.

Mr. Lang: The results of the 1984 labour force survey indicate that in the north-west region in the spring of 1984, 6·6 per cent. of those people without a job and looking for work had been employed at some time in the last three years in the construction industry. Data on the industrial classification of the unemployed cannot be provided for areas smaller than standard regions because of the sampling error that would be involved.

Mr. Canavan asked the Paymaster General what is the total number of unemployed people in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Lang: On 6 February 1986, the number of unemployed claimants in the United Kingdom was 3,381,893. This information is in the Library.

Mr. Janner asked the Paymaster General how many people in Leicester have been unemployed for more than one year.

Mr. Lang: On 9 January 1986, the latest date for which an analysis of unemployment by duration is available, 9,148 claimants in the city of Leicester had been unemployed for more than one year. This information is in the Library.

Mr. Kennedy asked the Paymaster General what account is taken in compiling the unemployment figures of those whose small self-employed businesses have gone bankrupt and are therefore not eligible for unemployment benefit.

Mr. Lang: Some people are not entitled to unemployment benefit if they were self-employed in the tax year relevant to their claim, but many nevertheless claim supplementary benefit or national insurance credits and are therefore included in the monthly unemployment count. Recent analysis from the 1984 labour force survey has revealed that only small numbers of unemployed people who had previously been self-employed are excluded from the unemployment count.

Employment and Training Measures

Mr. Willie W. Hamilton asked the Paymaster General what is the latest total of people assisted by the employment and training measures; and what effect this has on the recorded unemployment figures.

Mr. Lang: At the end of January, some 668,000 people were benefiting from our employment and training measures. It is estimated that the effect of the special employment and training measures was to reduce the unemployment count by 495,000.

Women's Retirement Age

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Paymaster General what consideration he has now given to the consequences for public policy of the decision of the European Court of Justice on Wednesday 26 February relating to the retirement ages of women; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to a private notice question from the hon. Member for Kingston-upon-Hull East (Mr. Prescott) on 27 February, at column 1067. I am actively considering whether any amendments should be made to the Sex Discrimination Bill to clarify the law and comply with the EC equal treatment directive in the light of the judgment.

Trade Unions (Political Fund)

Mr. Fatchett asked the Paymaster General what steps he has taken to monitor the arrangements for the political fund ballots held under the Trade Union Act 1984; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The Certification Officer, an independent statutory officer, is responsible for approving the rules under which political fund ballots are conducted. I observe the working of the arrangements as reported in the press and other published material.

Gas Heaters

Ms. Harman asked the Paymaster General if he will undertake an advertising campaign to warn the public of the dangers of open flue gas heaters in bathrooms; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: The British Gas Corporation tells me that it already runs publicity campaigns targeted particularly at areas where the remaining open flue gas heaters are mainly found. The number of heaters is diminishing and there are now very few incidents. Since 1980 British Gas regions have continuously advertised the need to have regular servicing. In addition, British Gas can stop dangerous appliances being used. The Health and Safety Executive has widely circulated its leaflet "The Gas Regulations for Everybody's Safety" which stresses the importance of competent servicing for gas appliances. The executive is also preparing a television reminder for public service broadcast.

Farm Workers (Safety Standards)

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Paymaster General how many serious or fatal accidents involving farm employees were reported in 1983, 1984 and 1985, respectively.

Mr. Lang: The number of serious or fatal accidents involving agricultural employees in Great Britain reported to the Health and Safety Executive in each of the last three years is shown in the table below:

	Fatal	*Serious*
1983	28	183
1984	27	251
1985	*19	†

* Provisional.
† Not yet available.

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Paymaster General which statutory bodies have a role in monitoring safety standards on farms and conditions of work for agricultural employees.

Mr. Lang: Employers have a duty to ensure the health, safety and welfare of agricultural employees so far as is reasonably practicable. Work at agricultural premises is subject to the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and associated legislation. The Health and Safety Executive is the enforcing authority at these premises.

Mr. Ron Davies asked the Paymaster General how many cases were brought against farmers, landowners or employers of agricultural labour for infringement of safety standards in 1983, 1984 and 1985, respectively, by statutory bodies; and, in each year, what was the percentage of convictions.

Mr. Lang: The number of informations laid and convictions obtained against self-employed farmers and employers of agricultural labour for infringements of safety standards in each of the last three years is shown in the table:

	Informations laid	*Convictions*	*Percentage*
1983	165	139	86·9
1984	211	182	86·3
1985	267	210	78·0

ENERGY

Energy Efficiency

10. **Mr. Stott** asked the Secretary of State for Energy whether he has any plans to promote the use of home energy audits.

Mr. David Hunt: My Department is continuing to work on the development of home energy audits at a price that the householder can afford.

15. **Mr. Patchett** asked the Secretary of State for Energy how he intends to monitor the effectiveness of Energy Efficiency Year.

Mr. Peter Walker: Energy Efficiency Year is just part of my campaign to save the 20 per cent. of our energy that is now being wasted. The level of response to our advertising campaign, attendances at our Monergy breakfast briefings and increases in the sales of energy efficiency goods and services will give some measure of the success of this campaign. The number of events taking place during the Year — well on course towards our target of 1,000—is another measure.

19. **Mr. Willie W. Hamilton** asked the Secretary of State for Energy what progress is being made towards the formulation of a national energy policy.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: It remains the Government's aim that energy should be produced, supplied and used efficiently and economically.

22. **Mr. Bellingham** asked the Secretary of State for Energy what progress has been made since 17 February in promoting energy efficiency measures in Energy Efficiency Year.

Mr. David Hunt: Our campaign is reaching every sector of the community. Since 17 February over 75 school plays have taken place as well as around 50 other events aimed at the domestic and industrial/commercial sectors. The Monergy '86 Roadshow is now at the Earls Court Ideal Homes exhibition and will visit nearly 200 town centres during the Year. Our major advertising campaign is continuing both on television and in the national and specialist press.

23. **Mr. Haynes** asked the Secretary of State for Energy whether he has any plans for targeting energy efficiency measures on housing in the inner cities.

Mr. Peter Walker: No. My energy efficiency campaign is directed at all sectors of the economy.

32. **Mrs. Clwyd** asked the Secretary of State for Energy what special measures will be made to make Energy Efficiency Year relevant to the needs of lower income households.

Mr. Peter Walker: I expect the number of voluntary sector insulation projects to double to around 400 as this programme, sponsored by the Manpower Services Commission and my Department, expands during Energy Efficiency Year. Over 100,000 more homes will be insulated, making a total of around a quarter of a million since the programme began. The programme will also create up to 6,000 jobs among the long-term unemployed.

In addition, low-income households can benefit from the advice and information on domestic energy efficiency measures, which has been made widely available by the Energy Efficiency Office; and many of the voluntary sector insulation projects also run individual energy counselling services.

36. **Mr. Cunliffe** asked the Secretary of State for Energy what provision he has made to increase the resources available to regional energy efficiency offices.

Mr. Peter Walker: The resources of regional energy efficiency offices have been increased substantially. Regional energy efficiency officers now have full-time assistants and clerical support and are able to draw on local professional assistance as required.

40. **Mr. Spencer** asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement about the progress in attaining objectives of the Monergy campaign.

Mr. David Hunt: Energy Efficiency Year aims to increase awareness and implementation of energy efficiency measures as a contribution to our campaign to save the 20 per cent. of our energy that is now being wasted. Our publicity programme including national press and television advertising has generated a substantial level of interest. We are well on course to achieve our original target of over 1,000 events during the Year—events run by private companies, the fuel industries and local authorities as well as the energy efficiency office. These events cover every sector and level of the community—including not only seminars for top executives but also courses for caretakers and plant operators and plays for schoolchildren.

Comrie Colliery, Fife

13. **Mr. Douglas** asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will pay an official visit to Comrie colliery in Fife.

Mr. David Hunt: I have no plans at present to visit Comrie colliery.

Privatisation

16. **Mr. Marlow** asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on his plans for privatisation of industries owned by his Department.

Mr. Goodlad: My right hon. Friend's legislative proposals for the privatisation of the British Gas Corporation are currently before the House.

Colliery Review Body

17. **Mr. Barron** asked the Secretary of State for Energy when he will next meet the chairman of the National Coal Board to discuss the workings of the modified colliery review body.

Mr. Peter Walker: The colliery review procedure is an agreement between the National Coal Board and mining unions, to which the Government are not a party.

Combined Heat and Power

18. **Mr. Caborn** asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he is satisfied with progress being made towards the development of combined heat and power in the United Kingdom as a basis for whole-city heating.

Mr. David Hunt: Yes, the consortia in Edinburgh, Belfast and Leicester are making good progress.

Energy Efficiency Office

20. **Mr. Evans** asked the Secretary of State for Energy when he intends to reply to the Energy Committee report on the Energy Efficiency Office.

Mr. Peter Walker: The Government have submitted their response to the Select Committee's report on the Energy Efficiency Office. I understand that the committee will publish the response later this week.

Oil Policy

21. **Mr. Orme** asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on Government policy on oil in the light of the fall in prices; and what discussions he has had with oil companies.

Mr. Peter Walker: No. I have regular discussions with the oil companies on matters of mutual interest.

Electricity Industry

24. **Mr. Ron Davies** asked the Secretary of State for Energy what have been the knock-on effects of closures in the coal mining industry on the electricity industry in the past 12 months.

Mr. David Hunt: The rationalisation of the coal industry coupled with a general reduction in operating costs is essential if the National Coal Board is to retain its position in the market for power station coal.

Sellafield

25. **Mr. Chapman** asked the Secretary of State for Energy what recent representations he has received about recent incidents at Sellafield.

Mr. Goodlad: I have received a number of representations from Members of the House and from the general public.

North Sea Oil (Car Fuel)

26. **Mr. Peter Bruinvels** asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will estimate the proportion of fuel consumed in cars in the United Kingdom is derived from North sea oil.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: I regret that the information is not available in this form. In 1985, 55 per cent. of crude oil run through United Kingdom refineries originated from the United Kingdom continental shelf.

NCB (Privatisation)

27. **Sir Geoffrey Finsberg** asked the Secretary of State for Energy when he expects to meet the chairman of the National Coal Board to discuss the privatisation programme of the National Coal Board.

Mr. David Hunt: The Government have no plans for privatising the National Coal Board's mining activities.

Energy Needs

28. **Mr. Greenway** asked the Secretary of State for Energy what percentage of United Kingdom energy needs is consumed in the domestic sector during winter months; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad: Details of final energy consumption by user are not available on a monthly basis. In the last five financial years, however, the domestic sector accounted for about a third of final consumption during the two quarters from October to March inclusive, or about a fifth of total final consumption in each year as a whole.

Coal Industry

29. **Mr. Knox** asked the Secretary of State for Energy what is the output of coal per manshift at the present time; and how this compares with the output per manshift in April 1979.

Mr. David Hunt: The latest figures available show that overall revenue deep-mined productivity reached 3·13 tonnes per man shift in the week ending 22 February 1986. This compares with an average of 2·20 tonnes per man shift for April 1979.

Sizewell

30. **Mr. Heathcoat-Amory** asked the Secretary of State for Energy when he expects to make a decision on the construction of a pressurised water reactor at Sizewell.

Mr. Peter Walker: I am anxious to make my decision as soon as possible after I have received the inspector's report. I regret the long period of uncertainty that has taken place and have offered the inspector all the administrative help that he requires to produce his report at the earliest possible date.

Energy Prices

31. **Dr. Michael Clark** asked the Secretary of State for Energy what study his Department conducts of how energy

prices paid by British industry compare with prices paid by similar industries in competing countries; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Walker: My Department keeps a close watch on comparative industrial energy prices. United Kingdom interruptible gas prices are the lowest in Europe, and firm gas prices amongst the lowest. United Kingdom electricity prices, except those for some large users at high load factor, are generally favourable compared with those in Europe apart from France, where prices reflect lower nuclear and hydro-electric costs.

Magnox Power Stations

33. **Mr. D. E. Thomas** asked the Secretary of State for Energy what is his Department's latest estimate of the continued life of Magnox power stations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad: The Central Electricity Generating Board has, for planning and accounting purposes, adopted an assumption of a 30-year life for each Magnox station. On the basis of current assessments the board expects actual operating lives to be at least as long as this.

North Sea Oil

34. **Mr. Kennedy** asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he is satisfied with the level of on-shore oil-related activity within the Scottish highlands; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: Projects currently approved are generating good tonnage of work for the United Kingdom fabrication and construction yards. The Scottish Highlands yards are well placed to secure a share of this business provided their bids for it are competitive.

British Gas (Privatisation)

35. **Mr. Favell** asked the Secretary of State for Energy whether his plans for the privatisation of British Gas are affected by the fall in the oil price.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: The offer for sale of shares in British Gas will take full account of prevailing market circumstances.

NCB (Drilling Exploration)

37. **Mr. Dormand** asked the Secretary of State for Energy if, when he next meets the chairman of the National Coal Board, he will raise with him the results of the board's drilling exploration off the north-east coast.

Mr. David Hunt: I am aware of the National Coal Board's exploration programme off the north-east coast, and my right hon. Friend and I expect to discuss the results of this with the chairman of the board from time to time as the board's plans develop.

Renewable Sources of Energy

38. **Mr. Yeo** asked the Secretary of State for Energy how much his Department has spent on research and development on renewable sources of energy in the last five years, compared to the spending in the five years 1974 to 1979.

Mr. David Hunt: Expenditure by my Department on research and development into the renewable sources of energy in the financial years 1980-81 to 1984-85 amounted to £68 million compared with £15·8 million in the period 1975-76 to 1979-80.

Colliery Review Procedure

39. **Mr. Welsh** asked the Secretary of State for Energy when he will next meet the chairman of the National Coal Board to discuss the new colliery review procedure.

Mr. David Hunt: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer my right hon. Friend gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron).

Coal Industry (Mining Practices)

41. **Mr. Hardy** asked the Secretary of State for Energy what proposals he has received or he now expects to receive from the National Coal Board in respect of changes in mining practice which will require changes in current regulations.

Mr. David Hunt: Proposals for new safety regulations are the responsibility of the Health and Safety Commission. Any such proposals are subject to an extensive process of consultation with all interested parties.

Atomic Energy Authority

Mr. Dalyell asked the Secretary of State for Energy on what basis certain employees of the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority have been offered pay increases in the form of market premium payments; which categories of employees have received such offers; what those offers comprise; what were the criteria used for selection of these categories; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad: The principle of awarding special additions to pay in response to proven difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff with scarce skills is now well established. I am asking the chairman of the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority to write to the hon. Member with details of the particular proposals to which he refers.

Electricity Tariffs (Industrial Consumers)

Mr. Rost asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will report progress on the implementation of the scheme proposed by the National Coal Board and the Central Electricity Generating Board to offer reduced electricity tariffs to large industrial consumers; and if he has any plans to introduce legislation to permit preferential supplies of coal or electricity.

Mr. Goodlad: Discussions are continuing between the electricity supply industry and the NCB on a possible commercial arrangement to supply lower cost electricity to very large industrial users. I have no plans at present to introduce legislation on preferential supplies of coal or electricity.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Gas Appliances (Safety)

50. **Mr. Tom Cox** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action he is taking to ensure the safety standards of gas appliances imported into the United Kingdom.

Mr. Howard: I announced on 13 December that new regulations were to be prepared to ensure that both new and second-hand gas cookers sold in the United Kingdom meet proper safety standards. This will apply to both imported and home-produced goods. If I see a need for legislation for other gas appliances, I shall introduce it later.

EC (Trade Statistics)

Mr. Tom Cox asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will give the present trade balance and deficit figures of the United Kingdom with each member of the European Economic Community.

Mr. Alan Clark: Statistics of United Kingdom trade with individual countries are not available on the balance of payments (BOP) basis. Figures on the overseas trade statistics (OTS) basis are in the table.

For comparison both OTS and BOP figures for the year 1985 are given for United Kingdom trade with the European Community as a whole.

United Kingdom balance of trade with EC countries
Twelve months to January 1986

	Crude balance £ million*
Belgium/Luxembourg	−579
Denmark	−359
France	+849
Federal Republic of Germany	−3,743
Greece	+19
Ireland	+797
Italy	−863
Netherlands	+722
Portugal	−289
Spain	−185
EC (12) OTS	−3,631
EC (12) 1985 OTS	−3,213
(EC (12) 1985 BOP†	−1,975)

Notes:
* Exports, valued exclusive of insurance and freight costs, less imports valued inclusive of insurance and freight.
† Exports less imports both valued exclusive of insurance and freight costs.
Source:
United Kingdom Overseas Trade Statistics.
Department of Trade and Industry.

Nissan (Washington Plant)

Mr. Roger King asked the Secretary of State for Trade and industry (1) what approaches the Nissan company has made to Her Majesty's Government seeking to modify its earlier undertakings on local content levels in the cars assembled at Washington; and if he will make it his policy not to accede to any such approaches;

(2) whether he has had discussions with Nissan over that company's output plans for its new Washington plant; and when that company now proposes to achieve an output of 250,000 units per year.

Mr. Butcher: Nissan has made no proposals to change the terms of its Washington project. These remain as outlined in the heads of agreement between the company and the Department of Trade and Industry published in 1984. If Nissan proceeds to phase 2, production will commence by 1990 at 60 per cent. local content, rising to 80 per cent. not later than the first half of 1991. The output would be at least 100,000 vehicles per year. Any revisions Nissan might propose to the terms of the project would be considered on their merits.

Mr. Roger King asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what commitment the Nissan company has made to export cars assembled at its Washington plant; and what proportion of United Kingdom output that company plans to export.

Mr. Butcher: Nissan does not expect to export vehicles from the United Kingdom in the first phase of its project. However, under phase 2 of the proposal, the company's commitment is that there should be substantial exports. The proportion of output exported will depend on market and other conditions at the time.

Regional Selective Assistance

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list in the *Official Report* the amount of regional selective assistance given or offered under section 7 of the Industrial Development Act 1982 of £5,000 or more in each of the past three years and to date *(a)* nationally, *(b)* in the east midlands and *(c)* to Leicestershire; and if he will list all the benefiting companies and the amount received in each case by installations in the east midlands and Leicestershire.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Offers of regional selective assistance (RSA) of £5,000 or more in each of the last three years and to date in Great Britain, the east midlands region and Leicestershire are as follows:

£ thousand

	1982-83	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	**1985-86*
Great Britain	136,283	178,466	247,591	173,071
East Midlands	10,016	6,395	7,960	2,555
Leicestershire	—	—	15	263

*April 1985—January 1986

The following issues of *British Business*, obtainable in the Library of the House, contain details of companies [about 200] in the east midlands region which have had offers of £5,000 or more and have received a first payment since April 1982:

24 September 1982,
17 December 1982,
15 April 1983,
24 June 1983,
18 November 1983,
17 February 1984,
6 July 1984,
13 July 1984,
14 September 1984,
23 November 1984,
22 February 1985,
28 June 1985,
30 August 1985,
29 November 1985,
28 February 1986.

Takeover Bids

Mr. Iain Mills asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what definition of the national interest he uses in deciding upon a reference to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission in the case of corporate takeover bids;

(2) if he will publish the criteria he uses in deciding upon references to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission on company takeover bids.

Mr. Howard: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry may make a reference to the commission where it appears to him that a merger proposal may have a bearing on the public interest. In making a decision on a reference, he takes into account the advice of the Director General of Fair Trading. The policy of the Government is to make references to the commission primarily on competition grounds. This does not, however, rule out the possibility of references on other public interest grounds. In assessing whether a merger proposal may raise public interest questions, my right hon. Friend is guided by the public interest criteria set out in section 84(1) of the Fair Trading Act 1973.

Mr. Iain Mills asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he is satisfied with the operation of the Fair Trading Act 1973 on corporate takeover bids; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: Yes. I am satisfied that the legislative and policy framework within which mergers are examined, in allowing for consideration of each case on its merits in the light of all the relevant circumstances, enables us to assess whether a proposal raises potential public interest questions which deserve further consideration by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission.

Systime plc

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will make a statement on the outcome of the meeting regarding Systime plc held on 19 January 1983.

Mr. Pattie: No.

Exports (United States Controls)

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he has taken to seek to prevent the infringement of United Kingdom sovereignity by the operation of United States controls on exports from the United Kingdom of goods, including United States components or technology; how many individual cases regarding re-export controls he has taken up with the United States Government since 1983; in what circumstances he has not permitted United Kingdom companies to make a commercial decision as to whether to comply with United States re-export controls; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I continue to emphasise to the United States Administration the Government's objections to United States claims to extraterritorial controls over exports and to warn of the damaging consequences to our mutual interest of attempts to enforce such claims in the United Kingdom. We continue to make efforts to prevent or resolve problems arising from such claims under the consultation arrangements agreed by the United Kingdom and the United States Governments in November 1984. Since 1983 we have taken up about 20 cases with the United States authorities regarding re-export controls. In 1982, directions under the Protection of Trading Interests Act were made to prohibit seven United Kingdom firms from complying with the United States embargo on exports and re-exports of United States origin goods and technology destined for the west Siberian pipeline project in the USSR.

BL (Bids)

Mr. Adley asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will tabulate for General Motors and all the other bidders for parts of BL, information in so far as it relates to their bids, which indicates whether *(a)* the bidder was allowed to visit all or any of the BL premises, *(b)* permission was given to meet the plant management, *(c)* permission was given to meet the unions at each plant and *(d)* he has received any notification of dissatisfaction, by any of the bidders, about lack of availability of assistance or information in assembling their bids.

Mr. Peter Morrison: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry told the House on 3 February, discussions with General Motors have reached an advanced stage. In order to examine the possibility of bringing together the BL and Bedford truck and van businesses, representatives of GM have visited Leyland Trucks and Freight Rover and have met some of the management. GM representatives have not visited the Land Rover plant at Solihull but they have met some of the Land Rover management in the course of general discussions with BL. GM has not held discussions with trade union representatives of the BL businesses. The position regarding other bidders for these businesses is set out below.

The Government are satisfied that all other commercial parties interested in all or part of the Land Rover, Freight Rover, Leyland Trucks and related businesses, who were willing to enter into the normal confidentiality agreements, have received appropriate information from BL's advisers, Hill Samuel, in order to enable them to decide whether or not to declare a firm intention to make a bid.

As my right hon. Friend told the House on 6 March, Hill Samuel has offered a meeting to Lancashire Interprises Ltd. to explain further the nature of its proposals following its preliminary expression of interest on 4 March. I understand that a meeting is taking place today (10 March) with representatives of Lancashire Enterprises Ltd. and the West Midlands enterprise board, on whose behalf the preliminary expression of interest was also made.

I understand that Lonrho and Aveling Barford have expressed dissatisfaction to Hill Samuel about the time scale in which they were asked to decide whether or not to declare a firm intention to bid, the level of financial information made available and the lack of access to premises and to plant management. The Land Rover management buy-out team led by Mr. David Andrews has, however, written to me observing that the time scale was very short but that an early decision is required in order to avoid commercial uncertainties damaging the businesses.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Horses (Docked Tails)

Mr. Greenway asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what steps he takes to seek to ensure the enforcement of the provisions discouraging the importation of horses with docked tails; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what recent representations he has received about the incidence of the docking of horses' tails; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: The import of horses with docked tails is controlled under the Docking and Nicking of Horses Act 1949.

Instructions have been issued to Her Majesty's Customs and Excise officials at points of entry to prevent such imports except where a licence has been issued by my Department in respect of an animal for breeding, or where the animal will be re-exported as soon as practicable under Customs control. No licences for breeding purposes have been issued since 1980.

Members of the state veterinary service have also been instructed to report on any docked horses found at markets and sales. Anyone convicted for failing to comply with the legislation is liable to a heavy fine or imprisonment.

My Department has not received any recent representations on horse tail docking.

Pesticides

Mr. Hawksley asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if the pesticides safety precautions scheme has given approval for the use of Mowchem in public parks and on verges.

Mr. Gummer: Mowchem — active ingredient mefluidide — currently has provisional commercial clearance under the pesticides safety precautions scheme for use as a grass growth retardant on industrial and non-crop land. This clearance permits its use on verges and in amenity areas such as public parks.

Mowchem is also approved for efficacy under the agricultural chemicals approval scheme.

Advisory Committee on Pesticides

Sir Richard Body asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether any member of the Advisory Committee on Pesticides has ever received a fee as a consultant or for research from a company manufacturing pesticides; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: Given the number of eminent scientists who have contributed to the work of the Advisory Committee on Pesticides since its inception in 1954—then titled the Advisory Committee on Poisonous Substances used in Agriculture and Food Storage—it is not practicable to provide the information requested.

However, my hon. Friend can be assured that great care has always been taken to ensure that members of advisory committee do not have any financial or commercial interests which would be likely to prejudice the proper discharge of their functions as members of the committee and the existing membership have all signed a declaration to that effect.

Nutritional Labelling

Mr. Murphy asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent representation he has received advocating compulsory nutritional labelling; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: We have received a number of representations advocating compulsory nutrition labelling of food. We are currently seeking comments on proposals to make the labelling of total and saturated fats compulsory, and on draft guidelines for voluntary wider nutrition labelling.

Agricultural Land

Mr. Cash asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress is being made in revising the current guidelines on the use of agricultural land so as to facilitate its use in appropriate circumstances for other purposes in the light of current production levels.

Mr. Gummer: There is little I can add to the answer given to my hon. Friend on 6 February. The Government remain committed to their policy for the protection of agricultural land. We do, however, recognise the need to strike a balance between competing interests and in responding to requests from planning authorities for advice on development proposals we try to adopt a flexible approach.

Horses (Slaughter)

Mr. Tom Cox asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what has been the number of horses slaughtered in each of the last five years; and what meat has been sold for human consumption.

Mr. Gummer: These statistics are not collected. Little horsemeat is produced for human consumption in the United Kingdom. However, in 1985 5,545 tonnes of horsemeat were exported from the United Kingdom to the member states of the European Community.

Labour Statistics

Mr. John asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if, pursuant to his reply of 10 February, *Official Report*, column 377, he will state what percentage of farms in the United Kingdom employ *(a)* one to five hired workers, *(b)* five to 10 hired workers and *(c)* over 10 hired workers; and if he will state the equivalent figures for Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and each of the standard regions in England.

Mr. Gummer: This information will take some time to extract and collate. I will reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Dairy Produce (Export Subsidy)

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if the decision of the European Economic Community Commission to cease publishing the amount of subsidy given for exports of dairy produce is subject to the agreement of the management committee and whether this change of policy by the Commission applies to other products outwith the dairy sector;

(2) if he will seek to establish from the European Economic Commission the reasons why they have decided not to publish the appropriate rates of subsidy given for dairy exports; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: Export refunds in the dairy sector are and will continue to be published, usually on a monthly basis. The Commission has however, recently stated that in the light of market conditions the rates for butter, butteroil and skimmed milk powder may be varied according to destination at short notice and for short periods. Rates set in this way will not be published but will be notified directly to member states which are responsible for passing the information on to the trade. The published rates will continue to apply to all other products and destinations.

The explanation given by the Commission for this change in procedure is the need to strengthen the Community's position on the world market by making it more difficult for competitors to undercut Community prices.

The Commission's action is based on the provision of article 17.5 of regulation 804/68 which says that where necessary the Commission may alter the refunds between meetings of the management committee. It does not apply to products outside the dairy sector.

European Community (Food Sales)

Mr. Craigen asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what consideration he has given to procuring the sale of European Economic Community surplus food stored in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Gummer: Day to day management of the common agricultural policy, including the disposal of intervention stocks, is the responsibility of the European Commission which consults member states through the commodity management committees. The United Kingdom is represented on these committees and takes an active part in encouraging cost-effective measures to dispose of stocks.

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how the representative of Her Majesty's Government on the management committee voted on the proposal to offer further supplies of butter at special prices to the Soviet Union, India and Pakistan on 28 February; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: Our basic objective remains to tackle the problem of costly surpluses at source. However, while they continue to exist the cheapest way of disposing of them is often to sell them on the world market with the benefit of export refunds. These refunds bridge the gap between Community and world prices and are not a mechanism to provide importing countries with cheap food. Where there are surpluses for export the Government remain opposed to singling out any particular country for special treatment. The proposal presented by the Commission at the management committee on 28 February, did not restrict sale to a particular destination. The United Kingdom representative therefore voted in favour.

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if the cost of the special sale of butter announced by the European Commission on 28 February is included in the agricultural budget for 1986; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: There is no specific provision for this sale in the 1986 budget, but there are provisions for disposal measures and export refunds generally which could be used. However, the Commission has stated that it considers that extra funds will be required in 1986 for the disposal of butter stocks.

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what estimate has been made by the European Commission of the cost of the special sales of butter announced on 28 February;

(2) pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) of 3 March, *Official Report*, column 10, what was the quantity of butter which the Commission agreed on 28 February to sell to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, India and Pakistan, respectively; and if the tender prices will be made public.

Mr. Gummer: The proposed sale of intervention butter announced on 28 February, involves a system of competitive tendering to determine the amount of the price reduction. The first invitation to tender will now close on 24 March. It is not possible to give any details of quantities, price or destination or to say whether such sales will in fact take place until the results of the tender are known.

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what percentage of the total tonnage of food exported to third countries by the European Economic Commission was sent to East Europe, including the Soviet Union, in the most recent annual period for which figures are available; and what were the comparable percentages in each of the previous 10 years.

Mr. Gummer: I will reply to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

Severe Weather Payments

Mr. Bob Clay asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the total amount to date of payments made to farmers under the exceptional weather aid scheme.

Mr. Jopling: To date, payments made to farmers in England under this scheme amount to £3·25 million.

Mr. Clay asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his estimate of the administrative costs involved in implementing the exceptional weather aid scheme.

Mr. Jopling: I estimate that the administrative costs of this scheme in England will amount to about £100,000.

Mr. Clay asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps were taken and what costs were incurred in publicising the exceptional weather aid scheme.

Mr. Jopling: The scheme was publicised by press releases, supplemented by various forms of local publicity in the areas concerned. In addition, a leaflet explaining the scheme was sent to every potential applicant. I estimate that the total costs were about £5,000.

Hormones

Mr. Dalyell asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on his policy towards the European Economic Community on the question of hormones.

Mr. Jopling [*pursuant to his reply*, 3 March 1986, c. *8*]: The Government have today made an application to the European Court of Justice seeking annulment of the EC directive banning the use of hormone growth promoters. This action reflects our objections to the basis upon which this directive was adopted, including the lack of regard for relevant scientific evidence.

In taking this action in the European Court, the Government do not seek to discourage producers who wish to rear animals without the use of added hormones. Until a ban is implemented, this remains a matter for commercial decision of individual farmers.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Group Accident Insurance

Mr. McWilliam asked the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission, what changes have been made to right hon. and hon. Members' group accident insurance arrangements.

Mr. Beith: The death and capital benefits available under the terms of the policy have been increased to £89,000 as from 1 January 1986. I will arrange for the memorandum by the Accountant, which gives details of the cover and exclusions to be placed in the Library.

Palace of Westminster (Floor Area)

Mr. Willie W. Hamilton asked the Lord Privy Seal if he will give the most recent figures showing the amount of space occupied in the Palace of Westminster by the Commons and Lords, respectively.

Mr. Biffen: The total floor area of the Palace of Westminster is approximately 790,000 sq ft. An approximate division between the two Houses is 530,000 sq ft for the House of Commons and 260,000 sq ft for the House of Lords. Precise figures could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

THE ARTS

Tax Settlements

Mr. Faulds asked the Minister for the Arts (1) whether he will list, giving the relevant references in the *Official Report*, those occasions on which the amounts of estate duty or capital transfer tax satisfied by the acceptance of objects or land in respect of individual cases have been specified in written answers during the period between the financial years 1976-77 and 1984-85;

(2) what steps he took to verify the accuracy of the information in relation to the dates of recommendations by the Museums and Galleries Commission for acceptances in satisfaction of tax on which his answer of 26 February, *Official Report*, column 593, was based; and if he now has anything to add to that answer;

(3) if he will specify, giving the relevant references in the *Official Report*, the occasions on which it has been stated to the House since 1979 and prior to his answer to the hon. Member for Warley, East of 26 February, *Official Report*, column 593, that the amounts of estate duty or capital transfer tax satisfied by the acceptance of objects or land is confidential in respect of individual cases;

(4) why, in the light of his answers of 13 February, *Official Report*, column 502, and 26 February, *Official Report*, column 593, indicating that £505,650 had been accounted for out of a total original provision of £2 million in respect of items of heritage quality accepted in lieu of tax, it was necessary to increase the cash limit on class V, vote 10 in relation to expenditure under subhead C2; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Luce: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Works of Art (Exports)

Mr. Faulds asked the Minister for the Arts if he will state for each year since 1979 the length of time which elapsed between the end of the year to which successive reports of the Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art related and the publication of the relevant report; to what factors he attributes the length of these periods and the trend shown by them; and what steps he is taking to reduce the time taken to publish these reports.

Mr. Luce: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

British Council

Mr. Cabom asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the Government's attitude to British Council funding for British sport coaches being sent to South Africa.

Mr. Eggar: It is our policy to discourage sporting contact with South Africa. In line with this policy the British Council does not make funds available to send sports coaches to South Africa.

Nuclear Tests

Mr. Strang asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will seek to obtain from the United States Government the Natural Resources Defence Council's report on unannounced United States nuclear tests.

Mr. Renton: Copies of the report are readily available from the Natural Resources Defence Council itself in Washington.

Syria

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on current relations between Her Majesty's Government and Syria.

Mr. Renton: Our relations with Syria are sound. There are no current bilateral problems. The recent visit of the Syrian Foreign Minister enabled us to continue our exchange of views on regional issues.

Nuclear Test Ban Treaty

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the reply to the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown), 6 December 1985, *Official Report*, column 385, what effects he assesses the conclusion of a comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty in 1986 would have upon the Trident nuclear warhead testing programme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: These would depend on the terms and conditions of an agreement, which remains a hypothetical question.

Zimbabwe

Sir Peter Emery asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will take an initiative to seek to persuade the Government of Zimbabwe to transfer to British citizens who have left Zimbabwe to return to Britain the annual interest payments on their investments currently blocked by the Zimbabwean Government; and if he will seek to establish a schedule of repayment of these funds and investments which gives priority in repayment to the needs of those who are aged and those who have only small amounts requiring repayment.

Mrs. Chalker: Since March 1984 individual holders of assets blocked in Zimbabwe have been able to purchase Government of Zimbabwe 4 per cent. external bonds, which permit the remittance of capital, with interest, over a 12-year period.

The Zimbabwean authorities have also made special provisions for holders of blocked funds who are elderly, sick or suffering other exceptional hardship. They are well aware of our concern that those in the greatest need should receive special attention. My right hon. and learned Friend last discussed this matter with the Zimbabwean Foreign Minister in February.

Apartheid and Human Rights

Mr. Craigen asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his most recent discussion with the South African Government on apartheid and human rights.

Mrs. Chalker: We have made very clear to the South African Government on a number of occasions recently, both here and in South Africa, our deep concern on human rights and the need to eliminate apartheid. These were among the issues discussed when my right hon. and learned Friend met the South African ambassador on 13 February.

Central America

Mr. Craigen asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what view Her Majesty's Government have expressed to the United States of America about the current situation in Central America and especially Nicaragua.

Mr. Eggar: As I said at column 177 in reply to a question by the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) on 5 March, we regularly discuss all important issues, including the situation on Central America, with the United States Government at a number of levels. They are fully aware of our views.

United States Embassy

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether Mr. Timothy Deal or Mr. Jack Lacey are currently accredited diplomats at the United States embassy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: Mr. Jack Lacy is at present a member of the diplomatic staff at the United States embassy in London. Mr. Timothy Deal's appointment ended on 6 June 1985.

Diplomats (Private Education Costs)

Mr. Frank Field asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will detail for the last 10 years the costs and number of employees covered in his Department's scheme for helping the Diplomatic Corps defray the costs of private education of their children; and if he will break down the costs according to whether they involved the payment of fees, the covering of fares, or any other costs.

Mr. Eggar: Since 1979 the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has employed three officials to administer boarding school allowances. At 1985 salary costs this amounts to £35,169 per annum. From 1980 to April 1984 four officials made all the travel arrangements for the Diplomatic Service. Twenty-five per cent. of their time involved arrangements for the travel of children of Diplomatic Service parents at boarding school. At 1985 costs this amounted to £12,911. Since the establishment of a Thomas Cook travel centre in the FCO in April 1984 only 10 per cent. of the time of one official has been devoted to travel arrangements for children of Diplomatic Service parents at boarding school. At 1985 costs this amounts to £1,291 per annum. The information for the period before 1979 for the administration of boarding school allowances and before 1980 for travel costs is not readily available and can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

TRANSPORT

Stansted Airport

Mr. Haselhurst asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has completed his consideration of the British Airport Authority's proposal to develop Stansted airport; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The British Airports Authority submitted to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 31 October 1985 its proposals for the development of Stansted airport in accordance with the planning consent given by my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Environment and for Transport in June 1985.

The authority proposes to construct in the first phase a terminal capable of handling up to 8 million passengers a year, together with the associated infrastructure necessary to support this volume of traffic. The proposals meet the conditions which were attached to the planning consent.

The traffic forecasts used by the authority in its financial appraisal are consistent with those set out in the

White Paper on airports policy (Cmnd. 9542) published in June 1985. They confirm that the additional terminal capacity will be required by 1991 in order to meet expected demand in the south-east, and that the number of passengers using the proposed new facilities at Stansted is likely to reach 8 million in 1995, only four years after it is planned to commission the new terminal.

The authority has estimated the cost of the proposed development at £290 million (at October 1985 prices). This expenditure will be spread over nine years.

This investment should meet the required rate of return for public sector investment, and I have today given my approval both to the BAA's proposal to start work on the construction of the new terminal facilities at Stansted in April (subject to its obtaining planning approval of the local authorities concerned) and to the estimated expenditure of £33 million on this project in 1986-87.

Driver-only Buses (Traffic Flows)

Mr. Greenway asked the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the effect on traffic flows in built-up areas of the use of driver-only buses; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: My right hon. Friend has not himself commissioned such an assessment, but London Regional Transport incorporates congestion effects into its cost-benefit appraisal of conversions to one-person operation.

Channel Tunnel

Mr. Squire asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether the forthcoming legislation on the Channel fixed link will include the need to cater for a road link at some stage as mentioned in article 1 of the treaty between the United Kingdom and France.

Mr. David Mitchell: No. It is intended that the forthcoming legislation should cover only the existing Channel Tunnel Group-France-Manche proposal and that fresh powers would be required for the construction of a road link at a later stage.

British Rail Engineering Ltd.

Mr. Snape asked the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he has any plans to meet the chairman of the British Railways Board to discuss the proposed re-structuring of British Rail Engineering Limited with particular regard to the implications for British Rail as future maintenance of railway rolling stock is concerned;

(2) if he plans to meet the chairman of British Rail Engineering Limited to discuss the implications of the proposed restructuring of British Rail Engineering Limited with particular regard to any possible redundancies arising from those proposals;

(3) if he has any plans to visit the British Rail Engineering Limited workshops at Eastleigh, Wolverton, Glasgow and Doncaster in the light of the proposed restructuring of British Rail Engineering Limited;

(4) if he is satisfied that British Rail Engineering Limited will have the resources to tender for the construction of new railway vehicles arising from Her Majesty's Government's decision to allow the construction of the Channel fixed link and particularly in the light of British Rail Engineering Limited's proposed reconstruction.

Mr. David Mitchell: The British Railways Board has been reviewing the whole of its repair and maintenance arrangements, including the future of BREL, and the chairman of the board is keeping us in touch with progress. The board is confident that the new maintenance arrangements will improve efficiency within the railways and that restructuring BREL will help make the company more competive in seeking future orders, including those relating to the Channel tunnel. The implications of the restructuring for individual BREL workshops are management matters for the board and BREL, and these details are now being worked out. I have visited all the BREL workshops since 1983; I have no immediate plans for further visits.

Public Service Vehicles

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish in the *Official Report* by operator group, the numbers of public service vehicles which *(a)* failed the annual test for each traffic area in Great Britain for each year from 1982-83 onwards and *(b)* failed the annual test for each traffic area in Great Britain after rectification of minor faults, for each year from 1982-83 onwards.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I shall answer this question shortly.

Gliders

Mr. Sheerman asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he has any plans to permit gliders to enter controlled airspace at specified entry and exit points.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Gliders are at present permitted to cross airways in visual meteorological conditions by day without compliance with normal air traffic control rules. This anomaly is causing concern among airways users, and a solution to the problem is under discussion within the forum of the National Air Traffic Management Advisory Committee.

Gliders are also permitted to enter some, but not all, control areas, control zones and special rules zones; such access is not normally limited to specific entry or exit points.

The National Air Traffic Services (NATS) has no plans to permit additional access by gliders to existing regulated airspace.

When new regulated airspace needs to be created, the question of access by gliders is considered in the light of local circumstances, and appropriate concessions are made if this is possible.

Okehampton Bypass

Mr. Steen asked the Secretary of State for Transport if, in the light of the decision of Her Majesty's Government taken subsequent to the decision of the Joint Committee on the Okehampton Bypass Special Procedure Order to promote an Order Confirmation Bill to reverse the decision of the Joint Committee on that order, he will now reimburse the objectors to that order who petitioned

against it in Parliament the costs they incurred in so doing, notwithstanding the fact that no application was made to the Joint Committee; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ridley: The objectors made no application to the joint committee, which had the power to award costs: I see no grounds for reopening the matter now.

Pilots and Drivers (Working Hours)

Mr. Robert Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list in the *Official Report* the maximum working hours of *(a)* civil airline pilots, *(b)* heavy goods vehicle drivers and *(c)* public service vehicle drivers.

Mr. Ridley: Flight time limitation on air crews is the responsibility of the Civil Aviation Authority. I am sure the chairman would respond to any questions from the hon. Gentleman. The maximum duty hours for drivers of most goods vehicles over 3·5 tonnes gvw within the United Kingdom are 11 hours per day and 60 hours per week, with up to 14 and 66 hours allowed for certain special needs. Most PSV drivers on local services are subject to a limit of 16 hours on the working day; most other PSV drivers are required to take a rest period that limits the working day to 14 hours. Special rules apply to double manning and to international passenger traffic.

Airports (Radar)

Mr. Robert Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the current standards of surveillance radar approach at United Kingdom airports.

Mr. Ridley: Standards of surveillance radar approaches at airports in the United Kingdom are laid down in the "Manual of Air Traffic Services", part 1, section 3, chapter 2, paragraph 13, issued by the National Air Traffic Services (NATS), which I will send to the hon. Member. NATS is also responsible for examining individual controllers to ensure that they are fully competent before validating their licences for use at a particular aerodrome. The proper standards are being maintained.

Mr. Robert Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will meet the chairman of the Civil Aviation Authority to discuss the safety of surveillance radar approach for talking down aircraft being interrupted.

Mr. Ridley: No. I do not wish to detract from the CAA's sole responsibility for aircraft safety. It has informed me it has no knowledge of any hazard to safety resulting from an interruption to a surveillance radar approach.

Air Traffic Controllers (Working Hours)

Mr. Robert Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will meet the chairman of the Civil Aviation Authority to discuss the safety aspect of air traffic controllers' working hours.

Mr. Ridley: The CAA has advised me there are no statutory maximum working hours for air traffic controllers in the United Kingdom. It would be impracticable to define levels which would be appropriate for every airport, bearing in mind the widely variable intensity of operation throughout the United Kingdom. Rostering of controllers is the responsibility of local management, with the advice of the NATS inspectorate of ATC.

Shipping Statistics

Mr. Kennedy asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the number of ships, giving tonnage, which have *(a)* sunk, and *(b)* requested assistance in each of the following sea areas (i) Pentland Firth, (ii) Minch, (iii) Little Minch, (iv) sea of the Hebrides and (v) North Channel since 1980; and of these if he will state how many in each case were crude oil-carrying tankers.

Mr. Ridley: I shall answer this question shortly.

BP Shipping

Mr. Steel asked the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what representations he has received about BP Shipping company's decision to transfer 26 of its ships to the Bermudan flag; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will make representations to the BP Shipping Company Ltd. about the transfer of 26 of its vessels to the Bermudan flag; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ridley: I have had letters from hon. Members and from the NUS and NUMAST expressing concern about the implications. Officials of my Department have had several exchanges with the company about its plans and about the legal position, and with NUMAST about the proposals in general. But the decision to transfer these vessels from the United Kingdom register is for the company, and I have no powers to prevent it.

Manchester International Airport

Mr. Couchman asked the Secretary of State for Transport what is the total value of Government subsidy given to Manchester international airport since it was formed in 1956.

Mr. Michael Spicer [*pursuant to the reply*, 7 March 1986, c. *312*]: According to readily available records, under the financial provisions of the 1955 municipalisation agreement (long since terminated) the Government paid grants of some £3 million towards the cost of airport developments. Under the same agreement the Government incurred costs of a similar order in providing navigation services to the airport free of charge.

East London River Crossing

Mr. Amess asked the Secretary of State for Transport what progress has been made on plans for a new east London river crossing.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I will answer this question shortly.

DEFENCE

Air Training Ship

Mr. Aspinwall asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the progress of the air training ship.

Mr. Lee: The conversion of the merchant vessel Contender Bezant into its new role of aviation training ship is complex and is running slightly behind schedule. We hope the shipbuilder will be able to make good this delay.

Gibraltar (Visiting Warships)

Mr. Tom Clarke asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list by country and class the number of warships to visit the British base in Gibraltar in the last five years.

Mr. Stanley: Full records of visits by warships to Gibraltar are not generally retained. However, in the time available, the following information can be provided about visits by warships other than those of the Royal Navy:

Gibraltar

	1981	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*
United States					
Amphibious Cargo Ships	1	—	—	—	—
Landing Ships	1	—	—	—	1
Cruisers	—	1	1	1	2
Destroyers/Frigates	2	4	2	1	—
Amphibious Assault Ships	—	—	—	—	1
Submarines	1	2	1	1	2
Sweden					
Destroyers	1	1	—	—	—
Minehunters	—	1	—	—	—
Italy					
Frigates	2	—	1	2	2
Ghana					
Patrol Craft	1	—	—	—	—
Nigeria					
Minesweepers	1	—	—	—	—
Netherlands					
Minesweepers	2	—	—	—	—
Frigates	—	—	1	—	—
Submarines	—	1	1	—	1
Belgium					
Minehunters	1	—	—	—	—
Federal Republic of Germany					
Destroyers	—	1	—	—	—
Egypt					
Patrol Craft	—	4	—	—	—
Oman					
Patrol Craft	—	1	—	3	—
Landing Ships	—	—	—	—	1
Canada					
Destroyers/Frigates	—	—	2	—	—
Submarines	—	—	—	1	1
Portugal					
Frigates	—	4	1	5	—
Submarines	—	—	—	2	—
Qatar					
Patrol Craft	—	—	2	—	—
Indonesia					
Frigates	—	—	—	—	1

Overseas Bases (Visiting Aircraft)

Mr. Tom Clarke asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list by country and type the number of visiting aircraft to visit British bases abroad in the last five years.

Mr. Stanley: This information could not be provided except at disproportionate cost.

Royal Yacht Britannia

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Defence if firms in the rest of the European Economic Community will be able to tender for any refit of Her Majesty's yacht Britannia; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lee: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the statement I made to the House on 6 February at column 530 in which I confirmed that HMY Britannia would be refitted in the United Kingdom.

Hospitals and Rehabilitation Centres

Mr. Richard Shepherd asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will name the hospitals and rehabilitation centres for which he is responsible; whether he will give the dates on which they were last inspected for breaches of food hygiene procedures; and whether the person responsible for any such inspection was a qualified environmental health officer.

Mr. Lee: There are 19 active hospitals and one rehabilitation centre for the Armed Forces in the United Kingdom and overseas. They are:

United Kingdom

Royal Naval Hospital Haslar
Royal Naval Hospital Plymouth
Cambridge Military Hospital Aldershot
Duchess of Kent Military Hospital Catterick
Queen Elizabeth Military Hospital Woolwich
Military Wing Musgrave Park Hospital Belfast
Royal Air Force Hospital Ely
Princess Mary's RAF Hospital Halton
Princess Alexandra Hospital RAF Wroughton
Defence Services Medical Rehabilitation unit Headley Court

Overseas

Royal Naval Hospital Gibraltar
British Military Hospital Berlin
British Military Hospital Hanover
British Military Hospital Rinteln
British Military Hospital Dharan
British Military Hospital Hong Kong
British Military Hospital Falklands
The Princess Mary's Hospital Akrotiri
Royal Air Force Hospital Wegberg

The commanding officers are responsible for all aspects of hygiene including food handling procedures; inspections are undertaken regularly and routinely and the appropriate standards of hygiene are maintained as advised by qualified environmental health officers. In addition, they are inspected annually, and on other unannounced occasions by qualified environmental health officers.

Underground Nuclear Tests

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Best), 18 December 1985, *Official Report*, column 212, if he will set out the reasons why it is not in the national interest to identify the purpose of any

joint United States of America and United Kingdom underground nuclear test or the weapons programme it supports.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The association of a nuclear test with a specific project would enable a potential enemy to acquire classified information which would jeopardise the effectiveness of our deterrent. Consequently it has long been the policy of successive Governments to classify very highly all details other than those provided to the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Best) in the *Official Report* of 18 December 1985. at column 216, and in official press releases.

Departmental Establishments (Byelaws)

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Defence why, in section 2, subsection f, of the proposed byelaws relating to RAF Brawdy, RAF Caerwent and ROF Llanishen, he introduced the offence of obstructing any other person acting in the proper exercise or execution of his duty.

Mr. Lee: Sub-paragraph 2*(f)* of the proposed byelaws is required to prevent a duly authorised person from being obstructed in carrying out his proper duty at the establishment concerned.

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Defence which establishments under his Department's control have been, or are to be, the subject of byelaws under the Military Land Act 1892 similar to those proposed for RAF Brawdy, RAF Caerwent and ROF Llanishen.

Mr. Lee: A total of 326 sets of byelaws, including revisions, have been made regulating individual military ranges, training areas and establishments under the Military Lands Act 1892. In the last five years 17 sets have been made at the following places:

1986
Faslane, Coulport and Rhu Narrows

1985
Upper Hulme Range
RAF Greenham Common
RAF Molesworth
RAF Alconbury

1984
British Underwater Test and Evaluation Centre
Bellerby Moor and Wathgill Ranges

1983
Ash Ranges
Kibworth Ranges
Purfleet Ranges

1982
Longmoor Ranges and Demolition Training Area
Proof and Experimental Establishment, Eskmeals
Tregantle Ranges

1981
Her Majesty's Naval Base, Portsmouth
Proof and Experimental Establishment, Pendine
Salisbury Plain Military Lands
Warcop Principal Training Area

In addition to RAF Brawdy, RAF Caerwent and ROF Cardiff, plans exist to introduce similar byelaws at a further 17 sites in due course. Military byelaws remain under regular review, and will be made or revised as necessary.

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Defence why he has proposed the latest byelaws relating to ROF Llanishen, RAF Caerwent and RAF Brawdy.

Mr. Lee: To regulate the use of the lands concerned for the military purposes for which they are appropriated; to safeguard the public from any dangers arising; and to prevent interference with the proper functioning of the establishments.

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received concerning the proposed byelaws relating to RAF Caerwent, ROF Llanishen and RAF Brawdy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lee: Six letters have been received concerning the proposed byelaws for RAF Caerwent, 14 for ROF Llanishenand 16 for RAF Brawdy. Ministers will consider these before deciding what form the byelaws will take.

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Defence why the prohibited activities under the proposed byelaws relating to RAF Caerwent, RAF Brawdy and ROF Llanishen include the distribution or display of various objects and the affixing of them to either side of the perimeter fence.

Mr. Lee: Security patrols may be hindered from carrying out their duties if objects — including large posters, flags, banners, etc.—are fixed to the perimeter fence. It is important that no obstruction of the perimeter fence should occur which may obscure sight of unlawful acts which have been, are being or are about to be committed on Ministry of Defence property. Distribution and display of certain material could, in some circumstances, act as an incitement to unlawful action.

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Defence why the protected areas in the proposed byelaws relating to RAF Brawdy, RAF Caerwent and ROF Llanishen include land outside the establishments concerned.

Mr. Lee: The proposed byelaws apply only to land owned by the Secretary of State for Defence or over which he has a right to control public activity.

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many weeks are usually allowed for objections to be made to proposed byelaws under part II of the Military Lands Act 1892.

Mr. Lee: Three.

Service Families (Education Costs)

Mr. Frank Field asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will detail for the last 10 years the cost of helping parents of service families defray the costs of places in private education of their children, whether through reimbursement of fees or other expenses, the rank of the serving parent or parents to which this help has been given and the cost of the scheme, classified in total and according to the rank of the serving parent or parents.

Mr. Lee: The cost of boarding school allowance for members of the Armed Forces for each of the last 10 years was as follows:

	£ million
1976-77	29·00
1977-78	33·00
1978-79	32·00
1979-80	35·00
1980-81	42·30
1981-82	60·00
1982-83	66·30
1983-84	76·50
1984-85	78·00
1985-86	*83·85

* Estimated outturn.

The sums listed above also include payments to the parents of children attending boarding school run by local education authorities. It is not possible to provide a precise breakdown, but it is estimated that about one fifth of the 21,500 children for whom boarding school allowance is being drawn at present are attending such schools.

Boarding school allowance may be drawn by any member of the Armed Forces while serving on a regular commission or engagement and the rate of allowance is the same for all ranks. Information on the cost of the boarding school allowance scheme by rank cannot be provided since such a breakdown of expenditure is not maintained.

Computers

Mr. Corbyn asked the Secretary of State for Defence what computers, other than minicomputers, have been ordered by the Ministry of Defence for administrative and general purposes since December 1983 stating the supplier, model and number of each processor ordered and the cost of each processor.

Mr. Norman Lamont [*pursuant to his reply*, 21 February 1986, c. 379]: The following mainframe machines have been ordered since 1 January 1984:

Manufacturer	*Type*	*Number*
ICL	2966	11
ICL	2988	2
ICL	2957	3
ICL	2958	2
ICL	Atlas 10	2
IBM	3083	3

Costs are not given because it is a long-standing practice of the Ministry of Defence to treat details of individual contract prices as commercially confidential.

SCOTLAND

Scottish Development Agency

Mr. David Marshall asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the budget of the Scottish Development Agency for 1986-87; and how this compares in real terms with *(a)* its original budget for 1985-86 and *(b)* its estimated outturn expenditure for 1985-86.

Mr. Allan Stewart: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Mr. Craigen asked the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will give figures showing the annual amounts spent by the Scottish Development Agency on consultants' fees since 1980;

(2) if he will list those projects in the Glasgow area which the Scottish Development Agency is to abandon because of funding difficulties.

Mr. Allan Stewart: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Macauley Institute for Soil Research

Mr. Robert Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish in the *Official Report* the proposed remit for the functioning of the combined Macauley Institute for Soil Research/Hill Farming Research Organisation, recommended to him by the steering group; and if this will be available for full public discussion.

Mr. John MacKay: No. Definition of the proposed remit is only one element of the work of the steering group and it would not be appropriate to have public discussion on interim stages of the group's deliberations, although consultation with bodies having a direct interest are being undertaken. The remit will be made publicly available as part of the overall report of the group.

Mr. Robert Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will now appoint trade union representatives from each of the Macauley Institute for Soil Research and Hill Farming Research Organisation to the steering group set up to investigate the future of a combined Macauley Institute of Soil Research/Hill Farming Research Organisation.

Mr. John MacKay: The purpose of the steering group is to make recommendations on the implementation of those aspects of the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland strategy paper on agricultural research and development relating to the Macaulay Institute for Soil Research, the Hill Farming Research Organisation, the Scottish Crop Research Institute and the specialist soils advisory and related work of the Scottish agricultural colleges. All of these bodies are represented on the group. It is intended to set up a specific group of representatives to consider the various issues affecting staff interests.

Private Woodlands (Grants)

Mr. John asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his estimate of expenditure on grants to private woodland owners in *(a)* 1985-86 and *(b)* 1986-87 under (i) the forestry grant scheme, (ii) dedication schemes and (iii) the broadleaved woodlands grant scheme.

Mr. John MacKay: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Ruchill Hospital, Glasgow

Mr. Craigen asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on recent shortages of accommodation at the infectious diseases unit of Ruchill hospital, Glasgow.

Mr. John MacKay: The Greater Glasgow health board is reviewing its proposal to close a ward in the infectious diseases unit at Ruchill hospital in the light of further studies which it has carried out. The board will take into account the recent cases to which the hon. Member has referred and will consult interested parties over any changes which it proposes.

Handicapped People

Mr. Craigen asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the number of places available for day care of the profoundly handicapped in each region of Scotland and as a percentage of the population.

Mr. John MacKay: No information is available centrally about day care provision for handicapped persons with particular levels of handicap. The most recent information available by regions on numbers of day care places available for physically, mentally and multiply handicapped adults is as set out:

*Number of places in Day Centres for Handicapped Adults (by main group attending) on 31 March 1985**

Region	*Mentally handicapped*	*Physically handicapped*	*Multiply handicapped*	*Total places*	*Total places as a percentage of population*
Borders	209	0	45	254	0·25
Central	371	30	0	401	0·15
Dumfries and Galloway	249	0	0	249	0·17
Fife	410	125	0	535	0·16
Grampian	674	80	0	754	0·15
Highland	176	82	0	258	0·13
Lothian	1,057	305	0	1,362	0·18
Strathclyde	3,098	709	25	3,832	0·16
Tayside	525	113	0	638	0·16
Orkney	36	0	0	36	0·19
Shetland	50	0	0	50	0·21
Western Isles	40	20	0	60	0·19
Scotland	6,895	1,464	70	8,429	0·16

*Provisional.

Mr. Craigen asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give the capital allocation figures for each of the past three years and the coming financial year to Strathclyde region in respect of providing services for the profoundly handicapped.

Mr. John MacKay: Local authorities are provided with a single capital allocation in the social work field each year but are free to determine the priorities for expenditure in the light of their own assessment of local needs. Capital allocation figures for Strathclyde region's social work building programme are as set out:

	£'000
1983-84	7,180
1984-85	7,150
1985-86	7,700
1986-87	6,120

Teachers' Dispute

Mr. Craigen asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will call together representatives of the teaching profession in Scotland either formally or for informal discussion on the current dispute.

Mr. Allan Stewart: My right hon. and learned Friend met representatives of the teachers' side of the Scottish joint negotiating committee for teaching staff in school education on 7 March.

Death Statistics

Mr. Wilson asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish figures to show the number of deaths in Scotland in January 1986 with any mention of hypothermia on the death certificate; and if he will give provisional figures for February 1986.

Mr. John MacKay: The provisional figure for January is 53; the corresponding figure for February is not yet available.

Monofilament Nets

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received on the Inshore Fishing (Prohibition of Carriage of Monofilament Gill Nets) (Scotland) Order 1986 from *(a)* the Scottish fishing industry, *(b)* the English fishing industry and *(c)* the European Economic Community Fisheries Commission.

Mr. John MacKay: Representations were received from

(a) The Scottish Fishermen's Association
The Highlands and Islands Fishermen's Association
Orkney Fishermen's Association
Salmon Net Fishing Association of Scotland
Association of Scottish District Salmon Fishery Boards
Western Isles Fishermen's Association
Western Isles Council

(b) The National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations
The Northumberland Sea Fisheries Committee

The Commission of the European Community was consulted and indicated that the order was compatible with Community law and in conformity with the common fisheries policy.

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Secretary of State for Scotland whether the Inshore Fishing (Prohibition of Carriage of Monofilament Gill Nets) (Scotland) Order 1986 applies to European Economic Community vessels.

Mr. John MacKay: From 31 March 1986 it will be an offence for any British fishing vessel to have monofilament nets on board in Scottish inshore waters. Any person found guilty of that offence shall be liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding £5,000, or on conviction on indictment to an unlimited fine. The court may also order the forfeiture of any net or other fishing gear used in the commission of the offence.

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what actions will be taken under the Inshore Fishing (Prohibition of Monofilament Gill Nets) (Scotland) Order 1986 against English fishing vessels fishing in the Pope Bank for cod with monofilament nets and landing their catches in Scottish ports.

Mr. John MacKay: The Inshore Fishing (Prohibition of Carriage of Monofilament Gill Nets) (Scotland) Order 1986 was made under section 2 of the Inshore Fishing (Scotland) Act 1984 which gives my right hon. and learned Friend power to prohibit by order the carriage, for any purpose, in any British fishing boat, in any specified sea area within Scottish inshore waters, of a type of net specified in the order. The order does not apply to vessels of other countries within the European Economic Community.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Primary Health Care

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when his Department first announced plans for the Green Paper on primary health care; and why it has not been published to date.

Mr. Hayhoe: The Government announced their intention to publish a Green Paper in April 1984. Since then there has been a number of important developments which the Government wished to take into account including the publication of the Royal College of General Practitioners' policy statement "Quality in General Practice".

Teeth (Fillings)

Mr. Shersby asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what is the cost to the National Health Service of fillings to teeth carried out by the dental service for the most recent 12 month period for which figures are available; and what was the real cost for the same period 10 years previously;

(2) what was the total number of gold crowns authorised for fitting to National Health Service patients during the most recent 12 month period for which figures are available; what was the average cost of supplying gold crowns; and what was the charge made to non-exempt patients.

Mr. Hayhoe: The cost of fillings carried out in the general dental service in England in 1984 was £152·1 million. The cost in 1974 was £158·6 million at 1984 prices.

In 1984, 632,000 gold crowns were provided under the general dental service in England. The average cost of these crowns (excluding the cost of any cores, posts, pins or screws) was £69·30. The charge for these crowns was £50 if the course of treatment started in the first three months of 1984 and £59 for the remainder of the year.

Supplementary Benefit

Mr. Wainwright asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing the administrative costs involved to his Department in the payment of supplementary benefit for 1979 and for the latest date available.

Mr. Newton: The estimated costs to this Department of the administration of supplementary benefit are as follows:

	£ million
1979-80	210
1984-85	490

Mrs. Beckett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what will be the *(a)* gross and *(b)* net savings to the social security budget of abolishing the rent addition paid to 21 to 24-year-olds from 28 July 1986 in (i) 1986-87, (ii) 1987-88 and (iii) in a full year after the policy affects all claimants at current benefit rates assuming no other major changes in social security.

Mr. Newton: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Stockport Health Authority (Management)

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) how many posts at district level in the Stockport district health authority's new management structure will be held by people with a nursing qualification; and how many in the management structure of the proposed acute and maternity unit will have nursing qualifications;

(2) if he will set out the top 10 management posts in the Stockport district health authority, with salaries, before the Griffiths re-organisation, and the top 10 posts after, with salaries; and if he will indicate which of the people in post before re-organisation obtained jobs in the re-organised structure; how many of the new posts were advertised and filled by competition; and how many were not.

Mr. Hayhoe: A professionally qualified chief nursing officer is a full member of Stockport health authority's district management board. I regret, however, that all the detailed information necessary to answer the rest of the hon. Member's points is not held centrally. He may wish, therefore, to make inquiries of the chairman of North-Western regional health authority, which is responsible for approving the management structures and appointments for its constituent district health authorities.

St. James Hospital, Balham

Mr. Tom Cox asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what is the present number of people employed at St. James hospital, Balham, and the positions that they hold;

(2) if he will give the amount of money that has been spent for each of the last five years on work at St. James hospital, Balham SW12, on projects that cost over £10,000; and if he will list them.

Mr. Whitney: I am sorry I cannot give the hon. Member the information he seeks as it is not held centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact the chairman of the Wandsworth district health authority for this information.

Mobility Allowance

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when his Department last undertook a review of the finishing age for eligibility for mobility allowance; and if he will not lift this upper limit to 80 years.

Mr. Newton: The last change in the age limits was in November 1979. We keep the position under review but have no present plans for any change.

AIDS

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether the planned information campaign on the acquired immune deficiency syndrome will exclude advertising in newspapers and magazines aimed at homosexuals.

Mr. Hayhoe: I intend to make an announcement soon.

Limited List Prescribing

Mr. Greenway asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what estimate he has of the effect on employment in the pharmaceutical industry of the introduction of the selected list of drugs.

Mr. Hayhoe: It is impossible to identify accurately the effect on employment of a particular change of policy. But Department of employment statistics on the pharmaceutical industry as a whole show that over the period December 1984 to December 1985 the number employed rose by 500.

District Health Authorities

Mr. Dykes asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he expects to announce the appointment and reappointment of new district health authorities.

Mr. Hayhoe: Soon.

Severe Weather Payments

Ms. Harman asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many claims were accepted in offices covering Fulham for payment of exceptionally severe weather benefit; and what was the amount paid out in 1985.

Mr. Newton: Ninetyfour single payments in respect of extra fuel used during a period of exceptionally severe weather were made by the Chelsea local office, which covers the whole of Fulham. The total amount paid was £1,158.

Mr. Clay asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what estimate he has made of the costs involved in making severe weather payments;

(2) what steps are being taken to publicise the availability of severe weather payments;

(3) what is the estimate of the costs to be incurred in publicising the availability of severe weather payments.

Mr. Newton: It is not possible to make a reliable estimate of the likely administrative and benefit costs of making single payments for extra fuel used during the recent period of exceptionally severe weather.

Paragraphs 7448 to 7450 of the S manual, a copy of which is in the Library, cover the publicity arrangements to be followed when a period of exceptionally severe weather has been declared. In addition, Ministers and regional information officers have made many broadcasts on national and local radio and television on this subject, and advertisements have recently appeared in most of the national daily and Sunday papers.

The cost of these national advertisements and of reprinting further supplies of leaflets and posters to ensure adequate stocks, is approximately £270,000.

Oswestry and District Hospital

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services, pursuant to the reply of 26 February, *Official Report*, column *614*, if he will now publish all the information and representations he has received concerning Shropshire health authority's proposed closure of the Oswestry and district hospital casualty department.

Mr. Hayhoe: The Department has received the Shropshire health authority's consultation document, papers summarising all the views and objections to the proposals, together with health authority's response, and details of all the bodies and individuals who submitted views. All these papers were considered at public meetings of the Shropshire health authority and the West Midlands regional health authority, and are thus public documents. I have also received representations from the local medical committee and my right hon. Friend the Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen).

National Insurance Fund

Mr. Frank Field asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list for each year since 1955-56 the proportion of the social security budget paid from the national insurance fund.

Mr. Major: The proportion of social security benefit expenditure paid from the national insurance fund for the years 1962-63 to 1985-86 is set out in the table. The proportion for the years 1955-56 to 1961-62 is not readily available.

Year	*Per cent.*
1962-63	74
1963-64	75
1964-65	76
1965-66	78
1966-67	77
1967-68	76
1968-69	73
1969-70	73
1970-71	72
1971-72	73

Year	Per cent.
1972-73	72
1973-74	75
1974-75	77
1975-76	76
1976-77	73
1977-78	71
1978-79	70
1979-80	66
1980-81	66
1981-82	63
1982-83	60
1983-84	59
1984-85	57
*1985-86	57

* Estimated outturn.

The definition of social security benefit is that used in the year in question.

Mr. Frank Field asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will express for 1955-56, 1960-61, 1965-66, 1970-71, 1975-76, 1980-81 and the latest available date the percentage of earnings represented by the contributions to the national insurance fund of (i) male and (ii) female workers earnings *(a)* lowest decile, *(b)* average earnings, *(c)* twice average earnings, *(d)* three times average earnings and *(e)* five times average earnings.

Mr. Major: The information is as follows:

Males (over 21)

	Lowest decile	Average earnings	Twice average earnings	Three times average earnings	Five times average earnings
1955-56	n.a.	2·1	1·1	0·7	0·4
1960-61	n.a.	3·0	1·5	1·0	0·6
1965-66	n.a.	5·0	2·5	1·7	1·0
1970-71	7·2	5·5	2·8	1·8	1·1
1975-76	5·5	5·5	2·9	1·9	1·2
1980-81	6·8	6·8	4·2	2·8	1·7
1984-85	9·0	9·0	6·1	4·1	2·4

Feales (over 18)

	Lowest decile	Average earnings	Twice average earnings	Three times average earnings	Five times average earnings
1955-56	n.a.	3·3	1·7	1·1	0·7
1960-61	n.a.	4·5	3·6	2·4	1·4
1965-66	n.a.	5·8	4·2	2·7	1·7
1970-71	7·8	6·6	4·5	3·0	1·8
1975-76	5·5	5·5	4·5	2·8	1·7
1980-81	6·8	6·8	6·4	4·1	2·5
1984-85	9·0	9·0	9·0	6·2	3·7

n.a. Not available.

Figures are based on all employees in Great Britain in full-time employment on adult rates of pay, and on the not-contracted out rates of national insurance contribution applicable in April each year.

Mr. Frank Field asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list for each year since 1955-56 the proportion of the national insurance fund contributed by employees, employers and the Exchequer.

Mr. Major: I refer the hon. Member to table 7.5 of the 1985 edition of the Central Statistical Office publication "United Kingdom National Accounts" and corresponding tables in earlier editions entitled "National Income and Expenditure", copies of which are in the Library.

Economists

Dame Judith Hart asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many economists are employed, and in what Civil Service grade, in that part of his Department concerned with social security policy and administration.

Mr. Newton: One senior economic adviser (grade 5), five economic advisers (grade 7), two senior economic assistants and one economic assistant. A number of other economists including the Chief Economic Adviser (grade 3) devote part of their time to social security questions.

Single Payments

Ms. Harman asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) to what specific factors he attributes the increase in single payments since 1981;

(2) what is his policy towards the use by local authorities of publicity campaigns to increase applications for single payments;

(3) if he has evidence of an increase in fraudulent claims for single payments in *(a)* Southwark and *(b)* the country as a whole;

(4) if he has conducted an investigation of fraudulent claims for single payments;

(5) what is his estimate of the amount fraudulently claimed in *(a)* single payments and *(b)* all other benefits.

Mr. Major: I shall let the hon. Member have replies as soon as possible.

University Students (Rents)

Mr. Craigen asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what information his Department has available about rent levels paid by university students living away from home in private and public sector accomodation.

Mr. Newton: The table sets out the most recent estimates of average private sector rents the average hall of residence charges produced by the National Union of Students (NUS) and the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principles (CVCP). No information is available about the level of rents paid by students on local authority housing. It should also be noted that hall of residence charges include other items besides rent.

	*Average cost**			
Type of charge	*London* £	*Elsewhere* £	*Academic year*	*Source*
Private sector rents	†24·74	†16·93	1984-85	NUS
	30·27	18·04	1985-86	CVCP
Charges in self-catered halls of residence‡	22·64	17·09	1984-85	NUS
Charges in catered halls of residence‖	48·57	37·74	1984-85	NUS
	1,510 per annum	1,186 per annum	1985-86	CVCP

* Figures are weekly unless specified otherwise.
† The NUS private sector rent figures are for all students. The other figures are for university students only.
‡ Including fuel costs.
‖ Including meals, fuel, etc.

Telephone Directories (Entry Costs)

Mr. Madden asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what additional cost he estimates will arise to his Department regarding the cost of entries in telephone directories arising from the decision of British Telecom to divide the existing Bradford area telephone book into three separate volumes covering Bradford and district, Huddersfield and district and Halifax and district, respectively.

Mr. Major: The additional cost is estimated to be £80 per annum.

Genito-Urinary Treatment

Mr. Barnett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he expects genito-urinary treatment to be available, after the proposed closure of the Dreadnought seamen's hospital, in the Greenwich district.

Mr. Whitney: I understand that the genito-urinary clinic presently situated at the Dreadnought seamen's hospital will move to Greenwich district hospital without a break in service.

Mr. Barnett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what genito-urinary treatment he expects will be available on a continuing basis in the Lewisham and North Southwark district after 1 April.

Mr. Whitney: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Dreadnought Seamen's Hospital

Mr. Barnett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) if he is satisfied that hospital facilities for seamen will be fully operative until 31 March at the Dreadnought seamen's hospital in Greenwich;

(2) if he is satisfied that the building at St. Thomas's hospital in which it is proposed to house the Dreadnought seamen's hospital is ready for permanent occupation by that hospital.

Mr. Whitney: We are satisfied that the facilities for seamen will be provided at the Dreadnought seamen's hospital until the service is transferred to St. Thomas's hospital in the West Lambeth health authority. I understand that the transfer to permanent accommodation is scheduled to take place on 1 April, although I believe that some external refurbishment will be necessary towards the end of the year, and that the patients will be accommodated in nearby wards while this is carried out.

Mr. Barnett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he is satisfied that provision currently being made for geriatric patients referred to the Dreadnought seamen's hospital in Greenwich by the Lewisham and North Southwark health authority will be catered for by that authority after 1 April.

Mr. Whitney: I understand that provision for these patients is presently the subject of discussion between the two health authorities, and I am assured that satisfactory arrangements will be agreed to facilitate continuity of care following closure of the Dreadnought seamen's hospital in Greenwich.

Mr. Barnett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish the contents of the report he has received about the state of the building at St. Thomas's hospital in which it is proposed to house the Dreadnought seamen's hospital.

Mr. Whitney: We have not seen any such report.

St. Nicholas Hospital, Plumstead

Mr. Barnett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he is satisfied that alternative provision and support services currently provided by St. Nicholas hospital, Plumstead, will be provided by the Greenwich and Bexley health authorities after the proposed closure of that hospital takes effect.

Mr. Whitney: I have been assured by the South-East Thames regional health authority that there will be continuity of care following this closure and that satisfactory alternative local provision is planned.

Mrs. B. (Invalid Carriage)

Mr. Latham asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what are the current whereabouts of the offside rear shock absorber of the crashed three-wheel carriage driven by Mrs. B. of Rutland, (Department reference PO(5) 4374/61); and why it was removed by

representatives of his Department prior to the second visit by Mrs. B.'s consultant engineer to the Ministry's retained garage in December 1983;

(2) what tests were carried out by representatives of his Department on the removed shock absorber of Mrs. B. of Rutland's invalid carriage prior to December 1983; why they were only instigated after the first report in May 1983 by Mrs. B.'s consultant engineer; what was the result of the tests; and what steps were taken to notify Mrs. B.'s legal advisers of the findings;

(3) why no response was made by his Department's artificial limb and appliance centre at Sherwood hospital to the oral and written complaints made by Mrs. B. of Rutland (reference PO(5) 4374/61) about the condition of her three-wheeled invalid carriage in February 1982; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 6 February 1986, c. *214*]: I have now written to my hon. Friend.

North-West RHA (Membership)

Mr. Terry Lewis asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list the current members of the North-Western regional health authority, and their dates of retirement, giving annual changes in membership since 1974.

Mr. Hayhoe [*pursuant to his reply*, 17 February 1986, c. *65*]: I am sorry I cannot give the hon. Member all the information he seeks, but details of membership changes prior to the reorganisation of the National Health Service in 1982 are no longer readily available. The terms of office of half the regional health authority members end every two years. Membership of North-Western regional health authority on 1 October 1982 and from 1 October 1984, was as follows:

Members	*Date on which appointment due to expire*
Membership on 1 October 1982	
Mr. M. A. Brennan	30 September 1986
Co. N. Briggs JP	30 September 1984
Co. Mrs. D. I. Carter	30 September 1984
Co. Mrs. M. P. Case	30 September 1986
Dr. S. S. Chatterjee JP	30 September 1984
Professor I. E. Gillespie	30 September 1984
Mrs. C. M. Harrison JP	30 September 1984
Dr. S. A. P. Jenkins	30 September 1986
Co. J. B. Leck JP	30 September 1986
Co. G. MacDonald JP	30 September 1984
Mrs. C. Merry	30 September 1984
Mrs. G. Oates	30 September 1984
Co. Mrs. S. D. Oldham JP	30 September 1986
Mr. R. T. Parkinson	30 September 1986
Mrs. C. M. Pickard JP	30 September 1984
Mr. K. M. A. Walker	30 September 1984
Mr. W. I. Woolley JP	30 September 1984
Membership from 1 October 1984	
Mr. M. A. Brennan	30 September 1986
Co. Mrs. M. P. Case	30 September 1986
Dr. S. S. Chatterjee OBE JP	30 September 1986
Professor I. E. Gillespie	30 September 1988
Mrs. C. M. Harrison JP	30 September 1988
Mr. R. E. Hodd CBE	30 September 1986
Co. K. Hornby*	30 September 1988
Dr. S. A. P. Jenkins	30 September 1986
Co. J. B. Leck JP	30 September 1986
Co. G. MacDonald JP	30 September 1988
Mrs. G. Oates†	30 September 1988
Co. Mrs. S. D. Oldham JP	30 September 1986
Mr. R. T. Parkinson	30 September 1986
Mr. K. M. A. Walker	30 September 1988
Mr. G. R. Ward	30 September 1988

* (Died in June 1985 Nominations for a replacement currently being considered)

† (Resigned in July 1985 and replaced by Miss H. Miller)

An invitation to fill the vacancy which exists for a member drawn from the wider trade union movement was issued last month.

Dental Charges

Mr. Weetch asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if, further to the answer of 20 December, *Official Report*, column *420*, he will give the average amount of dental charges remitted on form F1D, in money terms, and the percentage that fell within the following or other convenient ranges of charges: *(a)* £0-£5·99, *(b)* £6·00-£9·99, *(c)* £10·00-£14·99, *(d)* £15.00-£29·99, *(e)* £30.00-£49·99 and *(f)* over £50·00.

Mr. Hayhoe [*pursuant to the reply*, 5 March 1986, c. *149*]: In 1984 the average amount of dental charges remitted in England and Wales where remission was successfully claimed on form F1D was £27. The percentages of successful claims falling within the ranges of which information is available, were as follows:

£	*Percentage*
0-4·99	1
5-9·99	3
10-14·99	17
15-29·99	2
30-49·99	39
50 and over	38

Pensions and Benefits

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Social Services by how much will each of *(a)* the single pension, *(b)* the married pension, *(c)* unemployment benefit, *(d)* child benefit and *(e)* long-term rate of supplementary benefit in 1985-86 and 1986-87 have to rise to keep pace with prices.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 26 February 1986, c. *612*]: As my right hon. Friend made clear in his uprating statement to the House on Monday 24 February, at columns 680-81, the value of all the benefits listed will be increased in July 1986 by 1·1 per cent., in line with the increase in prices between May 1985 and January 1986. The benefit uprating in April 1987 will take account of inflation between January and September 1986. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer took the assumption in his autumn statement that price rises over that period would be 2·25 per cent, but the final inflation figure on which the April 1987 uprating will be based will not be know until October 1986.

Child Benefit

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the first-year and full-year cost of increasing child benefit by £1, £3, £5 and £10 per week in

1985-86 and 1986-87 *(a)* net of the cost of indexation and *(b)* net of the cost of indexation and savings in other benefits as a direct result of these measures.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 26 February 1986, c. *611*]: The estimated cost of increasing child benefit in November 1985 by the amount shown after deducting the cost of increasing the benefit in line with the retail prices index would have been as follows:

Amount of increase	*Cost*		*After allowing for savings on other benefits*	
	1985-86	*1986-87*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*
	£ million		*£ million*	
£1	110	315	90	250
£3	550	1,575	450	1,250
£5	1,000	2,850	800	2,200
£10	2,100	6,000	1,700	4,700

The estimated costs of increasing child benefit by these amounts in July 1986, after deducting the cost of the proposed increase of 10p, is as follows:

Amount of increase	*1986-87*	*1987-88*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*
£1	380	560	300	430
£3	1,220	1,800	950	1,400
£5	2,050	3,050	1,600	2,350
£10	4,150	6,150	3,200	4,750

Benefits (Indexation)

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Social services what are the full-year and first-year costs of indexing each of *(a)* the single pension, *(b)* the married pension, *(c)* unemployment benefit, *(d)* child benefit and *(e)* the long-term rate of supplementary benefit in 1985-86 and 1986-87, both including and excluding savings on other benefits as a direct result of indexation of these benefits.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 26 February 1986, c. *611*]: The estimated costs of increasing social security benefits in November 1985 in line wih the retail prices index are as follows:

Benefit	*Cost*		*After allowing for savings on other benefits*	
	1985-86	*1986-87*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*
				£ million
Retirement pension—men & women on own insurance	325	940	255	745
Retirement pension—married women on husband's insurance & adult dependants	55	150	40	120
Unemployment benefit	40	115	25	75
Child benefit	110	315	85	250
Supplementary allowance—long term rate	40	140	*25	*65
Supplementary pension	60	160	†−5	†−20

* Net costs after allowing for the uprating of other benefits.
† Net savings after allowing for the uprating of retirement pension.

The estimated costs of increasing these benefits in July 1986 in line with the retail prices index are as follows:

Benefits	*Cost*		*After allowing for savings on other benefits*	
	1986-87	*1987-88*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*
				£ million
Retirement pension—men & women on own insurance	105	155	80	120
Retirement pension—married women on husband's insurance & adult dependants	20	25	15	20
Unemployment benefit	10	15	5	10
Child benefit	45	65	35	50
Supplementary allowance—long term rate	15	25	*15	*20
Supplementary pension	25	35	*3	*5

* Net costs after allowing for the uprating of other benefits.

Unemployment Benefit

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the first-year and full-year cost of increasing unemployment benefit by £1 and £5 per week in 1985-86 and 1986-87 *(a)* net of the cost of indexation and *(b)* net of the cost of indexation and savings in other benefits as a direct result of these measures.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 26 February 1986, c. *611*]: The estimated costs of increasing unemployment benefit in November 1985 by the amount shown, after deducting the cost of increasing the benefit in line with the retail prices index, would have been as follows:

Amount of increase	*Cost/Saving*		*After allowing for savings on other benefits*	
	1985-86	*1986-87*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*
				£ million
£1	(−20)	(−50)	(−15)	(−35)
£5	50	150	35	100

The actual increase in the standard rate of unemployment benefit for a single person due to indexation was £2, so that an increase of £1 would have produced a saving.

The estimated costs of increasing unemployment benefit by these amounts in July 1986, after deducting the cost of the proposed increase of 35p in the standard rate of unemployment benefit for a single person, is as follows:

Amount of increase	*Cost*		*After allowing for savings on other benefits*	
	1986-87	*1987-88*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*
				£ million
£1	20	30	15	20
£5	140	200	100	150

Maternity Services

Dr. McDonald asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many district health authorities provide maternity services from *(a)* more than one site and *(b)* only one site.

Mr. Whitney [*pursuant to his reply*, 27 February 1986, c. *684*]: I am sorry that I cannot give the hon. Member the

information she seeks in precisely the form requested. Of the 191 district health authorities providing hospital maternity services in 1984, the latest year for which information is available centrally, 91 provided in-patient facilities in more than one separately administered unit and 100 in one separately administered unit.

Medicines

Mr. McCrindle asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will undertake an inquiry into the illegal import of medicines, including the extent to which such medicines are unlicensed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hayhoe [*pursuant to his reply*, 28 February 1986, c. *716*]: My Department is already making inquiries and investigations in all cases where there is evidence, from any source, that medicinal products, which have been imported, are being sold or supplied in contravention of the Medicines Act and European Community pharmaceutical directives. As a result of these investigations, enforcement, including, where appropriate, prosecution, is being pursued where there is sufficient evidence to warrant this.

In order to aid enforcement, a list of medicinal products which have been granted United Kingdom product licences (parallel importing) has recently been issued to representative organisations, for general use by their members. This list shows the EC member states in which the product is licensed, since it is only from these countries that the product may be imported. This list is at present updated monthly.

If my hon. Friend has any information on unlicensed medicines on sale or supply in the United Kingdom I should be grateful if he would send it to me so that my Department can look into it.

Pensions

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what would the single pension and married pension be if they had kept pace with the rise in average earnings since 1979; how this compares with the actual level of pensions in 1985-86 and 1986-87; and what would be the first-year and full-year costs of an increase in pension so as to restore the link with earnings *(a)* net of the cost of indexation and *(b)* net of the cost of indexation and savings on other benefits as a direct result of restoration of earnings/pension link.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 26 February 1986, c. *605*]: Had retirement pension been increased in line with the rise in average earnings since November 1978, the rates for single and married pensioners that would have come into effect in November 1985, based on the movement of earnings to May 1985, would have been as follows:

November 1985

	Single £	*Married* £
Actual benefit rates	38·30	61·30
Rates if link to earnings retained	39·65	63·45

The cost of the extra increase would have been £200 million in 1985-86 and £575 million in a full year. The cost after allowing for savings on other benefits would have been £150 million in 1985-86 and £450 million in a full year.

The July 1986 uprating will be based on the movement of prices to January 1986. Corresponding figures for the movement of earnings over this period are not yet available.

Mr. Gordon Brown asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what would be the first-year and full-year cost of increases in the single and married pensions in 1985-86 and 1986-87 by £1, £5, £8 and 10 per week *(a)* inclusive of the cost of indexation, *(b)* net of the cost of indexation and *(c)* net of the cost of indexation and savings in other benefit payments as a direct result of these pension increases.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 26 February 1986, c. *605*]: The estimated costs of increasing retirement pension in November 1985 by the amounts shown would have been as follows:

(a) inclusive of the cost of increasing retirement pension in line with the retail prices index;
(b) after deducting the cost of the increase in line with the retail prices index;
(c) after deducting the cost of the increase in line with the retail prices index, and also allowing for savings on other benefits.

£ million

**Amount of increase*	*(a)* *1985-86*	*1986-87*	*(b)* *1985-86*	*1986-87*	*(c)* *1985-86*	*1986-87*
£1	170	480	†−200	†−600	†−150	†−450
£5	850	2,400	450	1,300	300	900
£8	1,350	3,850	950	2,750	650	1,900
£10	1,700	4,800	1,300	3,700	900	2,600

* The increase is assumed to apply both to the personal rate of retirement pension and to the rate for adult dependants and married women dependent on their husband's insurance.

† The cost of a £1 increase is less than the cost of increasing retirement pension in line with the retail prices index.

The estimated costs of increasing retirement pension by these amounts in July 1986 are as follows:

£ million

**Amount of increase*	*(a)* *1986-87*	*1987-88*	*(b)* *1986-87*	*1987-88*	*(c)* *1986-87*	*1987-88*
£1	320	480	200	300	140	220
£5	1,600	2,400	1,500	2,200	1,000	1,500
£8	2,550	3,850	2,450	3,650	1,700	2,500
£10	3,200	4,800	3,100	4,600	2,300	3,400

* The increase is assumed to apply both to the personal rate of retirement pension and to the rate for adult dependants and married women dependent on their husband's insurance.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Commercial Woodlands (Tax Relief)

Mr. John asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the tax revenue forgone resulting from the availability of relief under *(a)* schedule B and *(b)* schedule D for owners of commercial woodlands.

Mr. Moore: Expenses of planting, maintenance and upkeep of woodlands are allowable for tax purposes under schedule D, and the estimated revenue forgone in relation to these expenses is tentatively estimated at some £10 million in 1985-86.

No expenses are allowable for tax purposes under schedule B.

Privatisation Programme

Mr. Craigen asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list those merchant banking and stockbroking firms used by the Government since 1979 in the sale of public assests and shares; and if he will give the latest cost to public funds, arising from services provided by these firms, of each part of the privatisation programme.

Mr. Moore: I refer the hon. Member to the replies I gave to the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) on 24 May 1985, at column 562, and to the hon. Member for Thurrock (Dr. McDonald) on 12 June 1985, at column 447. The table lists the merchant banks and stockbrokers used in subsequent Government share sales.

BRITOIL (1985)

Primary Underwriters
- Baring Brothers & Co. Ltd.
- Kleinwort, Benson Ltd.
- Lazard Brothers & Co. Ltd.
- Morgan Grenfell & Co. Ltd.
- N. M. Rothschilds & Sons Ltd.
- J. Henry Schroder Wagg & Co. Ltd.
- S. G. Warburg & Co. Ltd.

Financial Advisers
- Lazard Brothers & Co. Ltd.

Stockbrokers
- Hoare Govett Ltd.
- Cazenove & Co.
- Wood Mackenzie & Co. Ltd.

CABLE AND WIRELESS (1985)

Primary Underwriters
- County Bank Ltd.
- Kleinwort, Benson Ltd.
- Morgan Grenfell & Co. Ltd.
- J. Henry Schroder Wagg & Co. Ltd.

Financial Advisers
- J. Henry Schroder Wagg & Co. Ltd.

Stockbrokers
- Rowe and Pitman
- Cazenove & Co.

The total estimated costs to the Government (including VAT) of the categories of advisers specified in the earlier replies (primary underwriters, sub-underwriters, financial advisers, legal advisers, auditors, and stockbrokers) were as follows:

	£,000
Britoil (1985)	7,990
Cable & Wireless (1985)	10,127

In addition to the United Kingdom institutions listed, Wood Gundy Inc. and Swiss Bank Corporation International Ltd. assisted the Government on the special arrangements made for overseas sales in theBritoil (1985) sale.

Revenue

Mr. Frank Field asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the proportion of Government revenue raised by *(a)* direct and *(b)* indirect taxes for each of the past 20 years.

Mr. Moore: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Mr. Frank Field asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion social security contributions have made to total Government revenue for each year since 1955-56; and if he will also divide this data according to the contributions made by *(a)* employees and *(b)* employers.

Mr. MacGregor: The proportion of social security contributions to total Government revenue since 1955-56 is as follows:

Year	*Total Social Security Contributions*	*Employees Contributions*	*Employers Contributions*
1955-56	11	6	5
1956-57	10	6	5
1957-58	11	6	5
1958-59	13	7	6
1959-60	13	7	6
1960-61	12	7	6
1961-62	14	7	6
1962-63	14	7	6
1963-64	15	8	7
1964-65	14	8	7
1965-66	15	8	8
1966-67	15	7	7
1967-68	14	7	7
1968-69	14	7	7
1969-70	13	6	7
1970-71	14	7	7
1971-72	15	7	7
1972-73	16	8	8
1973-74	17	8	9
1974-75	17	7	10
1975-76	18	7	11
1976-77	19	8	11
1977-78	19	7	11
1978-79	18	7	11
1979-80	17	7	10
1980-81	17	7	10
1981-82	16	7	9
1982-83	17	8	9
1983-84	18	9	9
1984-85	18	9	9

Tax Threshold

Mr. Frank Field asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if, expressing the tax threshold as 100 in 1955-56, he will measure the increase in the threshold at the latest available date for a single person, married couple and a married couple with two and four children;

(2) if he will express for each year since 1955-56 the tax threshold as a percentage of average earnings for a single person, married couple, married couple with two children and married couple with four children.

Mr. Moore: I shall let the hon. Member have replies as soon as possible.

Income Tax

Mr. Frank Field asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will calculate the total amount of income tax reductions in money terms since 1979; and if he will present the distribution of this total among the *(a)* top one per cent. of income earnings, *(b)* top 2 to 5 per cent. of income earnings, *(c)* top 6 to 10 per cent. of income earnings, *(d)* top 11 to 20 per cent. of income earnings, *(e)* top 21 to 30 per cent. of income earnings, *(f)*top 31 to 40 per cent. of income earnings, *(g)* top 41 to 50 per cent. of income earnings and *(h)* bottom 50 per cent.

Mr. Moore: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Systime plc

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether the United States Government made representations to him seeking the initiation of legal action against Systime plc by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise in 1983 or 1984; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: In 1983-84, United Kingdom Customs undertook inquiries into the activities of Systime plc. No legal action was taken against the company following those inquiries. As is the rule with other investigating agencies, it is not the practice of customs to disclose the source of information, if any, in any investigation.

Freeports

Mr. Hill asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will direct Her Majesty's Customs and Excise to appoint an official with sole responsibility for liaison with freeports; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: No. There are already senior officials who have a responsibility for freeport policy and who maintain liaison as necessary with the freeport operators.

Exchange Rates

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 4 March, *Official Report*, column *95*, what was the value of the dollar against the European currency unit on the date when the Council of Ministers agreed the financial guideline for agricultural market support expenditure in the current year, and what is the current value of the dollar against the European currency unit.

Mr. Brooke: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

Mr. R. H. Hoyle

Mr. Steen asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will instruct the enforcements office of the Inland Revenue to refrain from instituting proceedings against Mr. R. H. Hoyle of Golden Plam, Kingswear, relating to his alleged liability for his deceased brother's debts, until the outstanding matters raised in connection with this case in correspondence between the hon. Member for South Hams and the Financial Secretary, the right hon. Member for Croydon, Central (Mr. Moore) have been resolved; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moore: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

Civil Service Contributory Pension

Mr. Soley asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress he has made in his consideration of proposals for a Civil Service contributory pension system.

Mr. Brooke: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 11 March 1986

PRIME MINISTER

Disabled Persons (Services, Representations and Consultations) Bill

Q13. **Mr. Wigley** asked the Prime Minister what response she has given to representations made to her concerning the Government's attitude towards the Disabled Persons (Services, Representations and Consultation) Bill; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I have so far received only one letter about the Government's attitude towards the Bill from the hon. Member, and I have already responded.

As my right hon. Friend the Minister for Health has made clear, the Government would like to see a measure emerge which genuinely helps to improve services for disabled people without imposing impracticable and inflexible burdens on local authorities, distorting priorities and diverting scarce resources.

Westland plc

Q153. **Mr. Dalyell** asked the Prime Minister what action Mr. Charles Powell understood her to have taken after receipt of the letter from the Solicitor-General to the then Secretary of State for Defence on 6 January; and what basis he had for this understanding.

The Prime Minister: I have nothing to add to the account which I gave to the House in my statement on 23 January, at columns 449-60, and in the debate on 27 January, at columns 651-58.

Engagements

Mr. Pike asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 11 March.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 11 March.

Mr. Ron Brown asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 11 March.

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House I shall be having further meetings later today.

Northern Ireland

Sir John Biggs-Davison asked the Prime Minister whether United States or other foreign aid for Northern Ireland will be accepted by Her Majesty's Government if it is made conditional on external supervision or intervention in matters within the internal jurisdiction of the United Kingdom.

The Prime Minister: The Government have welcomed the possibility of United States aid for Northern Ireland. Although there are now Bills before the United States Congress, no arrangements or definite proposals have yet been put to us.

Lord Chancellor

Mr. Sedgemore asked the Prime Minister if, following his refusal to divest himself of his interest as a name at Lloyd's before the Financial Services Bill reaches the House of Lords for consideration, she will dismiss the Lord Chancellor.

The Prime Minister: No.

WALES

Mentally Handicapped People

Mr. Wigley asked the Secretary of State for Wales what initiatives he proposes taking to help integrate people suffering from mental illness within the community; whether any necessary resources for such a strategy will be over and above those already allocated for the all-Wales strategy for mentally handicapped people; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mark Robinson: The Department is now reviewing the progress made so far in implementing the mental handicap strategy and is, at the same time, considering whether any additional steps should now be taken with regard to mental illness services.

Perinatal Deaths

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what information he has on research findings asserting a correlation between the incidence of perinatal deaths and the rate of attendances for antenatal care after 19 weeks; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what information he has on research findings asserting a correlation between the incidence of perinatal deaths and certain methods of foetal monitorings; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what information he has on research findings asseting a correlation between perinatal deaths and ultra-sound examination; and if he will make a statement;

(4) what information he has on research findings asserting a correlation between the incidence of perinatal deaths and the status of persons delivering babies;

(5) what information he has on research asserting a correlation between impaired foetal development, high perinatal mortality and the nutritional value of a mother's diet; and if he will make a statement;

(6) what information he has on research asserting a correlation between the incidence of perinatal death and the unemployment history of partners or parents; and if he will make a statement;

(7) what information he has on research findings asserting a correlation between the incidence of perinatal death and the social class of parents; and if he will make a statement;

(8) what information he has on research findings asserting a correlation between the incidence of perinatal death and the use of X-ray examinations; and if he will make a statement;

(9) what information he has on research findings asserting a correlation between the incidence of perinatal death and the time between intramuscular analgesia and delivery; and if he will make a statement;

(10) what information he has on research findings asserting a correlation between the incidence of perinatal deaths and the status of persons attempting to resuscitate babies; and if he will make a statement;

(11) what information he has on research findings asserting a correlation between the incidence of perinatal deaths and the mode of delivery; and if he will make a statement;

(12) what information he has on research findings asserting a correlation between the incidence of perinatal deaths and breech presentation before 37 weeks; and if he will make a statement;

(13) what information he has on research findings asserting a correlation between the incidence of perinatal deaths and the nature of presentation at delivery; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mark Robinson: I am aware that a number of studies and reports have been published on perinatal mortality and the factors listed in the hon. Gentleman's questions. However, a summary of the findings of these could only be provided at disproportionate cost. The perinatal mortality survey group set up by my right hon. Friend to identify the significant causes of perinatal mortality in Wales will be giving consideration to relevant research in this field in presenting its report later this year.

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish in the *Official Report* for each of the last five years for each health authority, the perinatal standardised mortality ratio.

Mr. Mark Robinson: The Welsh Office does not produce estimates of perinatal standardised mortality ratios.

Birth Statistics

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish in the *Official Report* the information that is available to him, by health authority in Wales, of the number of babies delivered at home in each of the last five years.

Mr. Mark Robinson: The numbers of births in the years 1980 to 1984 which were registered as having occurred at the mother's usual place of residence are given in the table:

Births at home
District Health Authority of mother's usual residence

	1980	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*
Clwyd	33	36	38	29	29
East Dyfed	51	56	42	44	40
Pembrokeshire	11	14	13	8	11
Gwent	46	44	50	36	37
Gwynedd	16	17	23	30	40
Mid Glamorgan	129	98	126	88	91
Powys	17	10	23	13	21
South Glamorgan	29	29	33	30	40
West Glamorgan	50	45	39	26	48
Wales	382	349	387	304	357

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish in the *Official Report* for each of the last five years, for each health authority in Wales, the percentage of all babies born who had a low birthweight, under 2,501 grams.

Mr. Mark Robinson: The information is given in the table:

Percentage of live and still births with birthweight under 2,501 grams

	1980	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*
Clwyd	6·3	6·7	6·2	6·8	5·6
East Dyfed	5·7	6·3	6·0	6·2	5·6
Gwent	7·1	6·8	6·2	7·6	7·1
Gwynedd	5·8	6·5	5·9	6·0	5·8
Mid Glamorgan	7·1	6·9	7·6	7·2	7·1
Pembrokeshire	*	*	6·7	7·4	6·9
Powys	4·5	5·8	5·8	5·7	7·9
South Glamorgan	7·0	7·5	7·9	7·2	8·0
West Glamorgan	6·0	7·1	7·1	7·0	5·8

* Figures are included with East Dyfed.

Health Authorities (Minutes of Meetings)

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish in the *Official Report* the information known to him as to those health authorities in Wales which send minutes of their meetings to right hon. and hon. Members.

Mr. Mark Robinson: I understand that the Gwynedd health authority regularly circulates its minutes to the respective Members of Parliament, but that it is not the normal practice of the other district health authorities in Wales to do so.

Bereavement Counselling Service

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for Wales what information is available to him as to which health authorities in Wales operate a bereavement counselling service for mothers.

Mr. Mark Robinson: This information is not kept centrally.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Burnham Teachers Panel

Mr. Cartwright asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he next plans to review the allocation of seats on the Burnham teachers panel; and if he will institute a system of regular reviews to ensure that the panel accurately reflects changes in the membership of the teachers organisations.

Sir Keith Joseph: I have only recently completed a review of the teachers' panel of the Burnham primary and secondary committee and I shall continue to keep the changes in membership of the teacher unions under careful observation.

European Studies (Great Britain and Ireland)

Sir John Biggs-Davison asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement about the project known as European Studies (Great Britain and Ireland) and promoted by his Department together with the Departments of Education in Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic.

Mr. Chris Patten: This curriculum development project, the planning of which began in early 1984, is to be organised and funded jointly by the Department of Education for Northern Ireland, the Department of Education, Dublin, and the Department of Education and Science, London. It will extend their long-standing co-operation in the educational field.

The project, which will begin in the school year 1986-87 will involve six secondary schools in Northern Ireland, six in the Republic of Ireland and six in Great Britain, and will attempt to encourage pupils in the United Kingdom and Ireland to explore both the common elements and the rich diversity of their heritage. History and geography will be the main subjects involved and pupil skills in these subjects will be developed by way of individual and group research as well as project work. The project will also concentrate on the acquisition of new skills and techniques in the area of information technology.

Pupil-Teacher Ratios and Class Sizes

Mr. Lilley asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) what information he has on the average pupil-teacher ratio in primary and secondary schools in other advanced industrial countries including the United States of America, Japan, West Germany, France, and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics;

(2) what information he has about the average class size in primary and secondary schools in other advanced industrial countries, including the United States of America, Japan, West Germany, France and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

Mr. Dunn: The available information is shown in the following table but it is not possible to provide data on a strictly comparable basis for each country. Data are mainly based on full-time equivalent teachers numbers except where stated. The precise definition of "teacher" can vary between countries and may include staff not engaged in teaching. Reference is made to further differences in the footnotes to the table. Average class size data for up to first level are included in the table. Class size information for second level education is not available.

Pupil/Teacher ratios, class sizes 1982-83*

Country	*Class size up to 1st level†*	*Pupil/teacher ratios up to 1st level†*	*2nd level‡*
United States	..	24·5	‖13·7
Japan	..	‖24·2	‖18·1
Germany, Federal Republic of	22·7	21·9	¶17·5
France			
—public	22·4	22·4	13·6
—private	25·3	25·3	..
USSR	..	‖●14·0	
Belgium			
—Dutch speaking	19·1	18·2	..
—Francophone	20·8	21·9	..
Ireland	31·2	27·5	15·2
Italy	16·5	15·2	■10·1
Netherlands	24·8	21·4	⋆19·2
United Kingdom			
—1982-83	#25·1	**22·1	‡‡14·7
—1983-84	#25·0	**22·0	‡‡14·5

.. Not available.

Footnotes:

* Data extracted from reply to a written European parliamentary question (1503/84) except where otherwise stated.

† Equates broadly with nursery and primary education.

‡ Equates broadly with secondary school education and non-advanced further education.

‖ Based on head counts not full-time equivalent.

¶ Derived from FDR publication.

● 1983-84.

■ Lower secondary schools only.

⋆ Second level general only.

Covers maintained primary schools in England, corresponding figures for maintained secondary schools are 21·1 in 1982-83 and 20·9 in 1983-84.

** Maintained nursery and primary schools.

‡‡ Maintained secondary schools and non-advanced further education. The figures for maintained secondary schools alone are 16·2 in 1982-83 and 16·0 in 1983-84.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Value Added and Data Services

Mr. Sumberg asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he expects to take decisions on the future licensing régime for value added and data services; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Pattie: As its next major step in its programme for the liberalisation of telecommunication services in the United Kingdom, the Government have decided further to open up competition in value added and data network services.

The Government's proposals, set out in a consultative document issued in December 1985, follow extensive earlier consultation, and have been generally welcomed by the public telecommunication operators, the industry and users. A copy of the consultative document has already been placed in the Library of the House. The Government now intend to use these proposals as the basis for a single class licence of 12 years duration to be issued by my right hon. Friend under the Telecommunications Act 1984.

The single class licence will be applicable to all but public telecommunication operators, members of their groups and associates. The licence will authorise the provision of all value added network services and all basic conveyance services except basic conveyance voice and telex services. Basic conveyance voice services will, however, be permitted as part of a directory information service. They will also be permitted when in necessary support of a value added service or as an integral part of a single more comprehensive service such as video conferencing; though in these latter cases the provision of voice services will be subject to a tariff condition.

Authorised services will, as at present, have to be conveyed between premises by means of fixed links provided by the PTOs. Simple resale as defined in the PTOs' own licences will also continue to be prohibited.

The Government believe that the provisions in the new licence applicable to small value added network service providers should be kept as simple as possible. Such providers, those below a certain financial threshold, will be authorised to operate their services subject only to a privacy and safety condition and to standard conditions for the running and maintenance of telecommunication systems to be set out in the licence.

For those value added service providers considered capable of distorting competition in the value added services market and for all basic conveyance service providers, additional licence conditions will apply to ensure that fair trading obligations and the provision of services to open system interconnection standards can be

met. After considering the comments received in the consultation process the Government intend that these obligations should apply to those value added network service providers whose annual telecommunications business turnover exceeds £1 million or who belong to a group with a total annual turnover in excess of £50 million. The Director General of Telecommunications will, however, be given the power to vary this figure in the light of experience. Basic conveyance service providers too will be subject to these conditions though the possibility of allowing certain market entry exemptions is under consideration.

The specific licence conditions to apply to the value added and basic conveyance service providers identified above will include

(i) an obligation to provide separate accounts for and not to cross-subsidise unfairly their basic conveyance service activities; their value added service activities; and other activities;

(ii) an obligation to operate under standard fair competition conditions of a kind already included in the PTO licences, that is publication of tariffs; prohibition on undue preference and undue discrimination; prohibition of linked sales; prohibition on exclusive dealing arrangements; and code of practice on the confidentiality of customer information;

(iii) an obligation, in time, to provide OSI facilities;

(iv) an obligation in the context of the provision of OSI or parallel proprietary facilities to give the Director General of Telecommunications and the public advance notice of material changes to their systems and services; and

(v) an obligation to register with the Office of Telecommunications to ensure the effective monitoring of their licence obligations;

though the precise obligations will not be finalised until the outcome of negotiations between the Director General of Telecommunications and the PTOs to amend the main PTO licences in an appropriate manner are known.

The Government have been persuaded from consultation with industry and users that in the light of the above safeguards the creation of a separate licensed category of monopoly apparatus or software supplier would not contribute further to fair competition but would add significantly to the complexity of the regulatory environment. The Government therefore do not intend to introduce these further categories of licence holder.

The Government are committed to promote the adoption of open system interconnection standards. The licence will permit the continued use of proprietary standards; but in order to widen the choice of equipment and service available to users and to increase opportunities for equipment manufacturers, the licence will impose a requirement to provide for access and use of both new and existing services by means of OSI standards. In-house systems will be exempt as will services for which the Director General is satisfied that there is no existing or potential user demand for OSI access. The licence will provide for a 12-month notification period to service providers of the obligation to provide access to individual OSI standards. The Director General will have the power to extend the notification period in exceptional circumstances. Licensees will need to be able to demonstrate how their services conform to OSI standards and, where access by proprietary standards is provided in addition to OSI, that the OSI access provides a broadly comparable service in terms of performance and price.

The provision of value added network services can often be associated with the need to transmit occasional basic conveyance messages allied to the value added service. The Government therefore intend to permit those small value added network service operators to whom the fair trading and OSI obligations would not otherwise apply to provide a small percentage of basic conveyance services, associated with value added services, without this provision of basic conveyance services triggering the requirement to meet those fair trading and open system interconnection conditions contained in the licence.

The licence will also extend the already permitted uses of international private leased circuits, for the provision of the services being opened to competition, to the extent consistent with the Government's international obligations.

The Government have considered certain representations that access for overseas service providers should be made available only on the basis of reciprocity. The Government will continue to press for the widest possible multilateral liberalisation of international telecommunications, but do not believe that it would be right to deprive telecommunications users of the benefits of a wide choice of services simply because of different conditions applied by other Administrations in overseas markets.

BT and Mercury have already agreed in principle to the modification, by the Director General of Telecommunications, of their existing licences, so as to prohibit their unfair cross-subsidy by appropriate separate accounting as well as to require the provision of OSI facilities; so that in the areas newly opened up to competition they will be offering their services on an equitable competitive basis with other service providers in this market. The Director General of Telecommunications will be pursuing this further with them in the months ahead. In the same period my Department will be circulating for comment a full draft of the proposed licence to ensure that in technical and legal terms it fulfils the aims set out in this statement. The aim is to have the full licence in place before 6 August 1986, the date when the validity of the existing 1982 VANS general licence under the transitional provisions of the Telecommunications Act 1984 comes to an end.

The Government believe that these new proposals taken together will provide a regulatory environment in which users can benefit from the latest technology through the provision on a competitive basis of significant facilities which are not yet normally available from PTOs without having as their main effect the diversion of PTO traffic revenues. All services which are legitimately permitted under the existing 1982 VANS general licence will of course remain liberalised. The further liberalisation which the new licence will initiate should allow British Telecom, Mercury and the other companies in this rapidly expanding industry the opportunity, while competing fairly to satisfy the increasing demands for new services, both to the service providers' benefit and to the benefit of users of telecommunications services.

Capital Investment

Mr. Holt asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will estimate the value of capital investment by British companies in *(a)* the United States of America, *(b)* Japan and *(c)* France in each of the past 10 years.

Mr. Butcher: The available information relates to outward direct investment (excluding oil) and is given in the table.

United Kingdom net outward direct investment (excluding oil)
£ million

	USA	*Japan*	*France*
1974	398	17	73
1975	244	3	68
1976	378	1	79
1977	453	17	98
1978	962	32	70
1979	1,612	39	89
1980	1,712	15	127
1981	2,477	17	130
1982	1,440	14	62
1983	1,952	26	119

Source: Business Monitor MA4.

Mr. Holt asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will estimate the value of inward capital investment into the United Kingdom from *(a)* the United States of America, *(b)* Japan and *(c)* France in each of the past 10 years.

Mr. Butcher: The available information relates to net inward direct investment (excluding oil) and is given in the table.

Inward Direct Investment in the United Kingdom in all Industries (Excluding Oil)

	USA £ million	*Japan £ million*	*France £ million*
1974	410	−22	25
1975	310	−41	28
1976	550	−16	85
1977	636	99	89
1978	809	−24	151
1979	994	51	12
1980	1,912	14	−109
1981	117	173	15
1982	377	−63	−2
1983	1,236	190	161

Source: *Business Monitor MA4.*

Computer Modems (West Midlands)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proportion of the 12,000 computer modems for schools will be distributed among schools in the west midlands.

Mr. Pattie: The intention of the modems in schools scheme is to provide each middle and secondary school in the United Kingdom with one modem. On this basis the proportion distributed to the west midlands will be 4 per cent.

Airbus

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Eccles on 21 February, *Official Report*, column *359*, he will reconsider his reply about the percentage of the British aerospace industry's contribution to the A320 Airbus; if he will express this contribution in total terms; if he will break the percentages down into engine, airframe, avionics, and other components; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Pattie: The reply to the hon. Member on 21 February, at column *359*, set out in percentage terms, based on the figures currently available, the contribution in total terms of the British aerospace industry to the Airbus A320 series production. On the latest information available, the contribution of the British aerospace industry to the series production of the main constituent elements of the A320 will be in the order of:

	Per cent.
Engine including nacelle	
V2500	36
CFM 56–5	6
Airframe	25
Equipment	20

National Metrological Co-ordinating Unit

Mr. Andy Stewart asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he expects to publish the annual report of the national metrological co-ordinating unit as required by section 60(1) of the Weights and Measures Act 1985; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: The report covering the period 1 April 1984 to 31 March 1985 has been published today. I have arranged for copies of the report, which includes the audited statement of accounts, to be placed in the Library.

Matthew Brown plc

Mr. Maclean asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he has received a report from the investigator who inquired into the alleged leak of information about the recommendations of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission in regard to the bid by Scottish and Newcastle Breweries plc for Matthew Brown plc; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: The investigator appointed to inquire into this alleged leak has now reported after a thorough and painstaking inquiry. No proof has emerged of a deliberate leak having occurred, although the investigator could not rule out the possibility that some information about the Monopolies and Mergers Commission findings may have leaked. He concluded, however, that if this were the case, any such leak was likely to have resulted from indiscretion or accident rather than intentioned revelation. He has not been able to identify a source. He found that the letter written by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence to a member of the public on 8 October was not responsible for stock market movements or the article in *The Times* and had no bearing on the main events of the case.

Fireworks (Injuries)

Mr. Moynihan asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will publish the figures for injuries caused by fireworks in 1985.

Mr. Howard: According to reports from hospitals in England, Wales and Scotland, 968 people required treatment for injuries caused by fireworks during a four-week period in October and November 1985. The figures for 1985 and the preceding four years are as follows:

	1985	*1984*	*1983*	*1982*	*1981*
Place of Accident					
1. Family or private party	255	231	311	189	231
2. Semi-public party (eg scouts, cricket club)	76	65	84	53	58

	1985	1984	1983	1982	1981
3. Large public display	117	108	111	88	101
4. Casual incident in street etc	435	298	257	220	229
5. Other place	64	59	54	61	46
6. Indoors	21	17	16	15	16
Total	968	778	833	626	681
Type of Firework					
1. Banger	241	175	184	147	167
2. Rocket	197	115	107	71	102
3. Roman candle, colured fire etc	90	103	114	84	107
4. Home-made or extracted powder	27	21	15	35	26
5. Other proprietary fireworks	73	74	78	82	64
6. Sparklers	67	65	95	40	48
7. Unspecified type	273	225	240	167	167
Severity of injury					
1. Fatal Injury	—	1	—	—	—
2. Detained more than one night	53	55	61	33	24
3. Sufficient to cause absence from work or equivalent	231	161	147	67	62
4. Minor injury	632	506	592	489	531
5. Unspecified injury	52	55	33	37	64
Eye injuries (included in 2-5)	341	295	293	241	261
Age Group of injured persons					
Over 20	214	180	215	139	132
16-20	161	109	108	73	89
13-15	271	208	173	149	173
Under 13	322	281	337	265	287

General Motors (Imports)

Mr. Speed asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the number of General Motors-manufactured motor cars imported into the United Kingdom and made in the United Kingdom, respectively, for each of the last five calendar years.

Mr. Peter Morrison *[pursuant to his reply* 5 March 1986, c. *132]*: Available information is shown in the table:

General Motors' United Kingdom passenger car sales by source(*)

	Built Overseas	Built in United Kingdom
1981	58,876	68,265
1982	79,164	102,573
1983	139,027	123,114
1984	165,116	117,719
1985	168,709	134,764

Source: Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders.
Note: * New registrations by country of final assembly.

Vickers Shipbuilding and Engineering Ltd.

Mr. Dykes asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if, further to his statement in the House on 7 March, he will state what was the further term in the other bid for Vickers Shipbuilding and Engineering Ltd. which he found very difficult to accept.

Mr. Channon: The term, which I can now reveal, required British Shipbuilders to repay with interest virtually the whole of the sum offered for VSEL

"in the event that neither of the following events has occurred:

(a) a binding agreement for the Trident vessel being in place by 25 February 1987

(b) the agreed formal contract documents for the Trident vessel having been issued by MOD by 25 February 1988".

Although the bidder made clear that it

"would procure that VSEL would negotiate in good faith with the MOD and would use its best endeavours to conclude a contract with MOD as quickly as possible",

and also undertook that if it was successful it would

"procure that VSEL negotiates with the MOD a contract for the SSBN05 on the basis of terms and conditions, price and programme no less favourable than the conditions of which we have been made aware as modified by any undertaking given to you by the VSEL Management Consortium by 5.30 pm on 5 March 1986".

I repeat that I found this clawback term very difficult to accept.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Ealing Vicarage (Rape)

Mr. Greenway asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis as to the progress of police action to seek to apprehend the gang responsible for rape and assault at the Ealing vicarage on 6 March; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I understand from the Commissioner that investigations into this incident are being taken forward with all urgency and that the police have been greatly assisted in their inquiries by an outstanding response from the public who have come forward with a considerable amount of information which may prove helpful to the investigation. I fully support the Commissioner's operational commitment to tracing the offenders in this case. Rape is an offence which is taken with the utmost seriousness by the police and the Commissioner has recently introduced a number of changes in the force's procedures for handling rape victims which, while recognising the trauma they experience, is designed to improve the sympathetic treatment which they need.

Prisons (Mortality)

Mr. Janner asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners died in prisons in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, respectively, during each of the past five years for which records are available; what ages were the deceased; and how many of such deaths were from natural causes.

Mr. Mellor: The information requested for England and Wales is as follows:

Year	Number of deaths	Ages	Deaths	Number of natural causes
1981	58	16	1	35
		18	3	
		21	2	
		22	3	
		24	2	
		25	2	
		30	1	

Year	Number of deaths	Ages	Deaths	Number of natural causes
		31	1	
		32	3	
		33	2	
		34	1	
		35	1	
		36	1	
		37	2	
		38	2	
		39	2	
		41	1	
		42	1	
		45	1	
		46	1	
		48	1	
		49	2	
		52	2	
		53	2	
		55	1	
		56	3	
		57	2	
		58	3	
		59	1	
		61	3	
		62	2	
		63	1	
		65	1	
		71	1	
		Total	58	

Year	Number of deaths	Ages	Deaths	Number of natural causes
1982	61	17	4	28
		18	3	
		19	1	
		20	2	
		21	2	
		22	2	
		23	1	
		24	2	
		25	1	
		27	1	
		28	4	
		29	1	
		30	1	
		31	2	
		32	1	
		33	2	
		34	3	
		35	1	
		37	1	
		39	1	
		41	2	
		42	1	
		44	1	
		46	3	
		47	1	
		50	1	
		52	2	
		53	1	
		54	1	
		56	3	
		57	2	
		59	1	
		60	2	
		65	1	
		67	1	
		73	1	
		76	1	
		Total	61	

Year	Number of deaths	Ages	Deaths	Number of natural causes
1983	64	17	1	33
		19	1	
		20	2	
		21	1	
		25	4	
		26	3	
		28	2	
		29	1	
		31	1	
		32	1	
		33	3	
		35	2	
		36	2	
		37	1	
		38	2	
		39	2	
		40	3	
		41	2	
		42	2	
		43	3	
		44	1	
		45	5	
		46	2	
		47	2	
		49	1	
		50	2	
		52	3	
		54	1	
		55	2	
		58	1	
		59	2	
		60	1	
		61	1	
		65	1	
		Total	64	

Year	Number of deaths	Ages	Deaths	Number of natural causes
1984	65	17	2	31
		18	1	
		19	3	
		20	2	
		22	1	
		23	2	
		24	3	
		26	3	
		27	2	
		30	1	
		31	1	
		32	1	
		33	3	
		34	1	
		36	1	
		37	5	
		38	1	
		40	2	
		41	1	
		42	3	
		43	1	
		44	2	
		47	4	
		48	3	
		49	1	
		50	1	
		51	1	
		53	2	
		55	2	
		56	2	
		62	2	
		64	1	
		66	1	
		74	2	

Year	Number of deaths	Ages	Deaths	Number of natural causes
		79	1	
		Total	65	

Year	Number of deaths	Ages	Deaths	Number of natural causes
1985	59	18	4	*20
		19	1	
		20	1	
		21	5	
		23	2	
		24	4	
		26	2	
		27	3	
		28	1	
		29	1	
		31	5	
		32	2	
		33	1	
		34	2	
		35	1	
		38	3	
		39	1	
		40	2	
		44	1	
		45	1	
		46	1	
		48	2	
		50	1	
		51	1	
		52	1	
		53	1	
		54	1	
		57	1	
		59	1	
		60	2	
		63	1	
		72	1	
		74	1	
		79	1	
		Total	59	

* Not including 15 on which verdicts still awaited.

My right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and Northern Ireland are responsible for the equivalent information in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Glen Parva Youth Custody Centre

Mr. Janner asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what changes have been introduced in screening or in other medical procedures in Glen Parva youth custody centre since October 1984.

Mr. Mellor: None.

Immigration

Mr. Procter asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will indicate whether the answer to the hon. Member for Billericay's question for written answer of 29 November 1985, *Official Report*, column *694*, will include figures produced manually or by computer; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waddington: The figures contained in the reply I sent to my hon. Friend on 5 March, of which copies have been placed in the Library, were produced from the computer system.

Rape

Mrs Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people convicted of rape or sex offences during the last seven years have won reductions on the length of their sentences resulting from Court of Appeal rulings.

Mr. Mellor: Of the 320 appellants to the Court of Appeal in 1984, against sentence for a sexual offence, 52 had a custodial sentence reduced; the corresponding figures in 1983 were 248 and 41. The numbers who had a custodial sentence reduced include 11 appellants in 1984 and 10 appellants in 1983 who had been convicted of rape. Corresponding information for earlier years could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Information for 1985 is not yet available.

Featherstone Prison

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many assaults on staff, escapes and other discipline offences have occurred each year in Her Majesty's prison Featherstone, near Wolverhampton; and how many prisoners in the same prison have been subject to rule 4 each year.

Mr. Mellor: Featherstone started receiving prisoners in November 1976. The following is the available information up to the end of 1985:

Year	Assaults on staff	Escapes	Disciplinary offences dealt with at Featherstone: Prisoners punished	Disciplinary offences dealt with at Featherstone: Total offences	Rule 43 cases: No. prisoners	Rule 43 cases: No. occasions
1976	Nil	5	6			
1977		8	157	291		
1978		2	333	438		
1979		7	248	476		
1980		2	211	381		
1981		Nil	200	304		
1982		Nil	198	269	37	38
1983	1	Nil	207	330	25	25
1984	Nil	Nil	201	319	15	16
1985	Nil	7	320	480	29	30

The figures for escapes refer to the numbers of prisoners, not the number of incidents. The 1985 figures for disciplinary offences are provisional.

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners Her Majesty's prison Featherstone, Wolverhampton, was intended to accommodate; how many are now in the prison; and what was the average annual occupation each year from opening to the present date.

Mr. Mellor: The certified normal accommodation of Her Majesty's prison Featherstone is 510. On 7 March the population was 530. The average annual occupation has been as follows:

	Average Annual Occupation
1976	*8
1977	253
1978	374
1979	476
1980	478
1981	484
1982	511
1983	516
1984-85	519

* Did not open until November.

Local Radio

Mr. Harvey asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the British Broadcasting Corporation and Independent Broadcasting Authority will have any advisory capacity in his allocation of franchises for the new network of local radio stations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw: We are now considering the allocation of experimental community radio licences in the light of proposals from the advisory panel on community radio appointed for this purpose by the then Home Secretary. The membership of the panel includes a member of the Independent Broadcasting Authority and a member of the staff of the BBC, both appointed in an individual capacity on the basis of their knowledge of broadcasting matters; but neither the authority nor the corporation has played or will play any part in the selection process.

Marriage Services (Offences)

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions have taken place in each of the last three years for offences in relation to marriage services conducted in the United Kingdom in contravention of the Marriage Acts.

Mr. Mellor: Records available to me, which may be incomplete, cover only England and Wales and show three persons proceeded against in 1982 for offences against the Marriage Acts 1949 and 1954, none in 1983 and none in 1984. Corresponding information for 1985 is not yet available.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Medium-range Missiles

55. **Mr. Beith** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the Government's policy towards a zero solution for the elimination of United States of America and Soviet medium-range missiles.

Mr. Renton: A global zero-zero solution remains Alliance policy. President Reagan's recent proposals offer a realistic basis for achieving that aim, consistent with the maintenance of our security at all times. Those proposals have our full support.

Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty

56. **Mr. Tony Lloyd** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has received regarding the difficulties of verification in negotiating a comprehensive test ban treaty.

Mr. Renton: We have received 23 letters on this subject, 12 from the general public and 11 from hon. and right hon. Members.

57. **Mr. Simon Hughes** asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he plans to seek to introduce a trial test ban in consultation with other nuclear powers.

Mr. Renton: No. We remain committed to seeking progress towards balanced and verifiable arms control agreements which contribute to United Kingdom security, including a comprehensive test ban treaty. Introducing a trial test ban, which would not meet these criteria, would not be in our interests.

Nuclear Materials (Export Ban)

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will make it his policy in negotiations on the future of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty to press for a ban on the export of fissile nuclear materials between nuclear weapons states for defence purposes.

Mr. Renton: No.

Embassy Staff

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many diplomatic staff stationed in British embassies abroad have had their assignments prematurely terminated or shortened during the last seven years, and in which countries these took place.

Mr. Eggar: British diplomatic staff in several posts abroad have had their appointments prematurely terminated for a variety of reasons during the period in question. These include political grounds, such as the expulsion of 23 diplomats from the Soviet Union over the last seven years, and personal, operational safety and other reasons. No central records are kept of the numbers of staff involved.

EMPLOYMENT

Youth Training Scheme

Mr. Wainwright asked the Paymaster General what is the latest estimate of the number of YTS places lost as a result of cutback in Manpower Services Commission funding of mode B placement schemes in *(a)* England, *(b)* Yorkshire and Humberside and *(c)* West Yorkshire; and how many redundancies are involved in each case.

Mr. Trippier: There will be some reductions in mode B1 type provision under two-year YTS, but we intend to meet the needs of young people and the number of premium and ITEC places next year will be substantially higher than the number of filled B1 places this year.

The figures are:—

	England	*Yorkshire & Humberside*	*West Yorkshire*
Number of approved mode B1 places at 28 February 1986	55,193	7,072	2,893
Highest level of filled B1 places in 1985-86	43,040	5,297	1,933
Latest estimate of planned premium & ITEC First and Second Year provision, 1986-87	57,907	7,217	2,803

No information is available about how many redundancies may be declared by providers of mode B1 schemes.

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Paymaster General if he will make a statement on the details of the trainee agreement for YTS trainees.

Mr. Trippier: The training agreement will provide trainees with information about their training programme and about the terms and conditions under which they will participate. The scope of this information is currently the subject of discussion between officials of the Manpower Services Commission and interested parties, including the CBI and TUC.

Wider Opportunities Training Scheme

Mr. Thurnham asked the Paymaster General how many unemployed people have taken part in the wider opportunities training scheme since its inception; what percentage of those taking part subsequently found employment and what was the individual cost of providing each job.

Mr. Trippier: The wider opportunities training programme was introduced in April 1985 as one of the Manpower Services Commission's adult training programmes. It built on work preparation, its predecessor under the training opportunities scheme. At January 1986, 41,300 unemployed people were in or had completed training under the WOTP. Follow-up results for the first six months of 1985-86 show that 51 per cent. of trainees had found employment or further training three months after completion of their course, at an estimated cost of £1,337 for each person helped.

Deregulation Unit

Mr. Andew F. Bennett asked the Paymaster General how many staff are employed in the Department of Employment deregulation unit by grade; what is the cost of the unit; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: The enterprise and deregulation unit employs the following civil service staff.

	Number
Under Secretary (Grade 3)	1
Assistant Secretary (Grade 5)	2
Principal (or equivalent)	6
Higher Executive Officer/ Higher Executive Officer (Development)	5
Executive Officer	1
Clerical Officer	1
Senior Personal Secretary	1
Personal Secretary	3
Specialist Typist	1

The unit is estimated to cost £488,000 in the 1986-87 financial year. The enterprise and deregulation unit is pursuing the Government's policy of reducing the burden of administrative and legislative requirements across all Government Departments and following up the White Paper "Lifting the Burden" (Cmnd. 9571) published in July last year. A second White Paper will be published this summer.

Factory Inspectors

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Paymaster General whether there has been any delay in the appointment of factory inspectors to the Health and Safety Executive.

Mr. Trippier: Inspectors are appointed to the Health and Safety Executive as quickly as practicable. The time scale depends on the satisfactory completion of inquiries into age, health etc., and on the period of notice a candidate may have to give his existing employer.

Seventeen factory inspectors have recently taken up post and up to 12 more are expected to join the Health and Safety Executive shortly.

Beer, Wines and Spirits

Mr. Parry asked the Paymaster General (1) how many people were employed in the brewing industry in England and Wales in June 1979; and how many at the latest available date;

(2) asked the Paymaster General how many workers were employed in the wines and spirits industry in June 1979; in England and Wales; and how many at the latest available date.

Mr. Trippier: The available information is as follows:

Employees in Employment in Great Britain

Industry	*June 1979*	*December 1985*
Brewing, malting, cider and perry	71,500	54,600
Spirit distilling and compounding	29,400	20,400

The Department's statistics do not provide separate figures for England and Wales.

Nuclear Submarine Bases

Mr. Donald Stewart asked the Paymaster General whether representatives of the Health and Safety

Executive are empowered to carry out inspections at *(a)* United Kingdom and *(b)* United States' nuclear submarine bases on the Clyde.

Mr. Trippier: Representatives of the Health and Safety Executive are authorised to inspect any nuclear submarine bases on the Clyde.

Tobacco Industry

Mr. Parry asked the Paymaster General if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing the numbers employed in the tobacco industry for each quarter since 1979.

Mr. Trippier: The figures for the period March 1979 to September 1985, the latest date for which figures are available, are as follows:

Employees in employment in the tobacco industry in Great Britain

	March	*June*	*September*	*December*
1979	31,300	31,300	31,900	31,600
1980	31,600	31,500	31,500	30,900
1981	29,500	30,100	29,900	29,300
1982	29,000	28,500	28,700	28,100
1983	27,700	26,900	26,700	25,900
1984	25,000	22,000	21,500	20,700
1985	20,300	19,600	18,700	n/a

TRANSPORT

Western Isles (Rescue Helicopter)

58. **Mr. Donald Stewart** asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will arrange for a helicopter to be based for rescue purposes at one of the airports in the Western Isles.

Mr. Ridley: As I have already informed the House, following the loss of the Bon Ami, I have asked the United Kingdom search and rescue committee to consider helicopter coverage of the seas off the north-west of Scotland.

Lorries (Overloading)

Mr. Tom Cox asked the Secretary of State for Transport how many prosecutions there have been over each of the last three years against lorry owners for allowing their lorries to be driven while being overloaded.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The number of prosecutions taken by the Department of Transport and local authority trading standards departments against goods vehicle operators for overloading offences were as follows:

	Number
1983	7,012
1984	6,352
1985	7,454

The police also prosecute overloading offences.

M1-M25 (Congestion)

Mr. Pawsey asked the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of congestion on the M1 motorway, southbound, from a point some miles prior to its junction with the M25 and continuing up to that junction; what steps he proposes to take to improve the slip road from the M1 to M25; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: No interchange between the M1 and M25 will exist until junction 6A of the M1 is opened in the autumn as part of the final section of the M25. The congestion on the approach to junction 6 should then be much reduced. We shall in due course consider whether alterations are needed. In the meantime we are erecting signs on the M1 to warn of delays ahead.

Temporary Spare Wheels

Mr. Iain Mills asked the Secretary of State for Transport how many representations he has received in favour of the use of temporary spare wheels; and how many he has received against.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Requests have been received over the years from individual motorists and from vehicle manufacturers to provide clearly in our regulations for the use of temporary spare tyres. Views have also been expressed that we should ban their use. We are about to provide an opportunity for all organisations concerned to make representations to us in the context of a proposal for amending regulations which will permit the use of these spare tyres provided the vehicle is not driven at a speed in excess of 50 mph.

Road Accidents

Mr. Holt asked the Secretary of State for Transport how many road accident have occurred in each of the past 10 years, involving loss of life or serious injuries in which at least one of the drivers involved had under 12 months experience after passing their driving test.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: This information is not available because details of drivers' licences are not given in accident reports.

Dangerous Substances

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for Transport if trimethylolpropane triacrylate has been *(a)* approved as a dangerous substance that is permitted for conveyance by road and *(b)* classified for the purpose of assigning a hazard warning sign on transporting vehicles.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: This substance is not regarded as dangerous in transport and vehicles carrying it in tanks are not required to display hazard warning panels.

Mr. Gareth Wardell asked the Secretary of State for Transport if binapacryl has been *(a)* approved as a dangerous substance that is permitted for conveyance by road and *(b)* classified for the purpose of assigning a hazard warning sign on transporting vehicles.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: This substance is a solid substituted nitrophenol pesticide. It is regarded as "toxic" for the purposes of supply and use under the Classification, Packaging and Labelling Regulations 1984 and packages must be marked with a number of appropriate risk and safety phrases. No further labelling is required for transport purposes but tank vehicles carrying the substance in solution should display a full hazard warning panel with the "harmful" diamond and the toxic liquid mixture identification number 2810.

A23 Warninglid-Brighton (Inquiry)

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has received the report of the

inspector for the A23 Warninglid to Brighton public inquiry; and when he expects to be able to announce his decision on the inspector's recommendations.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: We are at present considering the inspector's report on the A23 proposals. I hope to be able to announce a decision in the early summer.

Shipping Statistics

Mr. Kennedy asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the number of ships, giving tonnage, which have *(a)* sunk and *(b)* requested assistance in each of the following sea areas:; (i) Pentland Firth (ii) Minch, (iii) Little Minch, (iv) Sea of the Hebrides and (v) North Channel since 1980; and of these if he will state how many in each case were crude oil-carrying tankers.

Mr. Ridley [*pursuant to the reply*, 10 March, c. *366*]: The records held in my Department show that in the period 1980-85 there were 30 casualties to ships in the areas referred to and a total of nine vessels sank, as follows:

Location	*Total Casualties*	*Total sinkings*	*Total Tonnage*
Pentland Firth	5	2	92
Minch	6	2	44
Little Minch	8	3	106
Sea of the Hebrides	5	1	18
North Channel	6	1	68

None of the vessels which sank was a crude oil-carrying tanker.

The information on ships requesting assistance is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, the following table lists the number of ships recorded by Her Majesty's Coastguard, actually requiring assistance in the coastguard regions mentioned.

Coast guard SAR areas	*1982*		*1983*		*1984*		*1985*	
	Commercial vessels	*Fishing vessels*	*Commercial vessels*	*Fishing vessels*	*Commercial vessels*	*Fishing vessels*	*Commercial vessels*	*Fishing vessels*
Pentland	1	9	1	10	3	17	1	15
Clyde	3	15	1	18	5	6	3	9
Oban	3	16	5	21	1	17	4	27
Stornoway	0	7	0	12	4	8	1	9
Belfast	2	13	2	12	1	4	1	12

East London River Crossing

Mr. Amess asked the Secretary of State for Transport what progress has been made on plans for a new east London river crossing.

Mr. Ridley [*pursuant to the reply*, 10 March, c. *366-367*]: Plans for a new east London river crossing were published in 1984 and 1985. These plans are currently the subject of public local inquiries, which started last September.

ENERGY

Alternative Energy Sources

Mr. Best asked the Secretary of State for Energy (1) what investigations into alternative sources of energy are being conducted in Wales; what progress these are making; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will set out the present studies into alternative sources of energy, the amount of Government funding of each one and the manner of progress of each one; and if he will make a statement;

(3) if he will increase Government funding of research into alternative sources of energy.

Mr. David Hunt: A detailed account of the alternative energy technologies we are examining as part of our research and development programme, details of individual projects, their progress and the prospects for their exploitation in the United Kingdom is given in ETSU R28, R30 and N3/85. Copies of the first two reports are already in the Libraries of the House. I am placing copies of the third report, a register of research and development projects in the Libraries of the House today.

Total expenditure by my Department is currently running at an average of about £14 million per annum. Actual expenditure on the individual technologies from 1975-76 to 1984-85 was as follows:

£ million

	1975-76	*1976-77*	*1977-78*	*1978-79*	*1979-80*	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*
Wind				0·3	0·6	0·8	0·9	2·5	2·5	4·8
Wave				1·8	3·0	3·3	4·4	3·1	1·0	0·4
Geothermal aquifers				0·2	1·3	1·7	2·6	1·5	1·8	1·1
Geothermal hot dry rocks	0·5	0·3	1·3	—	—	0·6	5·6	3·0	2·9	4·6
Solar				0·2	1·2	0·9	0·7	1·4	0·9	0·5
Biomass				—	0·1	0·3	0·4	0·7	0·3	0·2
Tide				—	0·6	1·4	0·4	—	—	0·3
ETSU services		0·7	1·2	1·1	1·4	2·2	2·3	2·0	1·9	2·1
TOTAL	*0·5	*1·0	*2·5	3·6	8·2	11·2	17·3	14·2	11·3	14·0

* Includes energy conservation research and development.
No information available for 1974-75.

The Government have identified the most promising alternative energy technologies, and increased support is being given to their research and development.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Central America

Mr. Tony Lloyd asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the United Kingdom aid programme to central America.

Mr. Raison: British aid to the six countries of central America (excluding Belize) in 1984, the latest year for which figures are available, amounted to £5·38 million. This included loans worth £4·47 million. In addition, we support small development projects co-financed with British voluntary agencies and, in the last two years, have contributed over £1·25 million to international relief organisations to help refugees and displaced persons in central America.

SCOTLAND

Wines, Spirits, Beer and Tobacco

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how many workers were employed in the wines and spirits industry in Scotland in June 1979; and how many at the latest available date;

(2) how many workers were employed in the tobacco industry in Scotland in June 1979; and how many at the latest available date;

(3) how many workers were employed in the brewing industry in Scotland at June 1979; and how many at the latest available date.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The only available information is derived from the annual census of production: the estimated average number of workers employed in Scotland during the year is shown in the table.

	1979	*1983*
Spirit distilling and compounding; wines, cider and perry	23,600	16,700
Brewing and malting	4,500	3,000

Figures for employment in the tobacco industry cannot be published owing to the risk of disclosing information about individual enterprises.

Macaulay Institute for Soil Research

Mr. Maclennan asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many representations he has received from scientists regarding the future of the Macaulay Institute for Soil Research; and from which institutions and countries they have come.

Mr. John MacKay: My right hon. and learned Friend has received 104 letters from scientists associated with the following organisations:

United Kingdom universities and scientific organisations

University of Aberdeen
University of Birmingham
British Antarctic Survey
British Society of Soil Science
University of Cambridge
British Clay Minerals Group
University of Glasgow
Institution of Professional Civil Servants
Institute of Terrestrial Ecology
Macaulay Institute for Soil Research
Mineralogical Society
North of Scotland College of Agriculture
Resource Use Institute Ltd.
Robert Gordon's Institute of Technology
Schlumberger Cambridge Research Ltd.
University of Sheffield
University of Strathclyde
University College of Wales, Aberystwyth

Overseas universities and organisations

CSIRO, Australia
University of Adelaide, Australia
University of Western Australia
University of Leuven, Belgium
Agricultural Canada Research Branch, Canada
University of Saskatchewan, Canada
University of El-Zagazig, Egypt
University of the South Pacific, Fiji
Centre National De La Recherche Scientifique, France
Universite Louis Pasteur, France
Journal of Analytical and Applied Pyrolysis, West Germany
Technische Universitat Munchen, West Germany
Universita degli studi di Napoli, Italy
Universita degli studi Pavia, Italy
Universita degli studi Torino, Italy
Ehime University, Japan
Kyushu University, Japan
Nagoya University, Japan
Agricultural University, Wageningen, Netherlands
Delft University of Technology, Netherlands
Department of Scientific and Industrial Research, New Zealand
Society of Soil Science, New Zealand
Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand
Agricultural University of Norway
Statoil a.s., Norway
International Rice Research Institute, Manila, Philippines
University of Agricultural Sciences, Sweden
University of Cukurova, Turkey
University of California, Berkeley, United States of America
Colorado School of Mines, United States of America
United States Department of the Interior, Geological Survey, United States of America
International Humic Substances Society, United States of America
Iowa State University, United States of America
Michigan State Univeristy, United States of America
Mineralogical Society of America, United States of America
New York State College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, United States of America
Purdue University, United States of America
Schlumberger-Doll Research, United States of America
Texas A & M University, United States of America
International Association for the Study of Clay (AIPEA)
International Union of Pure and Applied Chemistry

Cancer (Dunoon)

Mr. Donald Stewart asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what information or statistics he has as to the levels of leukaemia and other cancers in the Dunoon area compared with average figures for the United Kingdom.

Mr. John MacKay: It is not possible to provide United Kingdom comparisons readily, as cancer statistics are collected separately in Scotland and England.

Information immediately available about the incidence of leukaemia and other cancers in the Dunoon area relates only to cases occurring in the 0 to 24 year age group of the population. Statistical information about leukamia in respect of the age group is currently being validated and updated.

The following table shows the actual and expected numbers of registrations of both leukaemia and all cancers except leukaemia in the Dunoon area and in Scotland as a whole.

	Dunoon, Kilmun Inverchaolain Kilmodan	*Scotland*	*Dunoon (Postal District PA23)*	*Scotland*
	*1968 to 1974		*1975 to 1982	
Actual Registrations				
Leukaemia	2	420	2	463
All other cancers	6	1,678	6	2,224
Expected No. of Registrations				
Leukaemia	0·9		1·2	
All other cancers	3·8		5·8	

*Because of local Government reorganisation the area covered from 1975 onwards is slightly different from before that date.

DEFENCE

Nimrod

5. **Mr. Patchett** asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will make a further statement on the Nimrod programme.

21. **Mr. Norman Atkinson** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he will take to seek to ensure the successful final development of the British Nimrod advanced early warning project and its bringing into service with the Royal Air Force.

45. **Mr. Favell** asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether he has reached a decision on the future of the Nimrod advanced early warning programme.

Mr. Norman Lamont: There is nothing I can add to the full account I gave to the House during our debate on the Royal Air Force on 26 February, at columns 962-65.

Trident

16. **Mr. Stott** asked the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to conclude the contracts for the Trident submarine.

Mr. Norman Lamont: It is hoped to conclude shortly with the new owners of VSEL the contract for the first Trident submarine.

44. **Sir John Farr** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is his latest estimate of that portion of the Trident contract which will be made in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Approximately 55 per cent., or some £5,400 million by value, of the total estimated cost of Trident (£9,869 million at 1985-86 prices and at £1=$1·28) is planned to be spent in the United Kingdom.

54. **Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what are the latest estimates of the cost of the Trident programme; and what proportion is of British manufacture.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I refer to the answers which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave to the hon. Member for Suffolk, South (Mr. Yeo) and which I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Sir J. Farr) earlier today.

RAF Trainer Aircraft

17. **Mr. Randall** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the slippage in the trainer replacement programme for the Royal Air Force.

Mr. Norman Lamont: As I told the House in opening the debate on the Royal Air Force on 26 February, at column 962, there will be a few months' delay in the delivery of the first aircraft, but it is hoped to recover some of the slippage later in the delivery programme. The first aircraft is expected to be delivered in early 1987 and the first twelve by the end of 1987.

Saudi Arabia (Aerospace Contract)

19. **Mr. Soames** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the expected total value of the recently signed aerospace contract with Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The memorandum of understanding signed on 17 February 1986 covers the provision of aircraft, associated equipment, initial spares, training and technical support to a value in the order of £5 billion.

Defence Programme (Costings)

20. **Mr. Woodall** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what progress he has made on the long-term costings of the defence programme.

Mr. Younger: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave earlier to the hon. Members for Oldham, Central and Royton (Mr. Lamond) and for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. McKay).

30. **Mr. McNamara** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what weapons system he expects to cancel or postpone as a result of his long-term costing of the defence programme.

Mr. Stanley: I cannot anticipate the outcome of my right hon. Friend's consideration of the long-term costing.

RIMPAC Naval Exercise

22. **Mr. Wigley** asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether the United Kingdom will be taking part in naval exercises in the Pacific later in the current year; and what other countries are involved in these exercises.

Mr. Stanley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) on 4 February, at column 122.

Western Europe (Missile Defence System)

23. **Mr. D. E. Thomas** asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether his Department has commissioned any research on the feasibility of a ballistic missile defence system for western Europe; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norman Lamont: No, although NATO's requirements for air defence are kept under constant review.

King Vessels

24. **Mr. Millan** asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will now place an order with British Shipbuilders for the fleet support King vessels.

Mr. Lee: We have studied this design with interest, but the Royal Navy does not at present have a requirement for a vessel of this type.

Recruitment

25. **Dr. Michael Clark** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he is satisfied with the quality and quantity of recruits for the armed forces; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lee: I am generally satisfied both with the numbers, and quality, of those offering themselves for service. The vast majority of those selected achieve standards above the minimum set for entry.

Falkland Islands

26. **Mr. Foulkes** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what are the latest estimates of all costs of defending the Falklands for 1986-87 and 1987-88, respectively.

Mr. Stanley: Our latest estimates of costs is in line with the provision of £442 million and £292 million, respectively, which was announced in "The Government's Expenditure Plans for 1986-87 to 1988-89" (Cmnd. 9702–II).

Reservists (Military Training)

27. **Mr. Marlow** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has as to which West European armies have a requirement for regular reservists to undertake a period of military training in excess of one day each year or biannually.

Mr. Lee: Levels of reservists training in other west European countries are not readily comparable with the standard suggested by my hon. Friend.

European Fighter Programme

28. **Mr. Stan Thorne** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the progress of the European fighter programme.

Mr. Norman Lamont: As I told the House during the debate on the Royal Air Force on 26 February, at columns 958-60, work on the European fighter aircraft project is proceeding well, and there is much work to be done in the coming months before the industrial report on project definition is submitted to the four Governments for appraisal later this year.

Youth Training

29. **Mr. Stern** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the participation of Her Majesty's forces in the revised YTS scheme.

Mr. Lee: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer that I gave on the armed services YTS on 11 February 1986, at column *444*.

Turkish Prime Minister

31. **Mr. Bill Walker** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he makes of the prospect of selling Tornados to Turkey in the light of the Turkish Prime Minister's recent visit to Britain.

Mr. Norman Lamont: It is not our policy to comment on individual sales prospects.

Defence Sales

32. **Mr. Leigh** asked the Secretary of State for Defence how the current level of defence sales compares with a year ago.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Complete figures for contracts signed in 1985 are not yet available, but are expected to show a significant increase over the previous year.

British Payload Specialist

33. **Mr. Bellingham** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if, following the American shuttle accident, there will be any delay in the launch of the British payload specialist.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The planned launches of two Skynet 4 communications satellites, which are due to be assisted by British payload specialists, will be delayed as a result of the shuttle accident, but the extent of the delays has yet to be finally determined.

Tornado Aircraft

34. **Mr. Cyril D. Townsend** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what progress is being made in selling Tornado aircraft to United Kingdom North Atlantic Treaty Organisation partners.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Panavia and the individual Tornado partners continue to pursue actively not only NATO but also world markets for Tornado aircraft. To date 80 Tornados have been sold, 72 to Saudi Arabia and eight to Oman, and potential sales are currently being promoted both in Europe and elsewhere.

Strategic Defence Initiative

35. **Mr. Alton** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what consultations he has had concerning a battle management system for the strategic defence initiative.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The arrangements between the United States and United Kingdom Governments provide the opportunity for United Kingdom participation in SDI research in a number of advanced areas, of which examples have been placed in the Library. The Ministry of Defence will assist United Kingdom organisations who so wish, and have relevent capabilities, to participate in such areas.

39. **Mr. Chope** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the Soviet strategic defence initiative; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stanley: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash) on 26 November 1985, at columns *562-64*.

49. **Mr. Sedgemore** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if United Kingdom companies taking part in strategic defence initiative research will be free to exploit the results of their research independently.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The memorandum of understanding and supporting documentation related to British participation in the SDI research programme provide satisfactory safeguards in, amongst others, the area of intellectual property rights. The documentation is confidential.

50. **Mr. Michael Forsyth** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the implications for his policy on the strategic defence initiative of the proposals in the recent publication by Dr. Colin Gray, "Britain and the SDI", a copy of which has been sent to him; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Her Majesty's Government welcome the publication of any material which enhances the public debate on the strategic defence initiative. The United Kingdom's position on this subject remains as set out by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence in the House on 19 February 19816.

52. **Mr. Flannery** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he has any plans to discuss with his American counterpart the possibility of British contracts connected with the strategic defence initiative.

Mr. Norman Lamont: My right hon. Friend will be able to discuss any current matters affecting United Kingdom participation in SDI research when he meets Mr. Weinberger during his visit to London next week.

Supersonic VSTOL Aircraft

36. **Mr. Gerald Howarth** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what plans his Department has for the development of a supersonic vertical short take-off and landing aircraft; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norman Lamont: There is as yet no established requirement for such an aircraft. We are, however, undertaking studies of relevant technologies jointly with the United States Government under the terms of a memorandum of understanding signed on 23 January 1986.

Royal Ordnance plc

37. **Mr. Robert Atkins** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the support given by his Department to Royal Ordnance plc, in furtherance of export contracts.

Mr. Norman Lamont: My Department's general policy is to give the same comprehensive support to Royal Ordnance plc as it does to any other United Kingdom company engaged in defence exports. One exception to this is a special facility over a transitional period which allows the company to draw on Ministry of Defence owned spares for royal ordnance factory products. Another exception to this general policy is set out in Cmnd. 9746.

Small Firms (Tendering)

38. **Mr. Spencer** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on current measures taken to publicise procedures for small firms tendering for Ministry of Defence contracts.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Publicity is primarily provided by a booklet produced by my Department and entitled "Selling to the MOD". It was first published in September 1983, and some 45,000 copies have been distributed at trade fairs, through trade associations and to individual companies. A second edition is in the course of preparation.

In addition MOD officials attend and address functions and seminars arranged by industry and by small firms organisations. Officials also participate in events organised by chambers of commerce, industrial development associations, enterprise agencies and similar organisations.

Type 23 Frigates

Mr. Duffy asked the Secreary of State for Defence what annual average ordering rate of type 23 frigates is needed if the fleet in the 1990s is to reach its target of around 50 destroyers and frigates.

Mr. Lee: It is our intention to maintain a surface escort fleet of about 50 destroyers and frigates and this would imply an ordering rate of around three new vessels per year. However, these figures are subject both to availability of resources and the length of hull life.

Nuclear Warheads

41. **Mr. Chapman** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is his latest estimate of the balance of the intermediate range nuclear warheads held by the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation countries and the Warsaw pact countries in Europe.

Mr. Stanley: Information on the nuclear forces of the Warsaw Pact and NATO is contained in annex A of volume 1 of the "Statement on the Defence Estimates 1985". We plan to update this information in the Statement of Defence Estimates for 1986.

Chemical Weapons

42. **Mr. Wallace** asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether he intends to meet the United States Defence Secretary to discuss modernisation and deployment of United States chemical weapons in Europe; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stanley: My right hon. Friend has no plans for a specific meeting with the United States Defence Secretary to discuss this particular issue. He will meet the United States Defence Secretary for both bilateral and NATO discussions later this month.

51. **Mr. Kirkwood** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what consultations will take place between Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe and Her Majesty's Government before a decision is reached on any new deployment of chemical weapons in Europe by the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation.

Mr. Stanley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) on 7 March, at column 313. The United States Government have indicated that they have no plans to deploy binary chemical weapons in any foreign country in peacetime and that should such a deployment be considered in the future the United States would consult beforehand with the countries concerned.

Defence Budget

43. **Mr. Hunter** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what recent representations he has received about the defence budget.

Mr. Stanley: Since 1 January 1986, three letters relating to this subject have been received from right hon. and hon. Members, and five have been received direct from the general public.

Cruise Missiles (RAF Molesworth)

46. **Mr. Boyes** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will consider a delay in the deployment of cruise missiles at Molesworth in view of recent Soviet proposals.

Mr. Stanley: No.

Ballistic Theatre Missile Defences

47. **Mr. Cartwright** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with his West German counterpart on the development of European ballistic theatre missile defences.

Mr. Stanley: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence met his West German counterpart, Dr. Manfred Woerner, in West Germany on 17 February, when a wide variety of subjects of mutual defence interest were discussed. Among these subjects was the possibility of improving NATO's air defences in Europe. Details of the discussions are, of course, confidential.

Crown Proceedings Act 1947

48. **Mr. Ashley** asked the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received concerning the abolition of section 10 of the Crown Proceedings Act 1947.

Mr. Lee: I have nothing to add to the answer I gave to the right hon. Gentleman on 20 February 1986, at column 326.

Ulster Defence Regiment

53. **Sir John Biggs-Davison** asked the Secretary of State for Defence if any changes in the role and deployment of the Ulster Defence Regiment have been made following the conclusion of the Anglo-Irish agreement; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stanley: As I said to my hon. Friend in my reply to him on 22 January, at column 237, there are no plans to change the operational role of the Ulster Defence Regiment. There are also no plans to make any significant changes in deployments at present although detailed deployments of course vary from day to day in response to operational needs.

BP Shipping Co. Ltd. (Tankers)

Mr. Steel asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the role of the BP Shipping Company Ltd's oil tankers in the defence interests of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Stanley: Defence planning includes the use of oil tankers of varying sizes in support of Royal Navy operations.

Holy Loch

Mr. Donald Stewart asked the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has as to the presence of cobalt 60 in the waters of the Holy Loch.

Mr. Lee: There is no measurable level of cobalt 60 in the waters of the Holy Loch.

Mr. Donald Stewart asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will institute an independent inquiry into the level of radioactivity in the silts at the head of Holy Loch.

Mr. Lee: No.

The levels of radioactivity in the sediment at the Holy Loch are monitored regularly, and the results published by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in its aquatic environment monitoring reports, copies of which are in the Library of the House. The Strathclyde regional council also commissioned an independent study of radioactivity in the Firth of Clyde, including the Holy Loch, the results of which were published in 1985. There is no scientific evidence of hazardous radioactivity from submarines operations in the Holy Loch. There is therefore no case for an independent inquiry.

Mr. Donald Stewart asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he has commissioned any studies into the levels of radiation emitted by the reactors of nuclear submarines based in the Holy Loch on *(a)* start-up and *(b)* flushing-out.

Mr. Lee: The level of radiation emitted from nuclear submarine reactors is very low. Routine radioactive discharges from nuclear submarines directly into the environment are not permitted. Routine radioactive discharges are permitted from the depot ship; the very low levels of radioactivity are published in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food's aquatic environment monitoring reports, copies of which are in the Library of the House. Routine monitoring of the inter-tidal zones shows levels indistinguishable from those in areas remote from nuclear facilities.

Mr. Donald Stewart asked the Secretary of State for Defence if the creation of a restricted military zone at the vicinity of the Holy Loch was brought into being at the request of the United States navy.

Mr. Stanley: No restrictions other than those under the dockyard port of the Holy Loch Order 1967 currently apply to the area. Draft byelaws regulating the use of the protected anchorages in the Holy Loch for defence purposes will shortly be advertised locally for public comment. These have been prepared on the initiative of this Department. The United States Navy has been consulted.

ENVIRONMENT

Sellafield

Mr. Frank Cook asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will state the chemical constituent components of the discharge from Sellafield on 23 January in terms of concentrations of organic and aqueous solvents, including an inventory of any quantities of tri-butyl phosphate, nitric acid, sulphuric acid and sodium nitrate contained within the discharge together with the concentration of uranium metal, by parts per million, carried in solution or otherwise within the discharged liquor.

Mr. Waldegrave: The information on the chemical components referred to is as follows:

	In parts per million, by weight
Organic solvents: tri-butyl phosphate	27
Odourless kerosene	3
Free Nitric Acid	0
Free Sulphuric Acid	0
Sodium Salts	about 1,000
Uranium (as Ammonium diuranate associated with ferric hydroxide floc)	300

No uranium metal was present.

Mr. Frank Cook asked the Secretary of State for the Environment to what extent *(a)* operator error and *(b)* plant malfunction contributed to the circumstances precipitating need for the discharge from Sellafield to the Irish sea on 23 January; whether this discharge was wholly made following a prior instruction from British Nuclear Fuels Limited management; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: The release of uranium was initiated by a plant malfunction which led to material reaching the sea tanks, and it was terminated by operator action to control the malfunction. The discharge from the sea tanks took place later, after consideration by British Nuclear Fuels management and a decision by it that this was the appropriate action. The circumstances are the subject of investigations by the Radiochemical Inspectorate and the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate.

Nuclear Waste

Sir Peter Emery asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether, as part of its search for available sites for the disposal of shorter-lived nuclear waste, the Nuclear Industry Radioactive Waste Executive has now concluded that there are no suitable sites in east Devon and Lyme bay: and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: The sites announced by my right hon. Friend on 25 February are the only ones which NIREX proposes to investigate in connection with the development of a near-surface facility.

Mr. Michael Brown asked the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he is prepared to receive a deputation from the Barnetby parish council to discuss proposals for nuclear waste disposal in the area; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he is prepared to receive a deputation from the Ukeby parish council to discuss proposals for nuclear waste disposal in the area; and if he will make a statement;

(3) if he is prepared to receive a deputation from the Immingham town council to discuss proposals for the disposal of nuclear waste in the area; and if he will make a statement;

(4) if he is prepared to receive a deputation from South Killingholme parish council to discuss proposals for the disposal of nuclear waste in the area; and if he will make a statement;

(5) if he is prepared to receive a deputation from North Killingholme parish council to discuss proposals for the disposal of nuclear waste in the area; and if he will make a statement;

(6) if he is prepared to receive a deputation from the East Halton parish council to discuss proposals for the disposal of nuclear waste in the area; and if he will make a statement;

(7) if he is prepared to receive a deputation from Cleethorpes borough council to discuss proposals for the disposal of nuclear waste in the area; and if he will make a statement;

(8) if he is prepared to receive a deputation from Humberside county council to discuss proposals for the disposal of nuclear waste in the area; and if he will make a statement;

(9) if he is prepared to receive a deputation from the Glanford borough council to discuss proposals for the disposal of nuclear waste in the area; and if he will make a statement;

(10) if he is prepared to receive a deputation from the Barrow on Humber parish council to discuss proposals for the disposal of nuclear waste in the area; and if he will make a statement;

(11) if he is prepared to receive a deputation from the Barton on Humber town council to discuss proposals for the disposal of nuclear waste in the area; and if he will make a statement;

(12) if he is prepared to receive a deputation from the organisation known as Humberside Against Nuclear Dumping to discuss proposals for the disposal of nuclear waste in the area; and if he will make a statement;

(13) if he is prepared to receive a deputation from the New Holland parish council to discuss proposals for the disposal of nuclear waste in the area; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: I shall be happy to meet, on behalf of my right hon. Friend, a deputation led by my hon. Friend.

Mr. Michael Brown asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what interval he intends to allow at the end of the consultation period in respect of the proposals for nuclear waste disposal announced in the statement he made to the House on 25 February, before he lays a special development order before Parliament; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: My right hon. Friend hopes to lay the order before Parliament in late April.

Mr. Michael Brown asked the Secretary of State for the Environment on how many occasions special development orders have been laid before Parliament since 1970.

Mr. Waldegrave: Twelve special development orders have been laid and made in England and Wales since 1970.

Mr. Michael Brown asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what factors he proposes to take into account in deciding whether to amend the draft special development order relating to nuclear waste disposal before the order is laid before Parliament.

Mr. Waldegrave: Any proposed amendments will be considered on their merits.

Mr. Michael Brown asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the names of all sites which have been considered by the Nuclear Industry Radioactive Waste Executive at some stage since 1 January 1985 as possibilities for the disposal of nuclear waste.

Mr. Waldegrave: No.

Mr. Michael Brown asked the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what information his Department has about the geology of South and North Killingholme in relation to the feasibility of dumping nuclear waste;

(2) if he will make it his policy to arrange for a separate assessment of the analyses of the results of the geological studies to be undertaken by the Nuclear Industry Radioactive Waste Executive at the four sites proposed for possible nuclear waste dumping; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: My Department and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food will make an independent assessment of any proposals put forward by NIREX. The assessment will include the results of geological studies undertaken by NIREX of the sites involved.

Mr. Michael Brown asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the precise geological, demographic and safety features which led the Nuclear Industry Radioactive Waste Executive to conclude that South Killingholme was potentially attractive as a nuclear waste dump.

Mr. Waldegrave: I understand that NIREX has recently sent my hon. Friend a copy of the brochure explaining its site selection procedures.

Mr. Michael Brown asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to allocate special resources from his Department to local authorities and others in Humberside to assist with defraying any reasonable expenses incurred in presenting to a public inquiry their views on nuclear dumping in South Killingholme.

Mr. Waldegrave: It is not Government policy to give financial aid to local authorities and objectors at public inquiries of this nature.

Mr. Michael Brown asked the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if the Nuclear Industry Radioactive Waste Executive has at any time considered the possibility of selecting a site in the county of Surrey for investigation as a possible nuclear waste dump; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if the Nuclear Industry Radioactive Waste Executive has at any time considered the possibility of selecting a site in the Greater London council area for investigation as a possible nuclear waste dump; and if he will make a statement;

(3) if the Nuclear Industry Radioactive Waste Executive has at any time considered the possibility of selecting a site in the county of Avon for investigation as a possible nuclear waste dump; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: The decisions on which sites to investigate and which to propose were matters for NIREX.

Mr. Michael Brown asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what consultations he has had with bodies, apart from the Nuclear Industry Radioactive Waste Executive, to assist him in formulating his policy regarding nuclear waste disposal.

Mr. Waldegrave: My right hon. Friend consults widely in formulating radioactive waste policy. Those consulted include other Government Departments, the Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee, the National Radiological Protection Board, enviromental groups and the nuclear industry.

Mr. Michael Brown asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list in the *Official Report* the factors to be addressed in assessing any proposals which the Nuclear Industry Radioactive Waste Executive may present to a public inquiry relating to the disposal of nuclear waste.

Mr. Waldegrave: The principles to be applied in the assessment by the relevant Departments, in considering whether to give a general authorisation under the Radioactive Substances Act 1960 for any proposed disposal facility are set out in a booklet published by my Department in January 1985; "Disposal Facilities on Land for Low and Intermediate-Level Radioactive Wastes: Principles for the Protection of the Human Environment". Copies are available in the Library. It also lists the factors NIREX has to address in preparing an environmental assessment for consideration at a public inquiry into development proposals. In addition, the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate is preparing principles relating to its own responsibilities for disposal sites.

Mr. Michael Brown asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to visit the site selected by the Nuclear Industry Radioactive Waste Executive in South Killingholme for possible nuclear waste disposal; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: I intend to visit each of the alternative sites in due course. I will inform the hon. Members concerned when I have firm plans.

Mr. Michael Brown asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received relating to the Nuclear Industry Radioactive Waste Executive's proposals to investigate South Killingholme as a possible site for the dumping of nuclear waste; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: I have received a number of representations from hon. Members representing Humberside constituencies. I met my hon. Friend and the hon. Members for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) and for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Hickmet) on 17 December

to discuss the question of sites. I have also received representations from local authorities and residents of the South Humberside area. I am aware that a petition has been presented to Parliament. My Department's Yorkshire and Humberside regional director has recently received a similar petition.

Mr. Michael Brown asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent discussions he has had with the chairman of the Central Electricity Generating Board relating to the disposal of nuclear waste; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: The civil nuclear power programme is an important contributor to the volume of radioactive waste expected in the future; and not unexpectedly it is a subject the chairman has raised with me when we have met informally, as for example we shall do when I have lunch with the CEGB on 26 March.

Mr. Michael Brown asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to be in a position to announce authorisation for the commissioning of a nuclear waste dump; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: The stage of formal authorisation under the Radioactive Substances Act 1960 will not be reached until a facility has been built. This will probably not be until the early 1990s assuming that one of the four sites announced proves suitable. The authorising Departments will, however, give their provisional view on whether any facility subsequently proposed for development would be suitable for authorisation, before a public inquiry is held into that proposal. Consultations with the local planning authority and other bodies will take place before that view is given. An inquiry is unlikely to be held before late 1988 at the earliest.

Norwegian Environment Minister (Visit)

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the itinerary of the Norwegian Environment Minister on her forthcoming visit to the United Kingdom, and the nature of the agenda for discussions; and whether acid rain will be among the main items to be discussed.

Mr. Waldegrave: The Norwegian Minister of Environment, Mrs. Rakel Surlien, will visit the United Kingdom at the Government's invitation from 17 to 19 March, for discussions with Ministers and others on matters of common interest in environmental pollution control, including atmospheric pollution and acid rain. Mrs. Surlien's programme will also include visits to the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology (Edinburgh), a coal-fired power station (Fiddlers Ferry, Warrington), and the Mersey Basin campaign; and a presentation on the proposed Dounreay European demonstration nuclear fuel reprocessing plant.

Nuclear Industry Radioactive Waste Executive

Mr. Michael Brown asked the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) how many meetings he has had with Nuclear Industry Radioactive Waste Executive since April 1985;

(2) on how many occasions he has met the chairman of Nuclear Industry Radioactive Waste Executive since 8 January 1986.

Mr. Waldegrave: My right hon. Friend and I, and members of my Department, have met NIREX and its representatives from time to time since April 1985 to discuss issues that were within our respective responsibilities, in pursuit of the Government's published policy on the disposal of radioactive waste.

Rate Support Grant

Mr. Gerald Bowden asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy that, in the event of a local authority failing to make its 1986-87 rate by 31 March, the rate support grant will not be paid to that authority until it has made a lawful rate.

Mrs. Rumbold: I am advised that the payment of rate support grant cannot under present legislaton be made contingent upon the making of a rate.

Natterjack Toad

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the changes of breeding status for the natterjack toad which have occurred during the last 10 years; and if acidification of breeding ponds has played a major role in these changes.

Mrs. Rumbold: I am advised by the Nature Conservancy Council that the most recent survey of natterjack toad populations, carried out in 1980, concluded that there had been no significant changes in breeding status of this species since the early 1970s.

Acidification has generally not been a problem, since most breeding sites are within areas of calcareous sand dunes. However, there is concern about acidification at one heathland site in southern England and the Nature Conservancy Council is funding an investigation there.

Acid Rain

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on his policy in representing the United Kingdom's position on acid rain in the light of the video on acid rain issued by the Central Electricity Generating Board, a copy of which has been sent to him.

Mr. Waldegrave: The Government's policy on acid rain is set out in our reply (Cmnd. 9397) to the report of the Select Committee on the Environment. The Central Electricity Generating Board's video is entirely a matter for the board.

Mr. Barnett asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many payments of £1 have been received by him as part of the acid rain campaign organised by Friends of the Earth.

Mrs. Rumbold: A total of £874 has been received to date.

Canary Wharf

Mr. Barnett asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will now commission an environmental impact analysis in connection with proposals for the development on Canary wharf in the Isle of Dogs.

Sir George Young: No, but the LDDC is currently undertaking a series of wider appraisals of the development which will consider its economic, social and environmental impact.

Asbestos

Mr. Shore asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what technical advice has been given to local authorities about the further use or removal of asbestos as a building material in council houses and flats; and how much additional finance Government have made available for remedial purposes in each year since 1978.

Sir George Young: The Department of the Environment issued a technical guidance note on asbestos materials in buildings in August 1983. Copies were sent to all local authorities in England and Wales. The guidance note is at present being revised and updated, and will be re-issued later this year. Funds are not made available specifically for remedial work on asbestos, but rate support grant is paid in support of authorities' revenue expenditure generally, including expenditure on asbestos.

London Borough Grant Scheme

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give details of the contribution made by each borough to the London borough grant scheme.

Sir George Young: The budget of the London borough grant scheme, and so the contributions of individual authorities, is a matter for the boroughs and not for me. But section 48(3) of the Local Government Act 1985 provides that each authority's contribution to the scheme shall be in proportion to its population.

Consent Applications

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 6 March, *Official Report*, columns *278-79*, if he will identify the outstanding applications for consent on which he is awaiting further information requested from the Greater London council.

Mr. Tracey: These applications are as follows. In four cases the information requested has since been received; consent has been issued in one case.

Outstanding GLC applications awaiting further information

5 Westminster Bridge Road, SE1
Agricultural Restoration
Anti-racist Awareness
Battersea Park
Burgess Park
Burgess Park
Burgess Park
Burgess Park
Carrington House Support Team
Civil Defence Video Films
Cromwell Road/Ashburn Place*
Dial-a-Ride
East London Family Service Unit
Finsbury Park
GLC Arts & Recreation Department
Housing Advisory Centre
Indemnity
Indemnity to Employees
Jubilee Gardens, Lambeth
LFB Training Centre
LFB Training Centre
Londoners Action Kit
Mile End
Mile End Park
Mile End Park
Mile End Park
Mile End Park
Parliament Hill
Roundhouse Arts Centre*†
Sidworth Street, Hackney
Spar Housing Association
St. Hilda's East
Thames Road Civic Amenity Site*
Trinity College
Unit 1, Parkhouse Trading Estate*
Victoria Park-Burdett Gardens
Woolwich Common/Nightingale Place
Yarnton Way, Thamesmead

Notes:

* Information now received.
†Consent given on 10 March.

Mr. Tony Banks asked the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 6 March 1986, if he will give the dates on which the Greater London council applied for each of the 58 applications for consent which have been outstanding for more than two months.

Mr. Tracey: A list of these applications, together with details of the dates on which they were received, is as follows. One of these has since been given consent and five have been refused consent.

Applicant	*Date*
1985 Brent Carnival*	4 October 1985
5, Westminster Bridge Road, SE1	30 August 1985
Accommodation for the Homeless	25 October 1985
Agricultural Restoration	6 June 1985
Anti-Racist Activity*	27 September 1985
Anti-Racist Awareness	14 June 1985
Battersea Park	15 July 1985
Burgess Park	15 July 1985
Burgess Park	15 July 1985
Burgess Park	15 July 1985
Burgess Park	15 July 1985
Car Park at Feelon Place	19 November 1985
Carrington House Support Team	9 December 1985
Civil Defence Video Films	27 March 1985
Cromwell Road/Ashburn Place	9 December 1985
Dial-a-Ride	1 August 1985
Disability Resource Team	11 November 1985
East London Family Service Unit	8 July 1985
Finsbury Park	15 July 1985
GLC Arts and Recreation Department	23 October 1985
Hockey Development*	5 December 1985
House Condition Survey	9 December 1985
House Condition Survey	9 December 1985
Housing Advisory Centre	23 December 1985
Indemnity	22 July 1985
Indemnity to Employees	26 September 1985
Improvement of Properties in Brixton	20 December 1985
Jubilee Gardens, Lambeth	12 December 1985
LFB Training Centre	1 August 1985
LFB Training Centre	1 August 1985
Local Household Survey	19 November 1985
Londoners Action Kit	17 July 1985
Market Road Recreation Site	23 December 1985
Market Road Recreation Site	20 December 1985
Mile End	15 July 1985
Mile End Park	15 July 1985
Mile End Park	15 July 1985
Mile End Park	15 July 1985
Mile End Park	15 July 1985
Neasden Rail Freight Depot	12 November 1985
One Islington*	5 November 1985
Parliament Hill	15 July 1985
Prince Regents Lane	20 December 1985
Prince Regents La Recreation	23 December 1985
Roundhouse Arts Centre†	17 July 1985
Sidworth Street, Hackney	23 December 1985
Spar Housing Association	26 November 1985
Sports Assistance*	20 December 1985
St. Hilda's East	8 July 1985
St. Paul's Recreation Site	20 December 1985
St. Paul's Recreation Site	23 December 1985

Applicant	Date
Thames Road Civic Amenity Site	23 December 1985
Tower Hamlets	6 December 1985
Trinity College	15 July 1985
Unit 1, Parkhouse Trading Estate	29 July 1985
Victoria Park Burdett Gardens	30 September 1985
Woolwich Comm/Nightingale Place	9 December 1985
Yarnton Way, Thamesmead	18 July 1985

Notes:
* Consent refused 6 March 1986.
† Consent issued 10 March 1986.

Local Authorities (Grants)

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish, for each local authority, the reductions in block grant, compared with the December block grant entitlements in columns 6, 7 and 8 of the tables showing grant entitlements, consistent with the guaranteed total of recycled grant for 1986-87.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Authorities block grant entitlements will depend on their own spending decisions. This information is not yet available. A wide range of spending assumptions would produce £500 million of grant for recycling.

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the extra block grant available to local authorities in 1986-87 in addition to the £8,280 million originally announced in December 1985.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: £22 million. I refer the hon. Member to my answer of 12 February 1986, at column 463, to the hon. Member for Hyndburn (Mr. Hargreaves) for details.

Local Authority Housing

Mr. Marlow asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has as to the average cost in inner city areas per unit of accommodation of *(a)* housing management and *(b)* housing repairs and maintenance for local authority housing.

Sir George Young [*pursuant to his reply*, 7 March 1986, c. 286]: In 1984-85, inner city authorities spent on average £213·9 per dwelling on supervision and management for their housing stock, and £257·5 per dwelling in revenue expenditure on repairs and maintenance.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Potatoes

Mr. Colin Shepherd asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the total hectarage of potatoes grown in the United Kingdom in the crop year 1985-86; and how much of this was subject to the ordinary levy of the Potato Marketing Board.

Mr. Gummer: The total field area of potatoes in the United Kingdom in the crop year 1985-86 is provisionally forecast as 192,300 hectares. All plantings of potatoes in Great Britain by producers registered with the Potato Marketing Board are subject to the board's ordinary area levy. The board estimates that such plantings amounted to 162,720 hectares in 1985-86, of which approximately 8,500 hectares were also subject to the payment of excess area levy.

The difference between the areas of potatoes in the United Kingdom and in Great Britain is accounted for by plantings in Northern Ireland (13,000 hectares approximately), plantings by unregistered producers in Great Britain (5,000 hectares approximately) and by the fact that the PMB statistics are based on planted area, which disregards unplanted parts of fields, such as headlands and ditches (11,000 hectares approximately).

Farm Prices

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will resist any proposals in the European Economic Community Agriculture Council on farm prices which would breach the strict budgetary controls on spending agreed at the Dublin summit.

Mr. Jopling: I have made it clear to the Council that the Government oppose the Commission's proposals for the 1986-87 price fixing because among other things they would breach the reference framework for 1986 as presently calculated.

Spending Trends

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when the Commission last submitted a monthly report to the Council of Ministers about trends in agricultural spending under paragraph 6*(b)* of the decision of the Council of 4 December 1984; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jopling: The Commission has not recently produced a formal monthly report to the Council but makes available to the member states each month a detailed analysis of current agricultural expenditure.

EC (Expenditure)

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if the Commission has submitted any report to the Council of Ministers under the early warning procedure of possible budget overruns on agricultural spending under paragraph 6(b) of the decision of the Council of 4 December 1984 in the current calendar year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jopling: The Commission has not specifically reported under this procedure but has included in its 1986 price fixing proposals an analysis of the budgetary situation, which indicated that, in its view, a supplementary budget will be required in 1986.

Waste Dumping (River Tyne)

Dr. David Clark asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many occasions in the last 12 months the MV David Marley and the MV Adderstone have requested a location fix from the coastal radar station whilst dumping waste off the mouth of the River Tyne under licence.

Mr. Gummer: I understand that the MV David Marley and the MV Adderstone have their own equipment to establish their position at sea and therefore have not

needed to request location fixes from the coastal radar station during disposal operations off the mouth of the River Tyne.

Broilermeat and Chickenmeat

Mr. Eadie asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the imports of broilermeat and chickenmeat in Scotland, England and Wales in the years 1983, 1984, 1985 and to the nearest available date in 1986; and if he will give the ports of entry.

Mr. Gummer I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Frozen Chickens (Imports)

Mr. Eadie asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many prosecutions took place for imported frozen chickens in 1983, 1984, 1985 and to the nearest available date in 1986; and if he will list the countries involved in the imports.

Mr. Gummer: The port health and food and drugs authorities are responsible for enforcement of the Imported Food Regulations 1984 and the European Community's regulations on the water content of frozen chickens. They are not required to inform my Department of prosecutions but I am aware of two successful prosecutions for excess water content since 1983—one in December 1985 and the other in February 1986. The countries of origin were France in the first case and Denmark in the second.

EC (Farm Statistics)

Mr. Foulkes asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list for each year since 1979 for the European Community as a whole *(a)* the amount devoted in the European Community budget to agriculture, *(b)* the estimate of the number of farmers in the European Community and *(c)* the cost per farmer of the common agricultural policy.

Mr. Jopling: The information requested is as follows:

(a) Cost of the common agricultural policy excluding fisheries

	Mecus
1979	10,834·4
1980	11,900·0
1981	11,531·0
1982	13,021·9
1983	16,582·0
1984	19,031·6
1985	20,594·7

The 1985 figure is for Budget appropriations net of transfers; those for earlier years are outturn.

(b) Censuses of Community farmers are not carried out on an annual basis. In 1977 the number of agricultural holdings in the Community of Nine and Greece was 6,520,000. For 1983, the latest year for which figures are available, the number of holdings in the Community of Ten is provisionally put at 6,518,000.

(c) On the basis of Community holdings of 6,520,000 the cost per holding of the common agricultural policy is

	Ecus
1979	1,662
1980	1,825
1981	1,769
1982	1,997
1983	2,543
1984	2,919
1985	3,159

Pesticides

Mr. McCrindle asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will introduce maximum pesticide residue levels for all crops in collaboration with other European Economic Community countries; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: Certain maximum residue levels for pesticides on fruit and vegetables have been adopted by the European Community and these have been notified to food and drugs authorities in the United Kingdom as presumptive standards under the Food Acts. Proposals for maximum residue limits for certain pesticides on cereals and on foodstuffs of animal origin are still under discussion in the Community.

Sellafield

Mr. Frank Cook asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what limits are placed on the chemical, as distinct from radiochemical, constituents of discharges from Sellafield to the Irish sea; and if he will place in the Library a copy of the authorisations issued to British Nuclear Fuels Ltd. in this respect.

Mr. Waldegrave: I have been asked to reply.

Under the Control of Pollution Act 1974 conditions to control discharges into coastal waters have recently been introduced. Under these conditions BNFL made application to the North-Western water authority to discharge components which are not radiochemical and thereby obtained deemed consent to continue its discharges to the Irish Sea. The authorisation is on the public register and a copy will be placed in the Library. The conditions for discharge will be periodically reviewed.

Intervention Stores

Mr. Teddy Talyor asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the total amount of various perishable foodstuffs and fish, respectively, which were withdrawn from the market by the intervention board in 1985; and what part of each of these totals was destroyed.

Mr. Gummer [*pursuant to his reply*, 4 March 1986, c. *89*]: Estimated 1985 United Kingdom production of apples, pears, cauliflowers and tomatoes was 731,800 tonnes of which 16,663 tonnes (2·3 per cent) were withdrawn from the market and 11,660 tonnes (1·6 per cent.) destroyed. Provisional landings of fish in the same period were 753,000 tonnes of which 36,784 tonnes (4·9 per cent.) were withdrawn and 456 tonnes (0·06 per cent.) destroyed.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Wines, Spirits, Beer and Tobacco

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many workers were employed in the wines and spirits industry in Northern Ireland in June 1979; and how many at the latest available date;

(2) how many workers were employed in the brewing industry in Northern Ireland in June 1979; and how many at the latest available date;

(3) how many workers were employed in the tobacco industry in Northern Ireland in June 1979; and how many at the latest available date.

Dr. Boyson: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Contraceptives (Minors)

Mrs. Ann Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he has any plans to circulate doctors in Northern Ireland to ensure that they are aware that the guidelines on the issuing of contraceptives to minors do not apply in that region.

Mr. Needham: I have no plans to circulate doctors at this stage. The advice on family planning in Northern Ireland, which has not changed since 1975, is to be reviewed in the light of the Law Lords' judgments in the Gillick case and the revised guidance on provision of contraceptives to minors issued recently by the Department of Health and Social Security. Doctors in Northern Ireland will be notified of the results of this review—confirming the existing guidance or advising of any changes in the guidance, as appropriate.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Housing Benefit

Mr. Andrew Bowden asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many pensioner households lost all housing benefit as a result of the changes which came into effect in November 1985; and, of these, how many were tenants and how many owner-occupiers.

Mr. Major: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

Mr. Kirkwood asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what has been the average delay between claiming, and receiving the first payment of, housing benefit for each year since the system was introduced.

Mr. Major: Responsibility for the administration of the housing benefit scheme rests with the individual local authorities. Information about the speed with which claims are processed is not collected centrally.

Severe Weather Payments

Mr. Madden asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many claimants in Bradford have received exceptionally severe weather payments in 1986; if he will list the number of payments made each week, to date, in the current year; how many other offices of his Department in west Yorkshire have made such payments this year; if he will give information about weekly payments made by each office, to date, this year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: Information on the number of single payments made for extra fuel used during the recent period of exceptionally severe weather is not yet available. When the period during which such payments are likely to be so made is over, each local office will be asked to make a return giving the total number of payments made, and the total cost of such payments.

Abortions

Mr. John Mark Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what are the abortion rates among resident girls under 16 years of age between March 1984 and June 1985.

Mr. Hayhoe: The table shows quarterly numbers and rates for March 1984 to June 1985 inclusive, together with an annual figure and an annual rate for 1984, for notifications of legal abortions carried out under the Abortion Act 1967.

Legal abortions to resident women aged under 16. England and Wales. Numbers and rates per 1,000 women March 1984 to June 1985.

Quarter	*1984*		*1985*	
	Number	*Rate per 1,000 women**	*Number*	*Rate per 1,000 women**
March	1,067	1·43	985	1·32
June	973	1·30	925	1·24
September	1,017	1·36		
December	1,048	1·41		
Total†	4,158	5·58		

* The rates (per 1,000 women) for the under 16 age-group are based on the population of women aged 14-15. The denominator is the mid-1984 estimated resident population figure.
† Includes 53 late notifications not assigned to any quarter of 1984.

Administration (Staffing)

Mr. Greenway asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many staff, whole-time equivalents, were employed by his Department on National Health Service administration in 1978-79 and in the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Whitney: The number of staff employed in the Department of Health and Social Security on work relating to the administration of the National Health Service in 1978-79 was 1048. This compares with the latest available figure for the current year, 1985-86, of 772.

NHS (Drug Purchasing)

Mr. Greenway asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what the National Health Service expects to spend on the purchase of drugs in 1986-87 compared with 1985-86 and 1984-85.

Mr. Hayhoe: The information requested is:

Drug Expenditure (England)

£ million

Year	*Family Practitioner Services*	*Hospital and Community Health Services*	*Total*
1984-85	1,195	279	1,474
1985-86	*1268	‡—	—
1986-87	†1,365	‡—	—

* (provisional).
† (estimated).
Note:
‡ Health authority expenditure on drugs is available only for past financial years.

Departmental Office, Bloomsbury

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many of the live caseloads at Bloomsbury local Department of Health and Social

Security office, Tavistock square, are still awaiting the November 1985 benefit uprating; and how many are still awaiting the November 1984 uprating.

Mr. Major: None. Both benefit uprating exercises have been completed.

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many new claims for social security were made in the past 12 months to the Bloomsbury local Department of Health and Social Security office at Tavistock square; how many of these are still awaiting assessment; and how long they have, on average, been awaiting assessment.

Mr. Major: Information is not available in the precise form requested. 12,228 supplementary benefit claims were cleared in the 12 months up to 11 February 1986. On that date 202 claims were still awaiting assessment. On average, claims are processed within three weeks; this includes the time taken, in some cases, to collect additional information from claimants.

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many live claims for social security the Bloomsbury local Department of Health and Social Security office at Tavistock square is currently handling.

Mr. Major: On 11 February 1986 the total number of live cases was 9,194. This is marginally more than the figure for claimants receiving supplementary benefit on that date, as it includes some cases of claimants whose benefit entitlement had recently finished.

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many requests for home visits have been received by Bloomsbury local Department of Health and Social Security office, Tavistock square, in the past 12 months; how many are currently outstanding; and, on average, for how long they have been outstanding.

Mr. Major: Records are not kept of the number of requests for home visits. In the 12 months up to 11 February 1986, 3,775 home visits were made and 178 visits were outstanding on that date. This includes visits initiated by the local office. Over the 12 months period, visits have taken on average about three to four weeks to clear, but now they are being made more quickly.

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will state the approved and actual staffing levels at the Bloomsbury local Department of Health and Social Security office, Tavistock square, in March 1981, March 1983, March 1985 and today; and if he will give the number of live claims in the office for each of these dates.

Mr. Major: Information is not available in the precise form requested. The information that is available is as follows:

	Complement March	*Staff in post on 1 March*	*Number of cases in action—February*
1981	52	*	*
1983	67	75	7,239
1985	76	92	8,682
1986	90	94	9,194

* Not available

Note In July 1984 there was a boundary change which resulted in five posts being transferred from Bloomsbury area office to Euston integrated local office.

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many urgent needs payments have been made in the last 12 months by the Bloomsbury local Department of Health and Social Security office, Tavistock square; and how many are currently outstanding.

Mr. Major: In the 12 months up to 11 February 1986, 1,557 urgent needs payments were made and on that date (the latest for which figures are available) none was outstanding.

Taste and Smell Mechanism

Mr. Pawsey asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) how many people are estimated to have suffered from loss of sense of smell in 1985, 1975, 1965 and 1956;

(2) what are the principal reasons known to his Department for loss of the sense of smell;

(3) what hospitals specialise in treatment for loss of smell.

Mr. Whitney: In many cases loss of sense of smell is a side-effect or symptom of an underlying condition. The principal reasons for temporary loss of sense of smell are common ailments such as colds and hay fever. Head injury or local trauma can also result in loss of this sense, which can on occasion be long-lasting or permanent. Causes of loss of sense of smell are too diverse for reliable estimates to be made of numbers of people affected. Such conditions are treated, in hospital or in the community, according to clinical indications. Some need no treatment and for others, unfortunately, no reliable treatments are yet available. We are not aware of any hospital specialising in this.

Mr. Pawsey asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what research sponsored by his Department has taken place and is taking place into how the taste and smell mechanism works;

(2) what research sponsored by his Department is currently taking place into the loss of the sense of smell.

Mr. Whitney: The Department has not sponsored nor is currently sponsoring any research into how the taste and smell mechanism works or into the loss of sense of smell. The main Government-funded body undertaking bio-medical research is the Medical Research Council, which is funded by grant-in-aid from the science Vote of the Department of Education and Science.

Ageusic Anosmic

Mr. Pawsey asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what grants are made by his Department to Ageusic Anosmic.

Mr. Whitney: We have received no application for grant-aid from this organisation.

Residential Care (Supplementary Benefit)

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is his estimate of the number of persons in residential care who are disaggregated for the purposes of supplementary benefit but whose partners are still asked to contribute to their maintenance as a liable relative; what is his policy in such circumstances where the partner is in employment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: There are no figures from which such an estimate could be made, but the number of cases where a liable relative is required to contribute when supplementary benefit is paid in respect of a spouse in residential care is thought to be small. In considering any liability to maintain under the supplementary benefit legislation, account is taken of any contribution already being made towards the claimant's accommodation.

Organ Transplants

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will give his Department's best estimate of the percentage of the population who *(a)* take kidney donor cards, *(b)* fill in kidney donor cards and *(c)* carry kidney donor cards; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Whitney: A Gallup poll conducted on behalf of the British Kidney Patient Association in January this year suggested that 21 per cent. of the population carried an organ donor card and that a further 7 per cent. had an organ donor card which they were not carrying at the time. We would like all people who are willing for their kidneys and other organs to be used for transplantation after their death to sign and carry a donor card and to let their relatives know.

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if any assessment has been made of the number of occasions in which the next-of-kin of dead persons have expressed regret at not having been asked permission to remove the organs of the dead person for transplant purposes; if he will consider commissioning a short inquiry to research such donor organ losses; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Whitney: We are not aware of any such assessment. The decision whether organs are to be removed from cadavers is a clinical one for the doctors concerned, but nevertheless it is helpful if relatives inform the doctors if they know that a dead person wished to be an organ donor. I informed the hon. Member in my reply of 4 March, at column *123*, of a study which we are considering supporting.

Infertility

Mrs. Ann Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many women per thousand population have sought treatment for infertility in each of the last five years for which figures are available in *(a)* England and Wales and *(b)* Northern Ireland.

Mr. Hayhoe: Information collected centrally is given in the table for the most recent years available. Figures for Wales and Northern Ireland are a matter for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales and Northern Ireland.

NHS non-psychiatric hospitals, England

Year	*Estimated number of female in-patient and day cases treated for infertility per thousand population*
1979	0·92
1980	1·11
1981	1·07
1982	0·93
1983	1·04

Mrs. Ann Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what information he has concerning the total cost to his Department of the treatment for infertility of women in their main childbearing years in *(a)* Northern Ireland and *(b)* England and Wales in each of the last five years for which figures are available.

Mr. Hayhoe: I regret this information is not available centrally.

Venereal Disease

Mrs. Ann Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what information he has concerning the number of women aged over 24 years per 1,000 women in the population who sought treatment for venereal diseases in *(a)* England and Wales and *(b)* Northern Ireland in each of the last five years for which figures are available;

(2) what information he has concerning the number of women aged under 24 years per 1,000 women in the population who sought treatment for venereal diseases in *(a)* England and Wales and *(b)* Northern Ireland in each of the last five years for which figures are available.

Mr. Hayhoe: Statistics on sexually transmitted diseases by age group are collected centrally only for primary and secondary syphilis and post pubertal gonorrhoea. Figures for Wales and Northern Ireland are a matter for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales and Northern Ireland. The available information is given in the table.

New cases seen at National Health Service clinics, England

Women aged over 24 years per hundred thousand population ages 25 to 59

	Primary and secondary syphilis	*Post pubertal gonorrhoea*
1980	0·89	61·59
1981	0·87	52·15
1982	0·70	55·65
1983	0·50	47·63
1984	0·51	44·96

New cases seen at National Health Service clinics, England

Women aged 24 years and under per hundred thousand population ages 15 to 24

	Primary and secondary syphilis	Post pubertal gonorrhoea
1980	3·32	400·40
1981	2·88	368·15
1982	2·14	363·89
1983	1·58	350·49
1984	1·52	353·40

Cervical Cancer

Mrs. Ann Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what information he has concerning the incidence of cervical cancer per 1,000 women in the population *(a)* in England and Wales and *(b)* in Northern Ireland in women aged under 24 years in each of the last five years for which figures are available;

(2) what information he has concerning the incidence of cervical cancer per 1,000 women in the population *(a)* in England and Wales and *(b)* in Northern Ireland in women aged over 24 years in each of the last five years for which figures are available.

Mr. Hayhoe: The tables show the latest available information on registrations of newly diagnosed cases or malignant neoplasm of cervix uteri, and of carcinoma-in-situ of cervix uteri.

Registrations of carcinoma in-situ of cervix uteri women aged 25 years and over

Year	Number	Rate per 1,000 population of women aged 25 years and over
England and Wales		
1978	3,618	0·21
1979	3,994	0·24
1980	4,331	0·26
1981	5,171	0·31
1982	5,015	0·30
Northern Ireland		
1978	*	
1979	*	
1980	53	0·12
1981	45	0·10
1982	55	0·12

1978—ICD (8) 234·0.
1979-1982 ICD (9) 233·1.
* Figures included in total for malignant neoplasms of cervix uteri.

Women aged 24 years and under

Year	Number	Rate per 1,000 population of women aged 24 years and under
England and Wales		
1978	316	0·04
1979	300	0·03
1980	369	0·04
1981	397	0·05
1982	412	0·05
Northern Ireland		
1978	*	
1979	*	
1980	10	0·03
1981	3	0·01
1982	14	0·04

1978—ICD (8) 234·0.
1979-1982 ICD (9) 233·1.
* Figures included in total for malignant neoplasms of cervix uteri.

Registrations of malignant neoplasms of cervix uteri women aged 25 years and over

Year	Number	Rate per 1,000 population of women aged 25 years and over
England and Wales		
1978	3,826	0·23
1979	3,843	0·23
1980	3,918	0·24
1981	3,981	0·24
1982	3,867	0·23
Northern Ireland		
1978	*117	*0·26
1979	*138	*0·31
1980	71	0·16
1981	89	0·19
1982	79	0·17

1978—ICD (8) 180.
1979-1982—ICD (9) 180.
* Figures include an unspecified number of carcinoma in-situ registration.

Women aged 24 years and under

Year	Number	Rate per 1,000 population of women aged 24 years and undere app
England and Wales		
1978	46	0·01
1979	36	0·004
1980	45	0·01
1981	43	0·004
1982	42	0·004
Northern Ireland		
1978	*4	*0·01
1979	*6	*0·02
1980	2	0·01
1981	0	—
1982	4	0·01

1978—ICD (8) 180.
1979-1982—ICD (9) 180.
* Figures include an unspecified number of carcinoma in-situ registration.

Contraception

Mrs. Ann Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what information he has concerning the total amount paid to doctors specifically for the prescription of contraceptive drugs and devices per 1,000 population in *(a)* England and Wales and *(b)* Northern Ireland in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available.

Mr. Hayhoe: General medical practitioners do not receive any specific payment for prescribing contraceptive

substances or any other drugs and appliances. For the provision of contraceptive services (which may or may not include the prescribing of contraceptive substances) payments per 1,000 population were made to general medical practitioners in England and Wales as follows:

	£
1975-76	67·73
1976-77	162·75
1977-78	171·38
1978-79	190·15
1979-80	226·34
1980-81	305·58
1981-82	348·79
1982-83	393·60
1983-84	432·50
1984-85	497·48

Matters relating to Northern Ireland are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Expenditure on Contraceptive Services Fees England and Wales

Year	*Population '000*	*Ordinary £*	*By '000 Pop £*	*I.U.D. £*	*By '000 Pop £*	*Total*
1984-85	49,763·6	20,517,188	412·29	4,239,353	85·19	497·48
1983-84	49,653·7	18,154,729	365·63	3,320,337	66·87	432·50
1982-83	49,601·4	16,474,830	332·14	3,048,509	61·46	393·60
1981-82	49,599·3	14,591,951	294·20	2,707,771	54·59	348·79
1980-81	49,282·6	12,589,968	255·46	2,470,083	50·12	305·58
1979-80	49,206·2	9,161,969	186·20	1,975,345	40·14	226·34
1978-79	49,153·7	7,854,468	159·79	1,492,144	30·36	190·15
1977-78	49,151·9	7,576,386	154·14	847,168	17·24	171·38
1976-77	49,173·0	7,459,048	151·69	543,862	11·06	162·75
1975-76	49,186·8	3,189,165	64·84	142,014	2·89	67·73

Expenditure.
Figures derived from the Annual Accounts of District Health Authorities in England and Wales (Include FPC Payments)

The population figures used are the Mid-Year estimates of resident population. It is emphasised that these figures make no allowance for differences in morbidity and age/sex structure of particular populations.

Conception Statistics

Mrs. Ann Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many girls per 1,000 population aged under 16 years at the time of conception have *(a)* given birth, *(b)* miscarried or *(c)* had abortions in (i) Northern Ireland and (ii) England and Wales in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available.

Mr. Hayhoe: The following table shows the information available on conceptions that lead to maternity in Northern Ireland and England and Wales and those that are terminated under the Abortion Act 1967 in England and Wales. Information on miscarriages is not available in the form requested.

Conceptions to Girls aged under 16 at the time of conception per 1,000 girls aged 13-15

Year of Conception	*Northern Ireland* Conceptions leading to maternities†*	*England and Wales‡ Conceptions leading to maternities†*	*England and Wales‡ Conceptions terminated under the 1967 Abortion Act*
1974	3·2	4·4	4·1
1975	3·2	3·9	4·2
1976	2·3	3·7	4·2
1977	2·7	3·6	4·0
1978	3·0	3·7	3·9
1979	2·5	3·4	4·2
1980	2·4	3·3	3·9
1981	2·2	3·1	4·1
1982	2·6	3·4	4·4
1983	3·0	3·6	4·7

Notes:
* The 1967 Abortion Act does not apply to Northern Ireland.
† Maternities at which one or more live or still births occurred.
‡ Conceptions to residents of England and Wales only.

Pelvic Inflammatory Diseases

Mrs. Ann Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many women per 1,000 population sought treatment for pelvic inflammatory diseases in each of the last five years for which figures are available in *(a)* Northern Ireland and *(b)* England and Wales.

Mr. Hayhoe: I regret this information for England is not available as it is not collected centrally. Figures for

Wales and Northern Ireland are a matter for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales and for Northern Ireland.

Leeds Western Health Authority

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what representations he has received from the chairman of the Yorkshire regional health authority regarding the chairmanship of the Leeds western health authority;

(2) why Mr. Robin Good is not being reappointed as chairman of the Leeds western health authority;

(3) what representations he has received from medical staff in relation to the chairmanship of the Leeds western health authority; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hayhoe: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

AIDS

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what experts have been consulted by his Department to assist with preparation for the forthcoming information campaign on acquired immune deficiency syndrome.

Mr. Hayhoe: Members of the expert advisory group on AIDS and representatives of the Health Education Council, the Terrence Higgins Trust, the Standing Conference on Drug Abuse and the College of Health have been among those consulted.

Prescription Charges

Mr. McCrindle asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what representations he has received concerning blanket exemptions from prescription charges for the elderly and children; and if consideration has been given to a means-tested system for prescription charges within those categories; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hayhoe: Many representations are received regarding the prescription charge exemption arrangements, the vast majority of which seek additions to the present exempt categories. Automatic exemption of the elderly and children was one of the many points raised in a letter from the British Medical Association.

As I made clear in my statement to the House on 10 March at column *671*, I have no plans to change the existing range of exemptions or the list of exempted medical conditions.

Hypothermia

Mr. Wilson asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list, for the United Kingdom, and for England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland separately, the number of deaths with any mention of hypothermia on the death certificate for the year 1985; and if he will break down the figures by *(a)* month of the year and *(b)* by age groups (i) under 25, (ii) 25 to 34, (iii) 35 to 44, (iv) 45 to 54, (v) 55 to 64, (vi) 65 to 74, (vii) 75 to 84 and (viii) 85 years and over.

Mr. Whitney [*pursuant to his reply*, 3 March 1986, c. *64*]: The tables show the provisional numbers of deaths with any mention of hypothermia on the death certificate, irrespective of whether it did or did not appear as the underlying cause of death for the United Kingdom and its constituent countries for 1985 by age group and month of registration.

Numbers of deaths with any mention of hypothermia, by age and month of registration: United Kingdom, England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales (provisional)

United Kingdom

Month of registration	*Under 25*	*25-34*	*35-44*	*45-54*	*55-64*	*65-74*	*75-84*	*85+*	*Total*
January	1	2	2	2	13	54	124	78	276
February	2	2	2	7	8	32	85	68	206
March	2	2	1	8	12	24	67	41	157
April	4	1	2	3	5	22	38	23	98
May	2	2	—	3	4	8	29	11	59
June	1	1	3	—	—	3	9	11	28
July	1	—	—	1	2	4	6	5	19
August	2	—	—	—	1	3	9	5	20
September	—	—	3	1	—	2	8	6	20
October	3	—	1	2	2	8	10	5	31
November	1	2	1	4	5	9	27	25	74
December	3	2	—	3	11	16	36	23	94
Total	22	14	15	34	63	185	448	301	1,082
*England**									
January	1	1	2	1	8	29	88	60	190
February	2	1	2	7	8	25	63	52	160
March	2	2	1	6	11	17	52	32	123
April	4	1	2	2	2	15	26	20	72
May	2	2	—	3	3	6	22	6	44
June	1	1	3	—	—	—	7	9	21
July	1	—	—	—	2	3	4	2	12
August	1	—	—	—	1	3	3	2	10
September	—	—	2	—	—	1	4	3	10
October	3	—	1	1	—	4	10	2	21
November	1	1	1	1	2	3	15	13	37
December	2	2	—	3	7	8	28	13	63

Month of registration	Under 25	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-74	75-84	85+	Total
Northern Ireland									
January	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	1
February	—	—	—	—	—	1	1	2	4
March	—	—	—	—	—	2	—	—	2
April	—	—	—	—	—	—	3	—	3
May	—	—	—	—	1	1	1	—	3
June	—	—	—	—	—	2	1	—	3
July	—	—	—	1	—	1	1	1	4
August	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	1	2
September	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	1
October	—	—	—	1	—	1	—	—	2
November	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0
December	—	—	—	—	—	2	—	—	2
Total	0	0	0	2	1	10	10	4	27
Scotland									
January	—	1	—	—	5	19	29	11	65
February	—	1	—	—	—	5	18	11	15
March	—	—	—	2	1	2	10	9	24
April	—	—	—	1	2	6	7	3	19
May	—	—	—	—	—	—	3	4	7
June	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	1	2
July	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	2	3
August	1	—	—	—	—	—	4	2	7
September	—	—	1	—	—	—	2	3	6
October	—	—	—	—	2	3	—	1	6
November	—	1	—	3	2	6	10	10	32
December	1	—	—	—	4	5	8	9	27
Total	2	3	1	6	16	46	93	66	233
Wales									
January	—	—	—	1	—	6	6	7	20
February	—	—	—	—	—	1	3	3	7
March	—	—	—	—	—	3	5	—	8
April	—	—	—	—	1	1	2	—	4
May	—	—	—	—	—	1	3	1	5
June	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	1	2
July	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
August	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	1
September	—	—	—	1	—	1	1	—	3
October	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	2
November	—	—	—	—	1	—	2	2	5
December	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	1	2
Total	—	—	—	2	2	15	23	17	59

* Includes 4 deaths of persons usually resident outside England and Wales.

Social Security Reform

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what will be the housing benefit paid to *(a)* a single person aged under 18 years, *(b)* a single person aged under 25 years, *(c)* a single person aged 25 to 59 years, *(d)* a couple without children where rates and rent are (i) 25 per cent., below average, (ii) average and (iii) 25 per cent., above average and gross weekly income is (1) at the level of unemployment benefit, (2) earnings of £45, (3) £55, (4) £65, (5) £75, (6) £85, (7) £95, (8) £110 and (9) £125 a week under current provisions and under the assumptions set out in the technical annex to Cmnd. 9691; and in each case at what level of income the entitlement to housing benefit would disappear.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 5 March 1986, c. *157-58*]: The information is given in the following tables.

Table 1 Amounts of weekly housing benefit under current scheme

		Weekly Income Level Gross Earnings								
	Unemployment Benefit	£45	£55	£65	£75	£85	£95	£110	£125	At which housing benefit no longer payable
Single person 16-17 years										
—average rent and rates	17·09	18·00	14·70	11·40	7·20	3·00	0	0	0	91·85
—75 per cent. average rent and rates	14·07	14·25	11·85	8·55	4·35	0	0	0	0	84·71

	Unemployment Benefit	Weekly Income Level Gross Earnings £45	£55	£65	£75	£85	£95	£110	£125	At which housing benefit no longer payable
—125 per cent. average rent and rates	19·44	20·85	17·55	14·25	10·95	5·85	1·65	0	0	98·99
Single person 18-24 years										
—average rent and rates	17·09	18·00	14·70	11·40	7·20	3·00	0	0	0	91·85
—75 per cent. average rent and rates	14·07	14·25	11·85	8·55	4·35	0	0	0	0	84·71
—125 per cent. average rent and rates	19·44	20·85	17·55	14·25	10·95	5·85	1·65	0	0	98·99
Single person 25-59 years										
—average rent and rates	17·09	18·00	14·70	11·40	7·20	3·00	0	0	0	91·85
—75 per cent. average rent and rates	14·07	14·25	11·85	8·55	4·35	0	0	0	0	84·71
—125 per cent. average rent and rates	19·44	20·85	17·55	14·25	10·95	5·85	1·65	0	0	98·99
Couple under 60 years										
—average rent and rates	18·32	19·00	19·00	18·72	15·53	12·23	8·26	1·76	0	114·35
—75 per cent. average rent and rates	14·25	14·25	14·25	14·25	12·68	9·38	5·41	0	0	107·21
—125 per cent. average rent and rates	21·17	23·75	23·75	21·68	18·38	15·08	11·11	4·81	0	121·49

Table 2 Amounts of weekly housing benefit under proposed scheme

	Unemployment Benefit	Weekly Income Level Gross Earnings £45	£55	£65	£75	£85	£95	£110	£125	At which housing benefit no longer payable
Single person 16-17 years										
—average rent and rates	8·16	2·54	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	50·26
—75 per cent. average rent and rates	3·67	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	41·68
—125 per cent. average rent and rates	12·65	7·44	2·75	0	0	0	0	0	0	60·98
Single person 18-24 years										
—average rent and rates	12·80	7·59	2·78	0	0	0	0	0	0	61·03
—75 per cent. average rent and rates	8·31	3·10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	50·32
—125 per cent. average rent and rates	17·29	12·08	7·76	2·45	0	0	0	0	0	70·17
Single person 25-59 years										
—average rent and rates	17·96	12·87	8·55	3·51	0	0	0	0	0	71·52
—75 per cent. average rent and rates	13·47	8·38	4·06	0	0	0	0	0	0	62·39
—125 per cent. average rent and rates	22·45	17·36	13·04	8·00	2·96	0	0	0	0	80·65
Couple under 60 years										
—average rent and rates	16·96	17·96	17·96	16·00	10·61	5·56	1·87	0	0	85·50
—75 per cent. average rent and rates	12·47	13·47	13·47	11·51	6·12	1·06	0	0	0	98·77
—125 per cent. average rent and rates	21·45	22·45	22·45	20·49	15·10	10·06	6·54	0	0	108·19

Notes to tables

1. The average weekly rent and domestic rates levels have been assumed to be £13·80 and £5·20 respectively.
2. The current minimum rent rebate and rate rebate levels of 50 pence have been used throughout.
3. The level at which housing benefit is not payable had been calculated for an earning single person/couple.
4. In the case of an earning couple it has been assumed that only one partner is in work.
5. The current income tax allowances, national insurance rates and unemployment benefit rates have been used throughout.
6. Other assumptions are based on the illustrative figures used in the technical annex to Cmnd. 9691, with a 20 per cent. contribution towards rates.

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is his estimate of the number of *(a)* single people aged under 18 years, *(b)* single people aged 18 years to 24 years, *(c)* single people aged 25 years to 59 years and *(d)* couples where the claimant is aged under 25 years who currently receive some housing benefit; and approximately how many in each category will lose all their housing benefit under the proposals in the Social Security Bill, on the assumptions in the technical annex to Cmnd. 9691.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 5 March 1986, c. *157-58*]: Using the illustrative assumptions in the technical annex to the White Paper (Cmnd. 9691) the information requested is as follows:

Housing benefit: caseload and numbers affected by proposals

Thousands, Great Britain

	Estimated number of recipients under present scheme	*Estimated number of recipients affected with no residual entitlement*	
		with 20 per cent. rates contribution	*without 20 rates contribution*
Single aged under 18 years	*	*	*
Single aged 18 to 24 years	210	20	10
Single aged 25 to 59 years	640	90	60
Couples, head aged under 25 years	30	10	10

Notes:
(1) Present scheme estimates have been made on a similar basis to that outlined in paragraphs 2.6 to 2.10 of the technical annex. The caseloads shown here are consistent with the caseloads underlying the technical annex tables.
(2) The estimates are not adjusted for differential take-up.
(3) The estimates exclude single parents and couples with children.
(4) * Indicates estimates of less than 5,000.

Sickness Benefit

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many people received reduced rate sickness benefit in each of the last five years for which figures are available; and how many of these subsequently obtained invalidity benefit.

Mr. Major [*pursuant to his reply*, 5 March 1986, c.*161*]: The number of claims giving rise to entitlement to sickness benefit at the reduced rate is provisionally estimated at 41,000 in 1983-84 and 28,000 in 1984-85. The number of these going on to obtain invalidity benefit was 4,000 and 5,000, respectively. I regret that the information is not available for earlier years.

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what would be the annual cost of paying sickness benefit to anyone who had paid or been credited with contributions on earnings of 25 times the lower earnings limit in the relevant tax year.

Mr. Major [*pursuant to his reply*, 5 March 1986, c. *161*]: On the evidence available, an estimated £120 million in 1986-87, of which approximately £2 million is attributable to people with contributions paid or credited on earnings between 25 and 49 times the lower earnings limit.

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is his estimate of the number of people each year who will fail to qualify for invalidity benefit as a result of the proposal in the Social Security Bill to abolish reduced rate sickness benefit.

Mr. Major [*pursuant to his reply*, 5 March 1986, c.*161*]: 6,500 in 1987-88.

Genito-Urinary Treatment

Mr. Barnett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what genito-urinary treatment he expects will be available on a continuing basis in the Lewisham and North Southwark district after 1 April.

Mr. Whitney [*pursuant to his reply*, 10 March 1986]: I understand that the Lewisham and North Southwark health authority has recently consulted publicly on the future of genito-urinary services in the district. Services are now concentrated, with the local community health council's agreement, on one site, the Lloyd clinic at Guy's hospital. The health authority plans to improve the service during the next financial year by providing extra walk-in clinics.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Civil Service

Mr. Ralph Howell asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give the figures for the years 1979, 1980, 1981, 1982, 1983 and 1984, respectively *(a)* for the cost of the Civil Service and *(b)* the average cost for each civil servant; and if he will break down the average cost for each civil servant into pay, national insurance, superannuation, and other costs, such as office space, heating, lighting, car allowance, travel allowance, telephone, and so on.

Mr. MacGregor: As part of the introduction of the new running costs control system reported in the 1986 public expenditure White Paper (Cmnd. 9702), there has been a reappraisal of the allocation of costs between the administrative and operational areas and some changes have been made. The reappraisal has been reflected in the running costs figures for all years in Cmnd. 9702. The adjustments were not, however, made to the level of detail requested by my hon. Friend, and I am not, therefore, able to provide the precise information requested.

Although there was a significant reduction in manpower numbers during the last five years, not all of the related costs (such as accommodation) can be expected to reduce at the same rate. The cost per head figures should be viewed in that light. However, the following figures are based on those published in Cmnd. 9702.

	1980-81	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*
	£ million outturn	*£ million outturn*	*£ million outturn*	*£ million outturn*	*£ million outturn*
Departmental running costs*	7,959	8,995	9,799	11,293	11,986

	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85
Staff totals (average staff in post):					
Civil Service (excluding Trading Funds)	665,300	648,400	630,600	611,100	596,000
Armed Forces†	58,000	58,000	58,000	58,000	58,000
Northern Ireland Civil Service	28,600	27,200	26,200	25,500	25,000
	£	£	£	£	£
Costs per head (cash terms)	10,585	12,261	13,709	16,258	17,652

* Departmental running costs comprise pay costs, personnel overheads, accommodation costs, office services and other services. They do not include notional accruing pensions liability, pensions in payment or capital expenditure.

† Running costs coverage for 1986-87 has been revised to include the pay of armed forces personnel only where they are engaged in headquarters and support activities; 58,000 for 1986-87 (Cmnd. 9702). Figures for these activities are not available for the period covered by this table, so the 1986-87 figures of 58,000 has been used throughout.

Building Industry (VAT)

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be *(a)* the revenue impact and *(b)* the employment impact of (i) removing value added tax on building improvements and alterations and (ii) reducing value added tax on all building repairs, improvements and alterations to 5 per cent.; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: It is estimated that the net revenue loss in a full year at 1986-87 prices of removing value added tax on building improvements and alterations would be of the order of £500 million; that of imposing value added tax on all building repairs, improvements and alterations at a rate of 5 per cent. would be about £450 million. It is not possible to estimate the effects on employment.

Wines and Spirits, Beer and Tobacco

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the duty payable on a hectolitre of 1037 deg original gravity beer in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available; by how much in cash percentage terms such duty increased in each of those years; and what is this percentage increase in real terms.

Mr. Brooke: The information is as follows:

	Post-Budget duty rate of 1037 OG (£ per hectolitre)	Percentage increase in cash terms	Percentage increase in real terms
1975	10·31	—	—
1976	11·94	15·8	− 0·6
1977	*13·14	10·0	− 5·0
1978	13·14	Nil	− 7·7
1979	13·14	Nil	−11·8
1980	16·10	22·5	3·9
1981	22·20	37·9	23·3
1982	25·16	13·3	4·3
1983	26·64	5·9	1·2
1984	29·60	11·1	5·8
1985	31·82	7·5	1·3

* This duty rate became effective from 1 January 1977 as a result of a 10 per cent. regulator surcharge on the 1976 Budget duty rate.

Mr. Parry asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much revenue was raised through excise duty on tobacco in each of the past six years.

Mr. Brooke: The information requested is as follows:

£ million

	Excise duty	VAT*
1979-80	2,584	450
1980-81	2,821	630
1981-82	3,420	720
1982-83	3,446	770
1983-84	3,806	810
1984-85	4,140	860

*Estimates based on consumers' expenditure data.

Mr. Parry asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many petitions have been sent to him by hon. Members opposing any substantial increase in duty on tobacco products; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: About 200 such petitions have been forwarded by hon. Members.

Mr. Parry asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how much revenue was raised through excise duty on wines and spirits in each of the past six years;

(2) how much revenue was raised through excise duty on beer in each of the past six years.

Mr. Brooke: I refer the hon. Member to table 3 on page 32 of the report of the Commissioners of Her Majesty's Customs and Excise for the year ended 31 March 1985. There is a copy in the Library of the House.

Lump Sum Payments

Mr. Blair asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many appeals against decisions of inspectors of taxes to seek to assess lump sum payments made in consideration of taking up employment have been heard before *(a)* the general commissioners and *(b)* the special commissioners in the last 12 months; and in how many cases the commissioners have held the payments not to be assessable;

(2) if he will introduce legislation to amend the law relating to the assessment to income tax on lump sum payments made in consideration of taking up employment; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what clearances have been given by the Inland Revenue for schemes providing for payment of a lump sum contingent on a partner remaining within a particular partnership for a specified period that they will not seek to tax them as income; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moore: I shall let the hon. Member have replies as soon as possible.

Glynn Valley (Tree Felling)

Sir Richard Body asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish in the *Official Report* the text

of the letter from the Treasury Solicitor to Mr. Michael Robertson, the owner of a designated woodland in the Glynn valley, regarding tree felling.

Mr. Jopling: I have been asked to reply.

The Treasury Solicitor's office has been unable to trace any letter to Mr. Michael Robertson on the subject of tree-felling. It did, however, write on 4 February 1986 to solicitors representing Messrs. C. M. Robertson (Developments) Ltd., of which Mr. Robertson is chairman, concerning the release of an area of woodland from the Forestry Commission's dedication scheme. The text of this letter is reproduced. The release of this woodland from dedication does not, however, imply permission to fell trees: any felling done is subject to the provisions of the felling regulations.

Dear Sirs

DEDICATED WOODLANDS (RELEASE)
PENGELLY ESTATE CORNWALL
C M ROBERTSON (DEVELOPMENTS) LIMITED

I have been advised by the Forestry Commission that your Clients own the freehold of 3·3 hectares of land coloured red on the plan enclosed in duplicate which is at present restricted by Deed of Forestry use. At request the Forestry Commissioners have agreed to release the land from this restriction.

Accordingly I should be grateful if you would provide me with a copy of the conveyance vesting this land in your Clients, including a copy or extract from the plan attached or referred to therein.

In the meantime I enclose a draft Deed of Release together with a copy thereof for your use please return one copy approved by you. I will then order plans and engross the Deed of Release, to be executed solely by the Commissioners.

Once the Deed has been sealed I will complete the matter, sending you the original Deed which you will note attracts no Stamp Duty. Thereafter the cancellation of the relevant Land Charge Entry will be dealt with and I will let you have a copy of the cancellation certificate for your records.

The terms agreed for the release were that the Commission should bear your Clients' reasonable legal costs in this matter. In submitting your invoice (which I suggest that you should so at completion) it would be helpful if you could show VAT separately, although it should be marked 'this is not a tax invoice'. The Owners should only be reimbursed for such of the VAT on your costs as the Owners cannot recover otherwise; so that I can tell how far your Clients should be reimbursed for VAT kindly return the enclosed VAT Certificate filled in on behalf of your Clients.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours faithfully
K. Dowling
for the Treasury Solicitor

Exchange Rates

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 4 March, *Official Report*, column *95*, what was the value of the dollar against the European currency unit on the date when the Council of Ministers agreed the financial guideline for agricultural market support expenditure in the current year, and what is the current value of the dollar against the European currency unit.

Mr. Brooke [*pursuant to his reply*, 10 March 1986]: The reference framework for 1986, including the financial guideline for agricultural market support expenditure was established by the Council of Ministers on 8 July 1985. The dollar/ECU exchange rate on that day was $1=1.347 ECU. On 7 March 1986, the exchange rate was $1=1.041 ECU. The 1986 EC budget was prepared using an assumption of an exchange rate of $1=1·20 ECU.

Mr. R. H. Hoyle

Mr. Steen asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will instruct the enforcements office of the Inland Revenue to refrain from instituting proceedings against Mr. R. H. Hoyle of Golden Plam, Kingswear, relating to his alleged liability for his deceased brother's debts, until the outstanding matters raised in connection with this case in correspondence between the hon. Member for South Hams and the Financial Secretary, the right hon. Member for Croydon, Central (Mr. Moore) have been resolved; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moore [*pursuant to his reply*, 10 March 1986]: I have written to my hon. Friend in reply to his recent letter about Mr. Hoyle's case.

Civil Service Contributory Pension

Mr. Soley asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress he has made in his consideration of proposals for a Civil Service contributory pension system.

Mr. Brooke [*pursuant to his reply*, 10 March 1986]: The Government have no plans to place the principal Civil Service pension scheme on an overtly contributory basis in the foreseeable future.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 12 March 1986

WALES

Primary Schools (Anglesey)

Mr. Best asked the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the last time there was a report by Her Majesty's Inspectorate on every primary school on Anglesey.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The information requested is not readily available prior to 1978. Since then one formal inspection report, in respect of Moelfre county primary school, has been issued. Two reports on individual schools and the report of a survey of 22 schools in the Bodedern and Holyhead areas are currently being prepared. Over the same period all primary schools were visited as part of a survey of mathematics in primary schools in Anglesey and various schools will have been visited as part of more general surveys.

ENVIRONMENT

Rural Development Areas

63. **Mr. Maclean** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the operation of rural development areas.

Mrs. Rumbold: Rural development areas are those areas to which the Development Commission gives priority and directs most of its resources. They were designated by the Developmet Commission using criteria laid down by my Department and came into operation in June 1984, replacing the former special investment areas.

Within rural development areas, county committees consisting of local authority representatives, rural community councils and other local agencies, draw up rural development programmes. These are made up of a range of economic and social development projects which may extend over several years, together with an outline strategy for five to 10 years ahead. These programmes help the commission to target its resources on projects which make the best contribution to rural development.

Agricultural Land

Mr. Cash asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will seek to amend planning law so that, in the light of current production levels of certain kinds of agricultural produce, some agricultural land may be made available for other uses.

Mr. Tracey: There is no provision in the Town and Country Planning Acts which specifically prevents agricultural land being developed. Individual development proposals must be considered on their merits, having regard to all material considerations.

Nuclear Waste

Mr. Michael Brown asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has about research by bodies, other than the Nuclear Industry Radioactive Waste Executive, into the safety of underground disposal of nuclear waste; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: My Department commissions research on the long-term safety of underground disposal of nuclear waste and is advised by the independent United Kingdom Radioactive Waste Management Advisory committee on the adequacy of work undertaken by the nuclear industry and other bodies.

The United Kingdom also contributes to international research programmes of the Commission of the European Communities, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development/Nuclear Energy Agency and the International Atomic Energy Authority. The results of research funded by my Department are published.

An annual report on my Department's research is available from the Department of the Environment publication sales unit, Victoria road, South Ruislip 4HQ 0NZ.

Basildon Development Corporation

Mr. Amess asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the arrangements for winding up the Basildon development corporation.

Mr. Tracey: My right hon. Friend has considered the point made by my hon. Friend in the rates debate on 25 February at column 846. Nevertheless, he has concluded that it is right to proceed with our previously announced plan. An order under section 41 of the New Towns Act 1981 has been made today, the effect of which will be to transfer the property rights and liabilities of the corporation to the Commission for the New Towns on 1 April 1986, and to dissolve the corporation on 30 June 1986. The Commission for the New Towns will round off the programme of development in the town, and will in particular carry forward a number of important road schemes. The commission will pursue the question of transfer of the corporation's rented housing to the district council and, meanwhile the position of the corporation's tenants will be unaffected by the change from the corporation to the commission.

Home Improvement Grant Schemes

Ms. Harman asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many local authorities currently operate home improvement grant schemes.

Sir George Young: I would expect all local authorities to operate home improvement grant schemes. Under part VII of the Housing Act 1974, all authorities are required to approve mandatory grants provided certain qualifying conditions are met, and must therefore operate schemes for approving and giving such grants. Other grants under this legislation are discretionary, and local authorities may approve applications in such circumstances as they see fit.

Forestry

Mr. Corrie asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the basis for the claim by the chairman of the Nature Conservancy Council in the latest annual report that, in forestry management in the north of Scotland, planting grant is often not obtained or even sought.

Mrs. Rumbold: The NCC is aware of only two cases of planting without grant, both in southern Scotland. The chairman has apologised to me for the inaccuracy. A correction has appeared in the NCC publication "Topical Issues" and will be repeated in the next annual report.

Religious Buildings

Mr. Cormack asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many *(a)* churches of the Church of England, *(b)* religious buildings belonging to other denominations and *(c)* redundant places of worship are currently listed as buildings of historic interest; and whether he will publish a list by county in the *Official Report*.

Mr. Tracey: I will write to the hon. Member.

Council House Sales

Mr. Chope asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what proportion of its stock of *(a)* council houses, and *(b)* council flats and maisonettes the Greater London council and each London borough has sold since April 1979.

Sir George Young: Separate numbers of houses and of flats owned by each authority are not available centrally.

For estimates of all completed sales and of sales of flats by each of the authorities, and all sales as a percentage of the total stock, I refer my hon. Friend to the table placed in the Library in response to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Murphy) on 19 December at column 259.

Hard-to-let Dwellings (Southampton)

Mr. Chope asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many hard-to-let dwellings are owned by Southampton city council.

Sir George Young: Numbers of difficult-to-let dwellings in April 1985 were reported in each authority's housing investment programme return, which is available in the Library.

Local Government Expenditure

Mr. Lilley asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish, for each local authority in England *(a)* the percentage by which its expenditure is above or below its grant-related expenditure assessment in 1985-86, *(b)* the rank order of spending relative to grant-related expenditure in 1985-86 within each authority's class, *(c)* its percentage above or below its expenditure target in 1985-86, *(d)* the rank order of spending relative to target in 1985-86 within each authority's class, *(e)* the cash growth (as a percentage) in net expenditure between 1978-79 and 1985-86, *(f)* the rank order of percentage growth in net current expenditure between 1978-79 and 1985-86 within each authority's class, *(g)* the cash growth (as a percentage) in net current expenditure between 1981-82 and 1985-86 and *(h)* the rank order of percentage growth in net current expenditure between 1981-82 and 1985-86 within each authority's class.

Mr. Waldegrave: I have today placed in the Library tables which give the information requested.

Housing Renewal

Mr. Iain Mills asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has reached a decision on proposals submitted to his urban housing renewal unit for schemes in the west midlands.

Sir George Young: Earlier today, on a visit to Coventry, I had the opportunity to visit the Hillfields estate. I was also able to announce my right hon. Friend's favourite response to a proposal for a scheme on the Hillfields estate which the city council has worked up in close consultation with my Department's urban housing renewal unit. We hope to reach agreement with the council on further schemes in due course.

The council has already introduced responsive locally based management arrangements on the estate, and is seeking to deliver a comprehensive housing service and to involve the residents in day-to-day decisions which affect their lives. The proposal agreed with the unit will be a major further step in the process of improving the quality of life on this rundown estate.

The Hillfields estate consists of 644 dwellings in ten tower blocks. Coventry city council has submitted a bid for resources from the unit's targeted housing investment programme allocation to replace defective heating systems, improve insulation, and provide extra lifts. I have agreed in principle to an additional HIP allocation of up to £779,000 for this programme in 1986-87. The estate will also benefit from a community refurbishment scheme, the aim of which is to enable unemployed people drawn mainly from the estate to work on improvements to the environment and communal areas. The scheme will provide up to 70 jobs, and will be funded by the Government's community programme, subject to the agreement of the Manpower Services Commission's area board, and my Department's urban programme. Resources of the order of £999,000 will be involved, including some £320,000 of urban programme funding, which I am pleased to approve in principle.

I warmly welcome the development of this package, and the close co-operation between the council and my Department's regional office and the staff and consultants of the urban housing renewal unit, which has made them possible.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Rape Victim (Photograph)

Mr. Corbett asked the Attorney-General, whether he will institute proceedings against the proprietor and editor of *The Sun* under section 4 of the Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act 1976 in relation to the publication of a photograph of an alleged rape victim on 10 March.

The Attorney-General: The prohibitions contained in section 4(1) of the Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act 1976 only apply to publications and broadcasts which take place after a person is accused of a rape offence. No person has yet been accused of the offence to which the report and photograph published in *The Sun* on 10 March refers and accordingly no offence is disclosed.

ENERGY

Hinckley Point (Incident)

Mr. Ashdown asked the Secretary of State for Energy when he expects to receive the Central Electricity Generating Board's board of inquiry report on the site incident at Hinckley Point power station on 29 November 1985; and if he will publish this.

Mr. Goodlad: I understand that the CEGB intends to publish the main conclusions of its inquiry shortly.

Bates Colliery

Mr. Lester asked the Secretary of State for Energy what discussions he has had with the chairman of the National Coal Board about the redeployment of men from Bates colliery.

Mr. Peter Walker: I understand from the chairman of the National Coal Board that all men wishing to continue working in the industry will be able to transfer from Bates to other collieries in the north-east. Reports that deputies at Bates would not be offered an equivalent job on transfer are completely untrue.

I understand that almost half the NACODS members at the pit have expressed a preference for redundancy and the remaining 48 who prefer transfer to equivalent jobs have been given details of 85 jobs which are available at pits in the area.

PRIME MINISTER

Local Authority Services (Competition)

Mr. Chope asked the Prime Minister, pursuant to the reply of 27 February, *Official Report*, columns *668-9*, when she expects a legislative opportunity to become available to implement the Government's intentions to extend compulsory competition and separate accounting to a wider range of local authority purposes; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I cannot anticipate the contents of future years' legislative programmes. However, the continuing low level of voluntary exposure of local authority services to competition reinforces this Government's determination to introduce appropriate legislation as soon as possible.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Clerks and Officers of the House

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the hon. Member for Berwick upon Tweed as representing the House of Commons Commission, how many *(a)* Clerks and *(b)* Officers of the House are in post; and how this compares with each of the past 30 years.

Mr. Beith: The table gives the information requested, as at five-yearly intervals. Clerks of the House are of course also Officers of the House and therefore the numbers in the second column include those in the first column.

	Number of Clerks	*Number of Officers*
1955	34	57
1960	34	58
1965	36	62
1970	45	83
1975	52	103
1980	61	122
1985	60	132
10 March 1986	60	139

HOME DEPARTMENT

Prisons (Correspondence)

Miss Maynard asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) whether, in the light of the proceedings taking place in the European Commission of Human Rights regarding privileged correspondence between solicitors and their inmate clients, he will issue guidance to solicitors on how letters covered by rule 37A(1) should be marked so as to distinguish them from mail liable to be opened and read pursuant to rule 33;

(2) what steps he is taking to protect from examination correspondence between an inmate and his solicitor regarding an adjudication in respect of which the inmate has a right to consult a solicitor; and if he will make a statement of the basis of application of prison rule 37A(1) to such correspondence.

Mr. Mellor: Prison rule 37A(1) protects correspondence between a prisoner and his legal adviser in connection with legal proceedings to which the prisoner is party from being read or stopped, unless the governor has reason to suppose that it contains matter not relating to the proceedings. This protection is extended by standing order 5B 35 to correspondence between a prisoner and his legal adviser about an adjudication. Neither the prison rule nor the standing order prevents correspondence from being opened and examined—for example, to check for illicit material.

The examination of legal correspondence is the subject of a case under the European convention on human rights. My right hon. Friend will want to consider the app j 1-9arrangements for the examination of such correspondence, including the points raised in these questions, in the light of the outcome of that case.

Prisoners (Illness)

Mr. Janner asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners were diagnosed as suffering from terminal illness, while serving sentences in prisons in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, respectively, during each of the past five yars for which records are available; in each such year, how many of such prisoners were discharged by reason of their terminal illness; and how many of such persons who were released and not released, respectively, were young offenders.

Mr. Mellor: In 1985 in England and Wales eight people were released early from their sentences by exercise of the royal prerogative of mercy on the compassionate grounds that they were fatally ill. One was a young offender. In the preceding four years the figures were: 1980, seven (including one young offender released from borstal); 1981, four; 1982, three; 1983, five; and

1984, two (including one young offender). The other information requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Information regarding other parts of the United Kingdom should be sought from my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Mr. Janner asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department to whom reports of the diagnosis of terminally ill inmates in prisons and in young offenders' institutions, respectively, are made; and when and by whom they are made.

Mr. Mellor: Prison standing orders require the medical officer of an establishment to submit a report if he is of the opinion that the illness of any prisoner is likely to terminate fatally within a brief period; that the risk of further crime is past; that the prisoner is in a fit state to be moved; and that there is reason to believe that he has relatives or friends who will be able and willing to take care of him if he is released. The report is submitted to the director of prison medical services, with a copy to the criminal department, so that consideration may be given to the prisoner's early release.

Kevin Capenhurst

Mr. Janner asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what date he was informed of the terminal illness of Kevin Capenhurst, an inmate of the Glen Parva young offenders' centre, and by whom.

Mr. Mellor: I understand that the case of Kevin Capenhurst was brought to the attention of the then Home Secretary on 20 August 1985.

Youth Custody Trainees

Mr. Janner asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects reconviction rates for youth custody trainees to become available.

Mr. Mellor: A special study is planned of the re-conviction rates of those given youth custody and results are expected to become available during 1987.

AMAC-1 Riot Control Vehicle

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the Metropolitan Police have any intention of testing the AMAC-1 riot control vehicle.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I understand that there are no present plans to do so.

Police (Disciplinary Proceedings)

Mr. Stern asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will state the number of cases in the last five years of which he is aware in which disciplinary proceedings against a serving police officer led, wholly or partially, to the deprivation of pension rights.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Power to require the forfeiture of pension rights is not available in disciplinary proceedings, but arises from the Police Pensions Regulations 1973, as amended. Outside the Metropolitan police, forfeiture of pension is at the discretion of the police authority, and there are no central records of the number of occasions on which the power has been used. However, except in cases of treason, or of offences under the Official Secrets Act involving a sentence of 10 years imprisonment or more, the police authority may not award forfeiture of pension unless a certificate has been issued by the Secretary of State to the effect that the offence committed in connection with the person's service as a member of a police force has either been gravely injurious to the interests of the state, or was liable to lead to serious loss of confidence in the public service. The number of such certificates issued in the past five years is as follows:

	Number
1981	—
1982	—
1983	2
1984	—
1985	1

In the Metropolitan police area the Secretary of State, as police authority, determines the extent as well as the principle of forfeiture. The number of awards of forfeiture of pension, in whole or in part, in the past five years is as follows:

	Number
1981	4
1982	1
1983	2
1984	—
1985	2

Prison Hospitals (Food Hygiene)

Mr. Richard Shepherd asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the hospitals attached to prisons for which he is responsible; whether he will give the dates on which they were last inspected in respect of food hygiene; and whether the person responsible for any such inspection was a qualified environmental health officer.

Mr. Mellor: There are in-patient facilities at all prison establishments except Castington, Gringley, Morton Hall and Shrewsbury. Food is supplied from the prison kitchen. The serving and associated hygiene arrangements in the in-patient areas are inspected annually by catering managers qualified to undertake hygiene inspections in accordance with the requirements of the Food Hygiene (General) Regulations 1970. Random checks are also carried out by suitably qualified departmental safety officers and by a qualified environmental health officer of the Department of Health and Social Security. In addition, the prison medical officer carries out a twice-yearly inspection of all aspects of an establishment in the interests of the health and hygiene of the inmates and staff.

Information as to when each facility was last inspected is not held centrally and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Computer-Aided Facial Recognition System

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the present state of development of the computer-aided facial recognition system (Wisard); for what purposes he envisages its use; whether he will publish the results of any feasibility study being conducted; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw: Wisard is a commercially available system for recognising images and is not specifically a facial recognition system. The Home Office scientific research and development branch is, however, considering commissioning a feasibility study to assess whether it could be used for recognising faces. This proposal is still at an early stage and decisions have not yet been taken as to whether the results of any trials should be published.

Effra Parade, Brixton (Eviction)

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether a water cannon from the Greenwich holding centre was present at an eviction carried out by Metropolitan police officers in Effra parade, Brixton, on 26 March 1984; and whether police on that occasion were equipped with CS gas, plastic bullets, or firearms.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis informs me that none of the police officers deployed at the scene was equipped with CS gas, plastic baton rounds, or firearms. No water cannon were present.

Closed Circuit Television

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will indicate the nature and purpose of the closed circuit television equipment being purchased under a £500,000 contract with Philips Business Systems by the Metropolitan police; and where the equipment will be used.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that the contract is for a computerised control system for use with the existing closed circuit television cameras which monitor traffic in London. The new control equipment will be sited in Metropolitan police operations rooms at New Scotland Yard and in the traffic control room at county hall.

Remand Prisoners

Mr. Favell asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to seek to reduce the time spent by remand prisoners awaiting trial.

Mr. Mellor: Field trials are in progress to prepare for statutory time limits on periods in custody awaiting trial; we are seeking to improve case management in the magistrates courts; and my right hon. and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor has provided more resources for the Crown court.

Community Radio

Mr. Dubs asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to announce to whom he has awarded the experimental community radio licences.

Mr. Giles Shaw: My right hon. Friend shall make an announcement when he has completed his consideration of the recommendations made by the advisory panel on community radio.

Mr. Mazooz Rashid

Mr. Shersby asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish the representations he has received from the hon. Member for Uxbridge concerning the entitlement of Mr. Mazooz Abdul Karim Rashid to remain in the United Kingdom; what investigations his Department have undertaken into this matter; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waddington: It is not normal practice to disclose information about a person's immigration status, nor would it be appropriate to publish my hon. Friend's representations in this case, but I shall reply to his letter of 16 January shortly.

Crime Statistics

Mr. Hickmet asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he has taken to seek to prevent the premature retirement of Metropolitan police officers; what effect such retirement has had upon effective and efficient policing; and, if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 February, c. *178*]: The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis tells me that he has set in hand a review to identify the most common reasons for premature retirement from the force. It is not possible to quantify their effect on police effectiveness.

Metropolitan Police

Mr. Hickmet asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about the retirement of police officers from the Metropolitan police; what is the average length of service of a police officer of the rank of sergeant or below, and how many are serving with a length of service of *(a)* two years, *(b)* between two and three years *(c)* between three and four years *(d)* between four and five years *(e)* between five and 10 years *(f)* between 10 and 15 years *(g)* between 15 and 20 years *(h)* over 20 years.

Mr. Giles Shaw [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 February, c. *178*]: Under the Police Pensions Regulations 1973, an officer is entitled to receive an ordinary pension on retiring after 25 years' service and a full pension on retiring after 30 years' service. The maximum age of retirement for officers to the Metropolitan police up to and including the rank of chief superintendent is 55. The average length of service in the force of Metropolitan police officers currently serving in the rank of sergeant or constable is 10 years nine months. The table shows the percentage of sergeants and constables in the Metropolitan police who have the lengths of service in that force which are specified in the question.

*Length of service of constables and sergeants in the Metropolitan police**

Length of service	*Percentage of constables*	*Percentage of sergeants*
Under two years	12·7	0·2
Two years and under three	6·0	0·4
Three years and under four	9·5	0·6
Four years and under five	9·9	1·5
Five years and under 10	26·3	28·0
10 years and under 15	11·9	23·4
15 years and under 21	8·9	22·5
20 years and over	14·8	23·4

* This table does not take account of service in other police forces.

Terrorism

Mr. Kaufman asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons were detained under the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1985 for periods in excess of 96 hours; how many persons so detained were charged with any offence; how many persons so detained were convicted of an offence; of which offences they were convicted; and how many persons were so convicted on the basis of evidence obtained by virtue of their detention in excess of 96 hours.

Mr. Hurd [*pursuant to his reply*, 25 February, c. *485*]: In 1985, 64 persons were detained under the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act for periods in excess of 96 hours. Of those, 38 persons were charged with an offence. No further action is to be taken in respect of three of those persons; one person has been convicted of an offence of withholding information under section 11 of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act; and the other 34 are either standing trial or still awaiting trial. The person who was convicted of withholding information made a statement after he had been detained for more than 144 hours, but this was not used in court because he pleaded guilty to the charge.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Scientific Equipment

Sir Trevor Skeet asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science by how much he estimates the cost of scientific equipment has on average moved ahead of the current rate of inflation; and whether the allocation to the University Grants Committee and Advisory Board for Research Councils will be increased to cover the difference.

Mr. Walden: The Advisory Board for the Research Councils estimates that the increasing sophistication of scientific equipment and materials adds an average 10 per cent. a year to their cost over and above average inflation. The allocation of funds for distribution on the advice of the University Grants Committee and the Advisory Board for the Research Councils will be reviewed during the year as part of the annual public expenditure survey. I cannot yet say what the outcome will be. However, the Government's science budget has actually increased in real terms—by 6 per cent. between 1981-82 and 1985-86 measured against average inflation — and on present plans will broadly maintain its value to the end of the decade. The Government's expenditure plans also provide in addition to the £4 million a year for this purpose in the current year, for a further £30 million over the three years 1986-87 to 1988-89 to increase the amount available for the improvement of equipment in selected centres of research in the universities.

Universities (Funding)

Sir Trevor Skeet asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science, how many university centres are being funded by £34 million provided for equipping them to the highest attainable standards; and if he will list the centres involved.

Mr. Walden: The following 19 research groups have so far been chosen to receive funds from the £34 million provided for the improvement of equipment in selected centres of research.

Research groups chosen for support in 1985-86

Professor A. R. Fersht, Chemistry, Imperial College
Professor A. R. Battersby, Organic Chemistry, Cambridge
Professor E. Ash, Electronic and Electrical Engineering, University College London
Sir Peter Hirsch, Metallurgy, Oxford
Professor T. L. Blundell, Birkbeck College, London
Professor A. Broers, Engineering, Cambridge
Professor R. Parsons, Electrochemistry, Southampton
Professor W. J. Brammar, Biochemistry, Leicester
Professor R. J. Donovan, Physical Chemistry, Edinburgh
Professors M. D. Lilly and P. Dunnill, Chemical and Biochemical Engineering, University College, London (interim grant)

Research groups which the University Grants Committee has undertaken to support in 1986-87

Professor M. D. Lilly and P. Dunnill, University College, London
Professor Sir David Phillips, Zoology, Oxford
Doctors Pepper, Willis and Ahmed, Cavendish Laboratory, Cambridge
Dr. Lowe, Biotechnology, Cambridge
Nuclear Structure Group, Physics, Liverpool
Professor P. Cohen, Biochemistry, Dundee
Professor A. W. Gambling, Electronics, Southampton
Professor G. K. Radda, Biochemistry, Oxford
Professor M. W. Roberts, Physical Chemistry, and Professor R. Williams, Physics, University College, Cardiff
Professor A. Keller, Physics, Bristol

The £34 million provision extends over the four financial years 1985-86 to 1988-89.

University Grants Committee

Sir Trevor Skeet asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what account was taken when deciding to reduce Government funding of the University Grants Committee by 2 per cent. per annum of the trends in outgoings in the scientific sector.

Mr. Walden: My right hon. Friend takes all relevant factors into account in considering the future funding of the universities. The suggested reduction in funding of 2 per cent. a year is a planning hypothesis adopted not by my right hon. Friend but by the University Grants Committee to give it some flexibility in allocating resources between institutions and some room for manoeuvre in relation to future levels of inflation. The Government's expenditure plans for 1986-87 to 1988-89 provide for a reduction in funding for the universities of about 1 per cent. a year compared with expected inflation over the same period.

Women Teachers

Mr. Jackson asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many women teachers were employed in secondary education in September 1965, September 1975 and September 1985; and what proportion of the overall number of teachers these figures represent.

Mr. Dunn: The information available on the numbers and percentages of women teachers in maintained secondary* education in England and Wales is as follows:

	Year	*Numbers†*	*Per cent.‡*
1965			
	Full-time‖	59,000	41

	Year	Numbers†	Per cent.‡
	Part-time¶	13,743	81
1975			
	Full-time‖	93,703	43
	Part-time¶	14,073	84
1984			
	Full-time‖	110,366	46
	Part-time●	—	—

* Secondary education includes those teachers whose service is divided between primary and secondary sectors.
† Numbers are head counts for both full and part-time.
‡ Women as a percentage of men and women in the sector.
‖ Numbers are given at 31 March of each year.
¶ Numbers are given at 30 September of each year.
● Separate numbers of men and women are not available for September 1984 but women teachers are estimated to be 85 per cent of total.

Colleges and Academies of Music

Mr. Spearing asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what consultations he has had with representatives of colleges or academies of music concerning any change in the current functions of each institution; with what purpose; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Keith Joseph: As I explained in my reply to my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Mr. St. John-Stevas) on 24 February at columns 430-431, I have met the heads of the music colleges as part of consultations with a number of leading figures in the musical world about the training of talented musicians. In the course of these discussions proposals from the Royal Academy of Music for its future academic development and other possible proposals have been raised.

University Teachers

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what he estimates the effect to be upon the quality of research and teaching in the United Kingdom university system of university teachers leaving their posts to teach in other countries.

Mr. Walden: Some movement of academic staff between nations is desirable. However, there is some evidence that there has recently been a disproportionate movement away from the United Kingdom of staff in certain disciplines. My right hon. Friend has expressed concern about this and is seeking further information about its extent and implications.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many university teachers in the United Kingdom have taken university teaching posts abroad in the past five years; and in what specialities.

Mr. Walden: I will reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Mr. McNamara asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has as to the comparative university salaries of a university lecturer with a Ph.D with seven years' experience, in the European Economic Community, the United States of America, Canada and Australia, respectively.

Mr. Walden: This information is not available centrally.

Civil Research

Sir Trevor Skeet asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has as to how many of the leading industrial states have progressively increased expenditure on civil research over the past five years; and what is the comparative position of the United Kingdom expressed in real terms.

Mr. Pattie: I have been asked to reply.

The available information from international sources relates to gross expenditure, civil and defence, on research and development and is given in the table below.

	Gross R and D expenditure at 1983 purchasing power parities ($ billion)	Percentage increase in gross R and D expenditure in real terms 1979 to 1983
United States	88·3	18
Japan	33·5	44
Germany	18·1	10
France	13·1	17
United Kingdom	12·6	3
Italy	5·9	45
Canada	4·7	32

Source: OECD

EMPLOYMENT

TUC

Mr. Greenway asked the Paymaster General when next he expects to meet the Trades Union Congress to discuss industrial relations.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I have no plans at present to meet the Trades Union Congress to discuss industrial relations.

Industrial Tribunals

Mr. Holt asked the Paymaster General if he has any plans to increase the number of industrial tribunals; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I have no plans to increase the number of industrial tribunals.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Clay asked the Paymaster General if he will state the latest unemployment figures by ward and postal area for Sunderland.

Mr. Lang: The following information is in the Library. Figures are given showing the numbers of unemployed claimants as at 6 February 1986 in the wards of the Sunderland local authority district. Unemployment figures by postal area for this date are not available.

	Number
Bishopwearmouth	1,173
Castletown	782
Central	839
Colliery	718
Deptford and Pallion	1,456
Downhill	1,432

	Number
Ford and Pennywell	2,282
Fulwell	524
Hendon	966
Humbledon	846
Hylton Castle	1,138
Roker and Monkwearmouth	1,163
Ryhope	891
St. Chads	994
St. Michaels	688
Silksworth	1,304
Thorney Close	1,394
Thornhill	479
Southwick	1,164
Hetton No. 1	541
Hetton No. 2	559
Houghton No. 1	755
Houghton No. 2	878
Houghton No. 3	959
Washington No. 1	1,303
Washington No. 2	3,695

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Paymaster General if he will list the total number of new jobs which have become vacant or available in the Wolverhampton area during the last three months, and the specific areas of industry or commerce in which they have arisen.

Mr. Lang: The information is not available as requested. However, data are collected on the number of vacancies notified to jobcentres. The following table gives the numbers of vacancies notified to the Wolverhampton jobcentre between 8 November 1985 and 7 February 1986, analysed according to the 1980 standard industrial classification.

We estimate that nationally only about one third of all vacancies are notified to jobcentres.

Notified vacancies—Wolverhampton jobcentre 8 November 1985 to 7 February 1986

Standard Industrial Classification 1980	*Notified vacancies*
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	4
Coal extraction	0
Mineral oil and natural gas extraction	0
Mineral oil processing	1
Nuclear fuel production	0
Gas, electricity and water	8
Extraction of other minerals and ores	0
Metal manufacture	15
Manufacture of non-metallic products	3
Chemical industry	5
Production of man-made fibres	0
Manufacture of metal goods	70
Mechanical engineering	54
Manufacture of office machinery and data processing equipment	1
Electrical and electronic engineering	15
Manufacture of motor vehicles	8
Shipbuilding and repairing	0
Manufacture of aerospace and other transport equipment	14
Instrument engineering	3
Food, drink and tobacco	8
Textiles	1
Leather, footwear and clothing	29
Timber and furniture	22
Paper, printing, publishing	6
Other manufacturing	9
Construction	53
Wholesale distribution	39
Retail distribution	309
Hotel and catering	99
Repair of consumer goods and vehicles	14
Transport	23
Telecommunications	17
Insurance, banking, finance and business services	105
Public administration and defence	137
Medical and other health services	34
Other services—not elsewhere classified	77
Total	1,183

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Paymaster General how many people resident in the west midlands have withdrawn claims from his Department's offices during the last seven years without listing a new employment post when signing off.

Mr. Lang: My Department does not ask benefit claimants why they cease to sign as unemployed.

Fraud Investigations

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Paymaster General how many cases of legal proceedings have been instituted by fraud officers employed by his Department in the west midlands during the last seven years.

Mr. Lang: Information for the west midlands area is not separately available and no information is held for any period before February 1982. Between February 1982 and December 1985, the total number of legal proceedings instituted by my Department's midlands region against people suspected of making fraudulent claims to benefit was 1,999 but this figure does not distinguish between different parts of the region.

Bitter and Whisky (Prices)

Mr. Allan Roberts asked the Paymaster General if he will list the average price used in compiling the retail price index of *(a)* a pint of ordinary bitter, 1037 original gravity, and *(b)* of a standard measure, one sixth of a gill, of a typical blended Scotch whisky in the years 1960, 1965, 1970, 1975, 1980 and 1985, respectively.

Mr. Lang: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Commissioners of Irish Lights

Mr. John David Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether the Commissioners of Irish Lights have registered with the Fair Employment Agency in respect of employment of staff in Northern Ireland; what information he has on their employment procedures; and if he will make a statement.

Dr. Boyson: The Commissioners of Irish Lights have not signed the Fair Employment Agency's declaration of principle and intent and are not on the agency's register of equal opportunity employers. I have no information on the commissioners' employment procedures.

Schools (Staff Reductions)

Mr. Key asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the schools in Northern Ireland which

have been notified of teaching staff reductions in the school year 1986-87; how many posts will be lost at each of the schools; and if he will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: I shall write to my hon. Friend when the 1986-87 staffing allocations for Northern Ireland schools are finalised.

Students (Travel Grants)

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will review the current provision of travel grants to third level students from or in Northern Ireland particularly those from the western area; and if he will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: A review of the new arrangements was carried out in 1985. It revealed that the majority of students gained under the flat rate arrangements, and that a relatively small number lost. There are no plans to carry out a further review at present.

Enterprise Ulster and Action for Community Employment

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement detailing how the Department of Economic Development calculated its figures for the cost per job in *(a)* Enterprise Ulster and *(b)* Action for Community Employment.

Dr. Boyson: The gross cost per job in Action for Community Employment and Enterprise Ulster is calculated on the expenditure incurred in each programme by the Department of Economic Development.

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement detailing the recommendations in respect of Enterprise Ulster made in the report "Intervention Measures in the Labour Market —An Efficiency Scrutiny", published in January 1985 and outlining what consideration he has given to the content of this report.

Dr. Boyson: The relevant information is contained in pages 4 to 8 of the report, a copy of which will be placed in the Library.

The board of Enterprise Ulster has already implemented some of the report's recommendations, and those dealing with the relationship between Enterprise Ulster and the Action for Community Employment scheme are being taken into consideration in the present review of Enterprise Ulster.

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement detailing the findings and recommendations in respect of Enterprise Ulster contained in the Deloitte, Haskins and Sells study published by the Department of Economic Development, "Report on the Effectiveness and Value for Money of Enterprise Ulster", and outlining what consideration he has given to the content of this report.

Dr. Boyson: I am making arrangements for copies of the report on this study to be placed in the Library.

The recommendations in the report are being taken into consideration in determining the outcome of the present review of Enterprise Ulster.

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what representations he has received about Enterprise Ulster from the Confederation of British Industry, the Northern Committee of Irish Confederation of Trades Unions, and the Manpower Council; and if he will make a statement.

Dr. Boyson: So far I have only received representations from the Manpower Council and I will take into consideration their views and any others received from those organisations before making a decision on the future role of Enterprise Ulster.

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he intends to make the order which would enable Enterprise Ulster to undertake new work after 1 April.

Dr. Boyson: I have no plans to legislate for Enterprise Ulster, pending the completion of the present review of the organisation. If the outcome of this review is a decision to extend the life of Enterprise Ulster, the order will be made as soon as possible.

TRANSPORT

Stansted Airport

Mr. Haselhurst asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has reached a decision on the new safeguarded area of land at Stansted airport; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The White Paper on airports policy, Cmnd. 9542, made it clear that, in view of the decision that a second runway should not be constructed, the area at Stansted airport proposed for safeguarding against incompatible development was too large; and that a smaller area should be identified which might be required for construction of a second terminal if this proved to be justified at some time in the future. We have now agreed the extent of the land which is to be safeguarded for this purpose. This amounts to 327 hectares, of which the BAA already owns 60 per cent., compared with the 1,000 hectares for which safeguarding had originally been sought. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment proposes to issue shortly a direction to Uttlesford district council and Essex county council safeguarding the area of land which has been identified. A map showing the new safeguarded area can be viewed at the airport.

I have written to the BAA asking it to dispose of any landholdings which do not fall within the new safeguarded area, giving priority to farmland.

Rail Electrification

Mr. Snape asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has received a request from Lancashire and Greater Manchester county councils for grant-aid under section 56 of the Transport Act 1968 towards electrification of the Manchester-Blackpool North railway line; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: I considered such an application last year, but announced on 17 January my conclusion that electrification of the route from Manchester to Blackpool would not be cost-effective. Instead, British Rail proposes to introduce new diesel 'sprinter' units, and I am confident these will produce real improvements for passengers virtually equivalent to the benefits of electrification, at substantially less cost to taxpayers and ratepayers.

Electrification would have cost £13 million more net but the trains would have been only one minute faster over this route.

Mr. Snape asked the Secretary of State for Transport what is the total cost of the electrification of the Manchester-Blackpool North railway line.

Mr. David Mitchell: It is estimated that electrification of the Manchester-Blackpool line would cost £23 million. The alternative of diesel sprinter units providing an almost equivalent service leaves the taxpayers and ratepayers £13 million better off.

Trains (Punctuality)

Mr. Pawsey asked the Secretary of State for Transport what information he has about the trend in the standard of train punctuality during the past 12 months.

Mr. David Mitchell: Information for the financial year 1985-86 is not yet available. I understand, however, from British Rail that punctuality so far has been slightly worse than in the preceding year. Taking the network as a whole, the board's own targets have been achieved for non-express trains, but not for express services.

Mr. Pawsey asked the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received about the 1985 Transport Users' Consultative Committee report for north-east England, with particular reference to the trend in train punctuality in 1985 as compared with 1984.

Mr. David Mitchell: I have not received any such representations.

A1 (Lighting)

Mr. Holt asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he has any plans to introduce lighting on the 46 miles of the A1 from its junction with the M18 to the Dishforth roundabout; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: There are no plans at present to install lighting on the unlit lengths of A1 between M18 and Dishforth. I will keep the matter under review.

A1 (Safety Barriers)

Mr. Holt asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he has any plans to provide centre safety barriers on the 31 miles of the A1 from its junction with the M18 to the Dishforth roundabout; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Safety barriers will be provided as part of the improvements planned for the A1 between Bramham crossroads and Dishforth.

The provision of barriers on the section between the M18 and Bramham crossroads will be kept under review.

Goods Vehicle Operator Licensing

Mr. Grylls asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list those who have made representations to his Department in response to the consultation announced on 25 July 1985 about goods vehicle operator licensing; and how many of these seek further strengthening of the environmental provisions.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Responses were received from the following bodies, 20 of which sought a strengthening of the environmental provisions:

Convention of Scottish Local Authorities
Peak District National Park
The Chiltern Society
The Wall's Meat Company Limited
Council on Tribunals
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
SPD Group
Nursling and Rownhams Parish Council
Council for the Protection of Rural England
Chobham Parish Council
British Gas
Freight Transport Association
The Chobham Society
Transport and General Workers Union
The National Farmers' Union
Cleanaway Limited
Road Haulage Association
Borough of Darlington
The Magistrates' Association
Dairy Trade Federation
Leicestershire County Council
Surrey County Council
The National Trust
Civic Trust
Association of Metropolitan Authorities
Food Manufacturers Federation Inc.
J D Atcherley Esq, on behalf of Chobham Residents
Association of District Councils
Hales Containers Limited forwarded by National Association of Waste Disposal Contractors
The National Association of Local Councils
Co-operative Union Limited
Transport 2000
Chemical Industries Association Limited
British Retailers Association
Surrey Heath Borough Council
Exeter Civil Society
The Nottinghamshire Chamber of Commerce and Industry

Mr. Grylls asked the Secretary of State for Transport what stage has been reached in the review of the working of the environmental provisions in goods vehicle operator licensing introduced in the Transport Act 1982, which was announced on 25 July 1985.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: We are considering the views expressed about these provisions. A statement will be made in due course.

Mr. Grylls asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether the review of the working of the environmental provisions in goods vehicle operator licensing will take into account the judgment of the transport tribunal in the case of Surrey Heath borough council v. N.F. T. Distribution Ltd. (No. W.17) issued on 7 February; and whether, in the light of observations made by the transport tribunal, he plans to take steps to change the relevant primary and secondary legislation.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Important issues were raised by the transport tribunal in its judgment on this case and I shall be considering these in the course in the current review of the legislation.

Mr. Grylls asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will issue revised guidance to licensing authorities to reflect the judgment of the transport tribunal issued on 7 February in the case of Surrey Heath borough council v. N.F.T. Distribution Ltd.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: All the licensing authorities are aware of the transport tribunal judgment and I am sure they will have regard to it in dealing with similar cases.

N.F.T. Distribution Ltd.

Mr. Grylls asked the Secretary of State for Transport when the additonal conditions imposed by the transport tribunal on the licence held by N.F.T. Distribution Ltd. for authorised vehicles at its Chobham depot will take effect.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The decision of the transport tribunal takes effect from the date it was made, 5 February 1986.

Heathrow Airport

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Transport what was his reply to the Government of the United States of America in response to their recent representations about charges imposed on United States airlines for the use of Heathrow airport.

Mr. Michael Spicer: My officials met a delegation from the United States of America recently to discuss amongst other things the concerns expressed by their Government to Her Majesty's Government about the proposals for regulating airport charges set out in the Airports Bill. The delegation's main concern was that the Bill should provide adequate means for ensuring that the United Kingdom could fulfil its international obligations. My officials were able to explain how the measures in the Bill would do so: attention was drawn specifically to clause 27 of the Bill.

The United States Government also expressed a general concern about consultation between the British Airports Authority and its airlines, and about the level of charges at Heathrow airport. Although these are matters for the BAA and the airlines, information was provided to correct a number of misunderstandings about these two aspects: in particular about the nature and extent of the consultations which had been conducted and the considerably and progressively reduced level of charges now paid by the United States airlines and other long-haul airlines at Heathrow.

Accident Statistics

Mr. Adley asked the Secretary of State for Transport how many people were killed, and how many injured, on the roads on Sunday 9 March.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Road accident reports are collated monthly by police forces before being checked and passed on magnetic tape to the Department of Transport. Full information covering all of Great Britain for March will not be available before August.

Northern Relief Route

Mr. Cash asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he is yet in a position to announce a decision on a preferred route for the northern relief route to relieve the M6 through the west midlands conurbation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Cormack asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he can now announce his decision on the preferred route for the northern relief route for the west midlands conurbation.

Mr. Richard Shepherd asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether he is yet in a position to announce a preferred route for the north Birmingham relief road; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I am pleased to be able to announce that we have now chosen the route for this very important scheme. Alternative routes were taken to public consultation in 1984.

We have selected the green chasewater and yellow route options, with some local variations. The new road will predominantly follow the existing A5, A38 and A446. It will avoid creating a major new corridor through this sensitive part of the west midlands. It will be an attractive route for north-west/south-east through traffic, as well as helping to stimulate industry in southern Staffordshire.

The decision ends the uncertainty and brings closer the urgently needed relief to the M6. We now intend to press on with the new road as quickly as possible and expect to publish draft orders in early 1988.

British Airways

Mr. Waller asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a further statement about the privatisation of British Airways.

Mr. Ridley: The Government's aim remains to privatise British Airways as soon as possible.

The Government are currently engaged in important negotiations with the United States Government about United Kingdom—United States air services and the competition law that applies to them.

The north Atlantic market is of great importance to all the British airlines which serve it, accounting, for example, for about 23 per cent. of British Airways' total revenue and about 36 per cent. of British Caledonian's total revenue. It is most important for all British airlines, not least British Airways, that we secure an agreement with the United States Government which either enables them to compete on fair and equal terms for all the traffic between our two countries or, failing that, safeguards our vital interests. Without such an agreement the ability of our airlines to maintain or improve their competitive position would be severely undermined. I made our position perfectly clear during my recent visit to the United States. I am hopeful that it will be possible to negotiate acceptable arrangements before the present ones expire this summer, but before we proceed with the privatisation of British Airways we must clarify with the United States Government the air services arrangements which govern a large part of the company's business.

During my visit to the United States of America, I also set out our continuing concern to resolve the serious dispute between our two Governments with regard to the application of United States anti-trust laws to international civil aviation. My officials are in discussion with the United States Departments concerned, but no solution of the problems has yet been found. Until the United States authorities rectify the situation, it is for British Airways and other British airlines to decide how best to deal with the implications of United States anti-trust laws, subject only to such restrictions as Her Majesty's Government may consider it necessary to impose to protect the trading interests of the United Kingdom. The seriousness of the Government's concern is amply demonstrated by the fact that four years after the collapse of Laker Airways, anti-trust litigation arising from it has not yet been concluded. The company has consistently denied any liability in this litigation, which in the view of Her Majesty's Government should not have been brought.

In view of these factors I have decided, with great reluctance, that I can still not set a firm timetable for privatisation for the time being. I shall watch the situation closely, and proceed as soon as I judge the situation to be sufficiently clarified.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Pesticides

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in which counties in England and Wales pesticide registration authorities require products for home and garden use to be packed in child-restraint packages and rodenticides to be used only in tamper-proof bait stations; and what proposals are presently being considered by his Department under the Food and Environment Protection Act 1985 to control packaging on a nationwide basis.

Mr. Gummer: I will reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Milk Quotas

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether progress is being made in permitting greater flexibility in the transfer and acquisition of milk quotas.

Mr. Jopling [*pursuant to the reply*, 5 March, c. *198*]: Since the milk quota system was first introduced, my right hon. Friend and I have been seeking greater flexibility to allow the industry to develop efficiently. After consulting the industry I have concluded that it would be helpful to make greater use of the existing provision in the Community rules under which purchasers of milk may reallocate quota. Within this context there is room for a limited arrangement under which producers may agree to reallocate quota between themselves for up to one quota year.

I am pleased to say that the Dairy Produce Quotas Regulations 1986 which I am laying before the House include provision for such temporary reallocations to be registered by the purchasers of milk (the milk marketing boards). This facility will be available to producers for the new quota year starting on 1 April. This provision in the regulations is in addition to those which I announced in my reply of 6 March to my hon. Friend the Member for Dorset, North (Mr. Baker).

European Community (Food Sales)

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what percentage of the total tonnage of food exported to third countries by the European Economic Commission was sent to East Europe, including the Soviet Union, in the most recent annual period for which figures are available; and what were the comparable percentages in each of the previous 10 years.

Mr. Gummer [*pursuant to his reply*, 10 March 1986, c. *358*]: The information requested is set out for the main agricultural products in the table below. Percentages based on total tonnages may be unduly influenced by variations in the composition of exports to different destinations.

European Community exports of the main agricultural products† to Eastern Europe (including the Soviet Union) as a percentage of the total tonnage of such products exported to third countries*

	percentage
1976	15·4
1977	7·7
1978	15·5
1979	17·7
1980	23·1
1981	26·1
1982	22·1
1983	26·6
1984	23·6

Source: EUROSTAT.
Notes:
* EC9 to 1980, EC10 thereafter.
† Section 0 of the standard international trade classification: this includes most of the major food items and some animal feed but excludes tobacco, alcoholic beverages and oils.

DEFENCE

Airbus

Mr. Normanton asked the Secretary of State for Defence if any study has been made of the feasibility of the joint Anglo-French exploitation of the Airbus airframe for use as an advanced airborne early warning and communications systems; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norman Lamont: No such study has been carried out by my Department.

SCOTLAND

Forestry Commission Sales

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list in the *Official Report* the name, location, including county and map reference, size, purchaser, and price received, in respect of each of those forest estates sold to date by the Forestry Commission throughout Great Britain.

Mr. John MacKay: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Youth Training

Mr. Hirst asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many YTS places are currently taken up by Scottish local authorities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Local authorities in Scotland at present have approval for 11,499 places under one year YTS, 9,143 of which are currently filled. Scottish local authorities have been major participants in and have contributed greatly to the success of one-year YTS. I am confident that the great majority will support the new two-year YTS which starts on 1 April 1986.

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Scotland how many individuals are currently receiving YTS training in Greenock and Port Glasgow; and how many of these trainees are females.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The information is not available in the precise form requested. However, in the local authority district of Inverclyde, which includes Greenock and Port Glasgow, some 813 individuals, of whom 368 are females, currently receive YTS training.

NHS (Management System)

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the introduction to date in the National Health Service in Scotland of a general management system consequent upon the Griffiths report.

Mr. John MacKay: All 15 health boards have general managers in post and the Common Services Agency is recruiting one. I expect to receive in April the study which has been commissioned as the basis for deciding how general management can best be developed in units. The Scottish Home and Health Department will undertake consultations between May and mid-July on a draft circular on the development of unit general management. Work is continuing on further aspects of general management within the Scottish Health Service.

Non-advanced Further Education

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what measures have been taken to improve the quality of work-related non-advanced further education in Strathclyde and in Scotland as a whole.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Following the publication of the 16-plus action plan in 1983 a major reform of the framework of non-advanced further education and training for those over the age of 16 has led to the introduction throughout Scotland of new modular programmes of study leading to the award of the new SCOTVEC national certificate. Students (including adults wishing to retrain) can take programmes of modules which cover a whole range of vocational and personal skills. The new system enables students to identify the components they require for a chosen job or career, or to complement what they are learning at work, or to change direction and build on to existing qualifications without loss of credit. The modules can be adapted easily and quickly to meet the changing needs of industry and to take account of the impact of new technology. The system allows the development of closer links between education and training schemes, such as YTS, which are designed to prepare young people for working life; YTS trainees can receive the SCOTVEC national certificate for their "off-the-job" training. These recent important developments in Scotland will be enhanced by the introduction of the two-year YTS on 1 April which will include measures to further improve the quality of training of young people on and off the job. Through the Manpower Services Commission the Government also provide a wide range of adult training for employed and unemployed people. All of these measures are available in Strathclyde as elsewhere in Scotland. The Government's initiatives have helped place Scotland in the vanguard of further education and training progress.

Fisheries Protection Vessel

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to make an announcement concerning the placing of a contract for a new fisheries protection vessel.

Mr. John MacKay: Tenders have been invited for the construction of a fishery protection vessel to replace the FPV Norna which was commissioned in 1959. My right hon. and learned Friend hopes to announce the name of the successful tenderer in June.

Caledonian MacBrayne (New Passenger Ferry)

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects Caledonian MacBrayne to announce the signing of a contract for the construction of a new passenger ferry.

Mr. Ancram: I am considering a proposal from Caledonian MacBrayne to build a further new passenger ferry. I hope to give it my decision soon, and, if it is favourable, the company will then be free to invite tenders for construction.

Strip Searches

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what rules, regulations and guidelines are applicable to the strip-searching and intimate scrutiny of female prisoners in Her Majesty's prisons in Scotland; if he will place copies of such documents in the Library; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John MacKay: General provisions regarding the searching of prisoners in prisons in Scotland are contained in rule 14 of the Prison (Scotland) Rules 1952, copies of which are available in the Library.

Prison standing orders require strip-searches to be carried out as part of normal admission and discharge procedures; when a prisoner is being transferred to a segregation unit; during routine cell searches and special cell searches where there is reason to believe that contraband or weapons are being concealed; following "open" visits; and on leaving prison to attend a court hearing.

The procedures observed in Scottish penal establishments for the strip-searching of female prisoners by female staff are as follows:

(a) When a female is being strip-searched she is required, after removing her outer garments, to remove or drop to the waist the underclothing of the upper half of her body; she is then provided with a sheet to wrap around herself before removing the underclothing from the lower half of her body for examination. In the interest of decency great care is taken by the examining officer to ensure the minimum exposure of the body at any given time.

(b) In cases where a female prisoner is menstruating, a request is made to remove the sanitary protection for examination. Staff fully appreciate the embarrassment which is inherent in such a situation and therefore approach the task with great sensitivity. In practice, there has been no occasion within the recollection of staff when any refusal to meet such a request has been maintained. In the event of a refusal, the right to remove a sanitary towel, but not a tampon, is reserved to staff.

Labour Statistics

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give the latest figures of long-term unemployment in the Greenock travel-to-work area.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The information is available in the House of Commons Library.

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the current level of youth unemployment in Greenock and Port Glasgow.

Mr. Allan Stewart: On 9 January 1986, the latest date for which information is available, the total number of

unemployed claimants under the age of 18 in the Greenock and Port Glasgow constituency was 701. In January 1985, the figure was 689.

Scottish Development Agency

Mr. Craigen asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list those projects in the Glasgow area which the Scottish Development Agency is to abandon because of funding difficulties.

Mr. Allan Stewart [*pursuant to his reply*, 10 March 1986, c. *372*]: Although a number of projects in Glasgow originally planned for 1986-87 are likely to be deferred to future years, the agency does not propose to abandon any projects.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

European Community (Internal Market)

8. **Mr. Amess** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many of the further measures intended to open up the internal market within the Community listed in the 1986 presiding action programme have been adopted so far in 1986.

Mr. Alan Clark: Over 100 measures are identified in the programme as candidates for adoption in 1986, building on action last year to tackle barriers to intra-Community trade. Substantial progress has already been made on a number of them.

British Overseas Trade Board

10. **Mr. Carttiss** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what detailed steps he takes to ensure that the British Overseas Trade Board's services are of particular relevance to smaller exporting businesses.

Mr. Alan Clark: Membership of the British Overseas Trade Board includes two successful small exporters who take a specific interest in the needs of smaller exporters. Many of the board's services are designed to be of particular relevance to smaller firms and about 75 per cent. of those making use of services provided by the board are small firms.

Manufacturing Investment

13. **Mr. Norris** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry by how much manufacturing investment has risen since 1983.

Mr. Channon: The latest available estimate of investment in manufacturing including leased assets, in 1985 is £6·7 billion at 1980 prices. This represents an increase of nearly 21 per cent. as compared with the 1983 level of £5·6 billion.

Takeover Bids

20. **Mr. Cash** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether reciprocity is a factor taken into account by the Director General for Fair Trading and the chairman of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission in considering takeover bids for United Kingdom firms by foreign nationals.

Mr. Howard: If they consider reciprocity to be relevant to the question whether the particular merger may be expected to operate against the public interest they may take it into account in advising the Secretary of State.

British Leyland

21. **Mr. Willie W. Hamilton** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will take steps to ensure that all employees at Land Rover, Leyland Trucks or any other part of British Leyland are consulted about their future before any irrevocable decisions are made.

Mr. Peter Morrison: As my right hon. Friend has told the House on a number of occasions, the BL management is making every effort to keep the work force informed. My right hon. Friend and I have met a number of delegations representing the work force in BL and have listened carefully to their views. I am very willing to meet further delegations whenever it wishes.

59. **Mr. Nellist** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he last met the board of British Leyland or its representatives to discuss Her Majesty's Government's plans for privatisation.

Mr. Peter Morrison: My right hon. Friend and I met representatives of BL yesterday, 11 March, to discuss plans for privatisation.

Consumer Safety

22. **Mr. Coombs** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what regulations he intends to introduce in the field of consumer safety over the next six months.

Mr. Howard: We intend to introduce consumer safety legislation over the next six months on child-resistant packaging and on radioactive products, to be followed shortly by legislation on electrical plugs and sockets, on surface temperatures of cookers and on the safety of gas cookers.

Automated Manufacturing Techniques

23. **Mr. Burt** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the level of support given by his Department for the introduction of automated manufacturing techniques in British industry.

Mr. Butcher: Since 1981 my Department has allocated £246 million to various measures aimed at helping British Industry with the introduction of advanced manufacturing technology.

Power Station Equipment

24. **Mr. Ron Brown** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on Government assistance in the realisation of export opportunities for manufacturers of power station equipment.

Mr. Alan Clark: All Government services for exporters are available to manufacturers of power station equipment, and the power section has made considerable use of these. In particular, more than a third of the aid and trade provision has been used to support projects of this kind. My Department continues to remain in touch with the manufacturers on their market objectives.

General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade

25. **Mr. Lilley** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on progress on the proposed new general agreement on tariffs and trade round.

Mr. Alan Clark: As I told my hon. Friend the Member for Harlow on 12 February, the contracting parties to GATT agreed unanimously on 28 November 1985 to set up a preparatory committee for a new round of multilateral trade negotiations. Ministers are expected to make a formal decision to launch the new negotiations at a special meeting planned for this September.

Alnwick and Amble

26. **Mr. Beith** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will make an official visit to the Alnwick and Amble area to discuss industrial development.

Mr. Peter Morrison: I have no plans at present to visit Alnwick and Amble. Of course, officials in my north-east regional office keep me in close touch and advise me on developments in the area.

Vickers Shipbuilding and Engineering Ltd.

27. **Mr. Thurnham** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement about the current position on the sale of Vickers Shipbuilding and Engineering Ltd.

Mr. Peter Morrison: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry announced on 7 March, at column 596, that British Shipbuilders had been given consent for the sale of Vickers Shipbuilding and Engineering Ltd. to the buy-out consortium.

Buy British

28. **Mr. Peter Bruinvels** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to encourage more people to buy British manufactured goods.

Mr. Butcher: Ministers, including the Prime Minister, repeatedly point out the advantages of buying British goods where they are well designed, of good quality and competitively priced. Much of my Department's work helps British manufacturers meet these requirements and we very much welcome private sector initiatives with similar objectives.

Design Commitment Conference

29. **Mr. Hargreaves** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he is in a position to report the outcome of the design commitment conference held at Lancaster House on 28 January.

Mr. Butcher: The conference brought together the top managers of leading United Kingdom companies with experience of exploiting design in their businesses. Its aim was to generate a multiplier effect by persuading them to hold design seminars for their principal suppliers and so help spread good design practice more widely. I am delighted that, at the latest count, 62 companies have said they would do so or consider doing so.

Services (International Trade)

30. **Mr. Wood** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress is being made in the liberalisation of international trade in services.

Mr. Howard: Work is proceeding in GATT to set up a new round of multilateral trade negotiations. It is essential that trade in services, among other relevant topics, should be included in the round, and we are working to that end. I hope also for progress towards the completion of the European Community's internal market in services as well as in goods.

Steel Industry

31. **Mr. James Hamilton** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he will next meet the chairman of the British Steel Corporation to discuss the prospects for the steel industry.

Mr. Peter Morrison: My right hon. Friend will be meeting the chairman-designate, Mr. Scholey, on 17 March.

Share Ownership

32. **Mr. Stephen Ross** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he is considering any further steps to encourage management-employee buy-outs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: On 7 March my right hon. Friend announced that he had agreed to the sale of Vickers Shipbuilding and Engineering Limited to the VSEL Employee Consortium plc. I welcome management-employee bids where they offer the prospect of an appropriate method of privatisation.

Strategic Defence Initiative

33. **Mr. Dalyell** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment his Department has made of the implications for industry generally of the non-military spin-off arising from strategic defence initiative-related research work in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Butcher: The aim of the Department of Trade and Industry is to encourage maximum civil benefits from defence research and development. This applies equally to strategic defence initiative research and defence research. Although strategic defence research has long-term defence applications as its primary objective, some activities are also likely to lead to civil end uses. It is too early to predict the specific results of the research.

Multi-fibre Arrangement

34. **Mr. Kirkwood** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he has received representations from the Scottish Knitwear Council on Her Majesty's Government's position on the renewal of the multi-fibre arrangement.

Mr. Alan Clark: Yes, I have received the views of the Scottish Knitwear Council through the British Textile Confederation with which, along with other interested organisations, the Department has kept in regular touch and whom I met last week. Taking full account of the

advice received and of the views expressed in debate in this House, I was able to play a full part in the Foreign Affairs Council debates on the MFA on 17-18 February and 10-11 March which agreed a mandate on the basis of which the European Commission will negotiate the renewal of the MFA in the GATT textiles committee.

The mandate should enable the Commission to negotiate terms for the renewal of the arrangement and for bilateral agreements with individual suppliers, which will enable effective protection to Britain's textile and clothing industries to continue to be provided while giving some element of more liberal treatment for the poorer countries and those with open markets. The mandate also provides for some limited liberalisation in respect of children's clothes. The Community has agreed that it will be ready to deal, during the next round of multilateral negotiations, with the question of the return of textiles trade to normal GATT rules over the longer term.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information he collects, in the context of the multi-fibre arrangement, concerning the comparative average annual incomes for industrial workers in *(a)* Brazil, *(b)* Turkey, *(c)* India, *(d)* Pakistan, *(e)* Korea, *(f)* Hong Kong, *(g)* Taiwan and *(h)* the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark: I shall reply to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

52. **Mr. Spencer** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent representations he has received on an extension of the multi-fibre arrangement.

Mr. Alan Clark: I continue to receive a large number of representations concerning the renewal of the multi-fibre arrangement. I met representatives of the industries, the trade unions, consumers and retailers last week to discuss their views.

Technological Innovation

35. **Mr. Fallon** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proportion of his Department's budget is spent in promoting technological innovations.

Mr. Butcher: In 1985-86 my Department expects to spend 28 per cent. of its budget in promoting technological innovations.

Telecommunications Industry

36. **Mr. Wainwright** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the effect on competition within the telecommunications industry of the privatisation of British Telecom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Butcher: The success of the changes in 1984 in promoting competition in the telecommunications industry is under constant appraisal. In this, my right hon. Friend has the assistance of the Director General of Telecommunications, with whom he shares a duty under the Telecommunications Act 1984 to maintain and promote competition. The privatisation of British Telecom, with its spur to greater efficiency and better services, has brought many benefits.

English Estates

37. **Mr. Hicks** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he is satisfied with the current level of investment by English Estates in advance factory units in England and the south-west region; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Morrison: My right hon. Friend will be making an early statement about English Estates' investment programme as soon as the Estimates have been submitted to Parliament, and will be discussing with them where it actually plans to spend the money in the 1986-87 financial year.

Design Advisory Service Consultancy Scheme

38. **Mrs. Peacock** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many companies have successfully applied for funding under the Department's design advisory service consultancy scheme.

Mr. Butcher: 2,263 initial projects and 598 follow-up projects had been completed as at 31 December 1985.

Fuel and Raw Material Costs

39. **Mr. Heathcoat-Amory** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry by what percentage industry's fuel and raw material costs have fallen during the past year.

Mr. Butcher: The price index for materials and fuel purchased by manufacturing industry in February was 9·5 per cent. lower than a year earlier.

Information Technology

40. **Mr. Simon Hughes** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the United Kingdom's share of the world information technology market in *(a)* 1970 and *(b)* 1983.

Mr. Butcher: Available information would suggest that the United Kingdom share of OECD exports of information technology goods (that is data processing equipment, office machinery, electronic components, electronic consumer goods, telecommunication equipment and electronic capital goods) in 1983 was 7 per cent. Information for 1970 is not available. The United Kingdom share in 1978 was 8 per cent.

Soviet Union

41. **Mr. Chapman** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on Britain's trade with the Soviet Union.

Mr. Alan Clark: This is the first year of the new Soviet five-year plan which puts great emphasis on the refurbishment of industry and on productivity, quality and the efficient use of energy. British firms have much to offer in these areas and I hope that they will take advantage of this. I initialled the long-term programme for economic and industrial co-operation with the Soviet Deputy Foreign Trade Minister Mr. Manzhulo, on 6 February, and the opportunities were listed therein. A copy of the programme is in the Library.

Research and Development

42. **Mr. Wallace** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much he estimates, in percentage terms, research and development in defence industry related areas will change in cash terms between the financial years 1983-84 and 1987-88.

Mr. Butcher: Most of industry is relevant to defence, but there are no clear definitions of defence industry relatd areas. In cash terms, intramural and extramural expenditure by the Department of Trade and Industry on aircraft, electronics, microwave standards and space is forecast to increase by 4 per cent. between 1983-84 and 1987-88. Expenditure on space will be with the British National Space Centre at Farnborough, which incorporates parts of the Royal Aircraft Establishment. Details of Ministry of Defence expenditure may be found in the "Annual Review of Government-Funded R. & D, 1985".

Romania

43. **Mr. Hunter** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what specific measures to increase Anglo-Romanian trade have been taken since the meeting of 14 February with the Romanian ambassador.

Mr. Alan Clark: The Department of Trade and Industry maintains a close and regular dialogue with the Romanians with a view to increasing bilateral trade. I had a useful discussion with the Romanian ambassador on 14 February.

Manufacturing Industry (North-West Region)

44. **Mr. Pike** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he proposes any new initiatives to encourage the growth of manufacturing industries in the north-west.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Many parts of the north-west Region are designated as assisted areas and thus stand to benefit from my Department's various measures of assistance. We shall of course be monitoring the new arrangements introduced late in 1984 to ensure that the maximum benefit is gained from the money put in.

Inmos

45. **Mr. Ashdown** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he proposes to take to retain Inmos in British ownership.

Mr. Butcher: It is for Thorn EMI, which control Inmos, to determine the future ownership of the company.

European Council (Consumer Affairs)

46. **Mr. Henderson** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress he hopes to make in the field of consumer affairs in forthcoming European Council meetings.

Mr. Howard: Progress will, as always, depend on the degree of agreement reached between member states. However, we intend to pursue the goal of a true internal market with all the benefits that it will bring to consumers, and hope that this can be achieved without the need for complex harmonisation of law.

In particular, we wish to ensure that the European Commission's communication "A new Impetus for Consumer Protection" will be fully discussed at forthcoming Councils of Ministers, including one of Consumer Affairs Ministers which we intend to hold during the United Kingdom presidency, and that as a result a realistic programme of action can be agreed. The most important parts of the Commission's communication are the proposals to ensure consumers' physical safety and the plans to stress that the consumer interest should be taken into account in all Community policies. The Government welcome this change in emphasis towards greater weight being given to the consumer interest in matters such as agriculture and transport and see this as an important step towards making the Community work to the benefit of all consumers.

Balance of Trade

47. **Mr. Andrew MacKay** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the latest balance of trade.

Mr. Alan Clark: The current account was in surplus in 1985 by £3·0 billion. In January there was a near record suplus of £1·1 billion.

57. **Mr. Ashby** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on Britain's current trading performance.

Mr. Butcher: The current account was in surplus in 1985 by £3·0 billion. In January there was a near record surplus of £1·1 billion.

Film Industry

48. **Mr. Dormand** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on present Government policy on the film industry.

Mr. Butcher: The Government remain of the view that the measures outlined in the White Paper, "Film Policy" (Cmnd. 9319) will provide a framework for the commercial film industry within which it can develop and prosper.

Exports (Soft Loans)

49. **Mr. Wolfson** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement of progress on implementing the soft-loans package for exporters announced in 1986.

Mr. Alan Clark: I should like to announce that, together with my right hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development, we have decided to offer to the Chinese Government an increase in the soft loan facility for China from £100 million to £300 million. This support will be provided from the aid programme under the aid and trade provision; it will help the development of China and lead to many projects, orders and jobs won for the United Kingdom. Agreement in principle has been reached with the Chinese authorities on a number of potentially suitable projects. Elsewhere, several projects which may be suitable for soft loan support are under active consideration.

Ford Motor Company

50. **Mr. Chope** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information he has on the proportion of

its United Kingdom profits in each of the last five years which the Ford Motor Company has reinvested in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The figures for 1985 are not yet available but Ford's 1984 annual report shows that for each of the years 1980-84, Ford's United Kingdom investment, or expenditure on tangible assets exceeded its United Kingdom profits after tax. The figures are:

£ million

	1980	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*
Profit (loss) after tax	204	165	192	(103)	37
Expenditure on tangible assets	249	197	277	199	174

Car Industry

51. **Mr. Loyden** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will meet the general council of the Trades Union Congress to discuss the future of British car manufacturing industry.

Mr. Butcher: My right hon. Friend has no immediate plans to do so, but of course is always prepared to have such a meeting.

Land Rover (Sale)

53. **Mr. Yeo** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many representations he has received regarding the possible sale of Land Rover to General Motors.

Mr. Peter Morrison: To date I have received some 625 representations about the possible sale of Land Rover to General Motors.

Domestic Telephones

54. **Mr. Phillip Oppenheim** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he has received any representations about the liberalisation of domestic telephone wiring; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Butcher: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has received several representations on this subject. The Director General of Telecommunications is currently considering the liberalisation of telephone extension wiring connected to direct exchange lines. I am awaiting his advice.

Insurance Industry

55. **Mr. Janner** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the progress of his Department's discussions with the insurance industry concerning changes to the statement of practice of the industry.

Mr. Channon: I refer the hon. and learned Member to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, South (Mr. Bright) on 21 February, at columns 358-59.

Computer Graduates

56. **Mr. Livsey** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will estimate the current short-fall from the requirements of the industry in computer graduates, for the latest convenient date.

Mr. Butcher: Steps have been taken to increase the supply of graduates with information technology related skills in response to industry's concerns about shortages. It is always difficult to provide precise estimates of skills shortages because of problems of definition. However, my Department has instigated a study by the Institute of Manpower Studies on the expected patterns of supply and demand for IT manpower to 1990, the result of which should be available in a few months.

Manufactured Goods

58. **Dr. Michael Clark** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the value of manufactured goods exported in the last year for which figures are available; and what was the comparable figure in 1979.

Mr. Alan Clark: In 1985 exports of manufactures amounted to £52·3 billion compared with £31·0 billion in 1979.

Competition Policy

60. **Mr. Wrigglesworth** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he is satisfied with the operation of the present machinery for competition policy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: The present machinery has served its purpose well, but we naturally keep all our policies under constant review.

BSC (Industry) Ltd.

61. **Mr. Hirst** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement about the activities of BSC (Industry) Ltd.

Mr. Peter Morrison: BSC (Industry) Ltd. is continuing to perform the role for which it was set up in 1975; that is helping to create jobs in steel closure areas. It operates in 18 "Opportunity Areas", and has helped more than 2,000 businesses since 1975. These businesses are committed to creating some 50,000 jobs by March 1987, of which about 30,000 are already in place. BSC (Industry) Ltd. became financially self-sufficient in April 1984.

Board of Trade

62. **Sir John Biggs-Davison** asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent meetings have been held at the Board of Trade under his presidency; who attended; what was the form of proceedings; and what business was transacted.

Mr. Alan Clark: There have been no meetings of the Board of Trade under the presidency of the present Secretary of State.

Copyright Law

Mr. Arnold asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he is yet in a position to say when he expects to publish the White Paper on reform of the law of copyright; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Pattie: The Government expect to publish in April a White Paper dealing with copyright law reform and other intellectual property issues.

Auditors

Mr. Tim Smith asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many responses he has received to his consultative document, "The Auditor's Role in the Financial Services Sector"; and when he expects to announce his decision on whether or not provisions relating to auditors should be added to the Financial Services Bill.

Mr. Howard: Twenty nine responses to the consultative document have been received. I hope to be able to announce my conclusions shortly.

Cancer Screening

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he plans to make available to companies and businesses assistance grants to enable them to establish cancer screening facilities on their premises.

Mr. Butcher: I have no such plans.

China

Mr. Hayes asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on trading prospects with China.

Mr. Alan Clark: I should like to announce that, together with my right hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development, we have decided to offer to the Chinese Government an increase in the soft loan facility for China from £100 million to £300 million. This support will be provided from the aid programme under the aid and trade provision; it will help the development of China and lead to many projects, orders and jobs won for the United Kingdom.

NATIONAL FINANCE

European Monetary System

64. **Mr. Alton** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received from British industry about the possible implications for industry of a decision by Her Majesty's Government to joint the European monetary system.

Mr. Ian Stewart: My right hon. Friend has received a number of representations from industry about joining the exchange rate mechanism of the EMS.

Value Added Tax

Sir Trevor Skeet asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many firms have exceeded the time limit for making value added tax returns; and how many prosecutions have occurred in the past year.

Mr. Brooke: Of the 1·5 million or so traders who are registered for VAT about 75 per cent. usually fail to furnish returns by the due date. In the 1985 calendar year, 4,360 traders, representing some of the most serious cases, were prosecuted for such failures.

Sir Trevor Skeet asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will take steps to permit small firms to make value added tax returns within two months instead on one month currently permitted.

Mr. Brooke: No. The one-month period for payment was set only after extensive consultation with trade and other interests. It allows an average of two and a half months' credit before the tax charge to customers has to be paid to Customs and Excise. However, as part of the Government's deregulation initiative, Customs and Excise is reviewing its policy towards small businesses more generally, including the practicability of any other special arrangements for them.

Sir Trevor Skeet asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of total value added tax remains uncalculated due to default.

Mr. Brooke: None. All value added tax due is assessed by calculations performed by Customs and Excise in default of returns by registered traders.

Contingency Reserve

Mr. Higgins asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will analyse the way in which the Government's contingency reserve was allocated between Departments in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available.

Mr. Lawson: Since 1984-85 all variations between departmental spending and plans have been met from the reserve. Thus the divergence between departments' plans and outturn is a measure of the way in which the reserve has been allocated. The figures are in the table.

For years before 1984-85 the contingency reserve was used only for discretionary increases in expenditure above departmental plans; it thus excluded most overruns on demand-led and local authority current spending, which in some periods have been substantial. Because of the different nature of the reserve, it is not possible to produce figures showing a departmental breakdown of sums charged to the contingency reserve which would be comparable with the figures in the table provided and relevant to the way the reserve in now managed.

£ billion

Department	*Plans**	*1984-85 Outturn‡*	*Difference*	*Plans†*	*1985-86 Estimated outturn‡*	*Difference*
Defence	17·1	17·2	+0·1	18·0	18·2	+0·2
Foreign and Commonwealth Office‖	1·8	1·8	—	1·9	1·9	—
European Community	0·4	0·9	+0·6	0·7	0·8	+0·1
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food¶	2·1	2·1	—	2·1	2·5	+0·4

Department	1984-85 Plans*	1984-85 Outturn‡	Difference	1985-86 Plans†	1985-86 Estimated outturn‡	Difference
Trade and Industry●	1·6	2·1	+0·5	1·7	2·0	+0·3
Energy	0·8	2·6	+1·8	—	1·0	+1·1
Employment	3·2	3·1	—	3·3	3·3	—
Transport	4·4	4·6	+0·2	4·5	4·6	—
DOE—Housing	2·4	3·2	+0·8	2·3	2·7	+0·5
DOE—Other environmental services	3·5	4·0	+0·5	3·4	3·9	+0·5
Home Office■	4·8	5·0	+0·2	5·1	5·3	+0·2
Education and Science	13·1	14·0	+0·9	13·6	14·5	+0·9
Arts and Libraries	0·6	0·7	—	0·6	0·7	—
DHSS—Health and personal social services	15·4	15·8	+0·3	16·5	16·7	+0·2
DHSS—Social security	37·2	38·1	+0·9	40·0	41·2	+1·2
Scotland	6·9	7·0	+0·2	7·2	7·4	+0·2
Wales	2·6	2·6	—	2·7	2·8	—
Northern Ireland	4·0	4·0	—	4·3	4·3	—
Chancellor's Departments	1·7	1·7	—	1·8	1·8	—
Other departments*	1·3	1·2	−0·1	1·3	1·3	—
Local authority relevant current unallocated to programmes (England)	0·7	—	−0·7	0·6	—	−0·6
Reserve	2·8	—	−2·8	5·0	—	−5·0
Privatisation proceeds	−1·9	−2·1	−0·2	−2·5	−2·6	−0·1
Adjustments#	—	—	—	—	−0·2	−0·2
Planning total	126·4	129·6	+3·3	134·2	134·2	—

*Plans in the 1984 White Paper (Cmnd. 9143), less changes announced in the 1984 Budget, adjusted to the definition of public expenditure used in the 1986 White Paper (Cmnd. 9702).

†Plans in the 1985 White Paper (Cmnd. 9428), plus changes announced in the 1985 Budget, adjusted to the definition of public expenditure used in the 1986 White Paper (Cmnd. 9702).

‡Figures taken from the 1986 public expenditure White Paper (Cmnd. 9702).

‖Including Overseas Development Administration.

¶Including Intervention Board for Agricultural Produce and Forestry Commission.

●Including Export Credits Guarantee Department.

■Including Lord Chancellor's Department.

*Including Property Services Agency and Civil Superannuation.

#Estimated outturn in 1985-86 includes an allowance for shortfall.

**An unallocated amount for local authority relevant current expenditure in England was included in public expenditure plans for these years; at outturn all local authority relevant current expenditure is allocated to programmes.

Visual Display Units

Mr. Soley asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many visual display units are in use by his Department and the Inland Revenue; and how many of these are Tempest-shielded.

Mr. Moore: There are 483 visual display units in use in Her Majesty's Treasury and some 7,300 in the Inland Revenue. Information regarding the numbers of these which are Tempest-shielded is classified.

EC (Budget Contributions)

Mr. Deakins asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how the abatement of the United Kingdom contribution to the European Economic Community is taken into account in the European Economic Community budget process; if the 1986 abatement will require a supplementary budget; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: The United Kingdom statement is taken into account in the EEC budgetary process in a number of stages. First, the Commission calculates, from its information about shares of VAT contributions and about receipts from the budget, the size of the abatement according to the formula laid down in the own resources decision of 7 May 1985. This sum is then deducted from the contributions the United Kingdom would have to make at the uniform rate of VAT needed to finance the budget, and a new, reduced VAT rate for the United Kingdom is calculated and entered in the budget. Once the budget has been adopted, our VAT payments are made at the abated rate. The agreed detailed methodology for the budget procedure on our abatement is set out in the EC document COM(85) 36 which was discussed during proceedings in Committee on the European Communities (Finance) Act —[*Official Report*, 1 July 1985; Vol. 82, c.78-116.]

This agreed methodology makes provision for two possible corrections of the abatement by means of amending budgets. The first of these is interim and optional, the second final and compulsory. The corrections are designed to take account of more complete information on our VAT and receipts shares from the Community budget. As my predecessor reported to the House on 30 October 1985, the Council of Ministers has already invited the Commission to introduce an amending budget during 1986 in order to uprate the abatement in respect of 1985 and has undertaken to take the necessary decisions on the basis of the Commission's proposal.—[*Official Report*, 30 October 1985; Vol. 84, c.*501*-2.] The preliminary assessment of the abatement in respect of 1986 will be included in the main 1987 budget.

Enterprise Allowance

Mr. David Howell asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer why it is the practice of the Inland Revenue to treat the enterprise allowance as trading income rather than as grant.

Mr. Lawson: The enterprise allowance is intended to supplement the takings of a business during its first year and its tax treatment as a trading receipt follows from this. A grant paid for a similar purpose would be taxable in the same way.

Public Expenditure

Mr. Fallon asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing, for the latest years now available, identifiable public expenditure by programme in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales and the United Kingdom expressed *(a)* in cash terms, *(b)* as a percentage of United Kingdom total identifiable public expenditure, *(c)* as an amount per capita and *(d)* as an amount per capita expressed as a percentage of the United Kingdom amount per capita.

Mr. MacGregor: Tables 1 to 5 show figures of identifiable public expenditure according to main function in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. These are the only available figures comparing public expenditure by function in the four countries of the United Kingdom. The analysis covers 1980-81 to 1984-85, the only period for which data are available on a consistent basis. The term "identifiable expenditure" refers to expenditure that can be identified from official records as having been incurred in a particular country.

Table 6 compares, for the latest year, 1984-85 expenditure in the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland programmes with the total identifiable expenditure in the respective countries. It shows that identifiable expenditure has a wider coverage than expenditure within the responsibility of the Secretaries of State in the case of Scotland or Wales, and in the case of Northern Ireland it has a slightly wider coverage than the Northern Ireland programme in the public expenditure survey. This table also shows total unidentifiable expenditure by programme for 1984-85.

Unidentifiable expenditure includes expenditure on defence, overseas aid and other overseas services which are deemed to have been incurred on behalf of the United Kingdom as a whole. Also included in this category are Government net lending to, and the market and overseas borrowing of, the public corporations (including the nationalised industries) due to the difficulty in allocating this expenditure between countries. Total identifiable expenditure accounts for approximately 80 per cent. of total public expenditure on programmes.

Identifiable expenditure has been defined as expenditure that can be allocated to England, Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland. In some cases it can be allocated to Great Britain (rather than England, Scotland or Wales) and in these circumstances it is appropriate to compare Northern Ireland allocated expenditure with that allocated to Great Britain. Tables 7a and 7b provide this analysis over the five-year period.

The extent to which expenditure can be identified may vary from year to year and between countries. The coverage of particular programmes can also vary between countries—for example, in Northern Ireland expenditure on arts and libraries is contained in the education programme.

The following tables use the terms and definitions of the public expenditure White Paper "The Government's Expenditure Plans 1986-87 to 1988-89" (Cmnd. 9702). The figures have therefore been classified to the definitions of public expenditure used in Cmnd. 9702 and may differ slightly from those published previously. The territorial analysis exercise was carried out before the figures in Cmnd. 9702 became available. The latter incorporates later information and shows total expected outturn for 1984-85 to be £129·6 billion, that is some £200 million higher than the planning total shown in table 6. The additional sum will be included in the next territorial analysis.

Table 1a: Identifiable public expenditure 1980-81

£ million

	England	*Scotland*	*Wales*	*Northern Ireland*	*United Kingdom*	*As a percentage of United Kingdom identifiable expenditure*			
						England	*Scotland*	*Wales*	*Northern Ireland*
Agriculture, Fisheries, Food and Forestry	622·8	194·0	78·4	125·7	1,020·9	61·0	19·0	7·7	12·3
Industry, Energy, Trade and Employment	2,266·2	505·9	305·8	336·5	3,414·4	66·4	14·8	9·0	9·9
Arts and Libraries	450·4	56·9	26·8	—	534·1	84·3	10·7	5·0	—
Roads and Transport	3,389·2	452·5	262·2	120·2	4,224·1	80·2	10·7	6·2	2·8
Housing	4,463·7	782·7	207·5	238·7	5,692·6	78·4	13·7	3·6	4·2
Other Environmental Services	2,724·4	443·9	227·6	122·1	3,518·0	77·4	12·6	6·5	3·5
Law, Order and Protective Services	2,894·6	315·1	140·1	322·1	3,671·9	78·8	8·6	3·8	8·8
Education and Science	10,550·2	1,571·9	658·0	459·0	13,239·1	79·7	11·9	5·0	3·5
Health and Personal Social Services	11,361·4	1,558·5	692·7	484·0	14,096·6	80·6	11·1	4·9	3·4
Social Security	19,565·7	2,226·4	1,234·5	725·1	23,751·7	82·4	9·4	5·2	3·1
Other Public Services	746·4	187·0	70·2	32·3	1,035·9	72·1	18·1	6·8	3·1
Common Services	478·1	49·4	24·4	22·5	574·4	83·2	8·6	4·2	3·9
Planning Total	59,513·1	8,344·2	3,928·2	2,988·2	74,773·7	79·6	11·2	5·3	4·0

Table 1b: Identifiable public expenditure 1980-81

£ per head

	England	Scotland	Wales	Northern Ireland	United Kingdom	As a percentage of United Kingdom identifiable expenditure per head: England	Scotland	Wales	Northern Ireland
Agriculture, Fisheries, Food and Forestry	13·3	37·6	27·8	80·7	18·1	73·5	207·7	153·6	445·9
Industry, Energy, Trade and Employment	48·4	98·2	108·6	216·0	60·6	79·9	162·0	179·2	356·4
Arts and Libraries	9·6	11·0	9·5	—	9·5	101·1	115·8	100·0	—
Roads and Transport	72·4	87·8	93·1	77·2	75·0	96·5	117·1	124·1	102·9
Housing	95·4	151·9	73·7	153·2	101·1	94·4	150·2	72·9	151·5
Other Environmental Services	58·2	86·1	80·8	78·4	62·5	93·1	137·8	129·3	125·4
Law, Order and Protective Services	61·9	61·1	49·8	206·7	65·2	94·9	93·7	76·4	317·0
Education and Science	225·5	305·0	233·7	294·6	235·1	95·9	129·7	99·4	125·3
Health and Personal Social Services	242·8	302·4	246·0	310·7	250·3	97·0	120·8	98·3	124·1
Social Security	418·2	432·1	438·4	465·4	421·8	99·1	102·4	103·9	110·3
Other Public Services	16·0	36·3	24·9	20·7	18·4	87·0	197·3	135·3	112·5
Common Services	10·2	9·6	8·7	14·4	10·2	100·0	94·1	85·3	141·2
Planning Total	1,272·0	1,619·3	1,395·0	1,918·0	1,327·8	95·8	122·0	105·1	144·4

Table 2a: Identifiable public expenditure 1981-82

£ million

	England	Scotland	Wales	Northern Ireland	United Kingdom	As a percentage of United Kingdom identifiable expenditure: England	Scotland	Wales	Northern Ireland
Agriculture, Fisheries, Food and Forestry	655·9	199·8	74·8	120·7	1,051·2	62·4	19·0	7·1	11·5
Industry, Energy, Trade and Employment	2,626·1	542·4	365·0	363·0	3,896·5	67·4	13·9	9·4	9·3
Arts and Libraries	492·2	69·8	29·5	—	591·5	83·2	11·8	5·0	—
Roads and Transport	3,856·8	505·9	300·2	125·4	4,788·3	80·5	10·6	6·3	2·6
Housing	3,130·0	722·3	121·2	234·1	4,207·6	74·4	17·2	2·9	5·6
Other Environmental Services	2,834·5	468·8	237·9	128·7	3,699·9	77·2	12·8	6·5	3·5
Law, Order and Protective Services	3,418·0	367·8	162·7	354·9	4,303·4	79·4	8·5	3·8	8·2
Education and Science	11,496·6	1,730·5	719·2	499·9	14,446·2	79·6	12·0	5·0	3·5
Health and Personal Social Services	12,723·6	1,769·4	782·3	546·2	15,821·5	80·4	11·2	4·9	3·5
Social Security	23,846·8	2,705·5	1,514·9	875·5	28,942·7	82·4	9·3	5·2	3·0
Other Public Services	806·2	196·6	75·3	34·7	1,112·8	72·4	17·7	6·8	3·1
Common Services	549·7	63·3	26·8	26·5	666·3	82·5	9·5	4·0	4·0
Planning Total	66,436·4	9,342·1	4,409·8	3,309·6	83,497·9	79·6	11·2	5·3	4·0

Table 2b: Identifiable public expenditure 1981-82

£ per head

	England	Scotland	Wales	Northern Ireland	United Kingdom	As a percentage of United Kingdom identifiable expenditure per head: England	Scotland	Wales	Northern Ireland
Agriculture, Fisheries, Food and Forestry	14·0	38·6	26·5	77·2	18·6	75·3	207·5	143·0	415·1
Industry, Energy, Trade and Employment	56·1	104·7	129·7	232·1	69·1	81·2	151·5	187·7	335·9
Arts and Libraries	10·5	13·5	10·5	—	10·5	100·0	128·6	100·0	—
Roads and Transport	82·4	97·7	106·7	80·2	84·9	97·1	115·1	125·7	94·5
Housing	66·9	139·4	43·1	149·7	74·6	89·7	186·9	57·8	200·7
Other Environmental Services	60·5	90·5	84·5	82·3	65·1	92·9	139·0	129·8	126·4
Law, Order and Protective Services	73·0	71·0	57·8	226·9	76·3	95·7	93·1	75·8	297·4
Education and Science	245·5	334·1	255·6	319·6	256·2	95·8	130·4	99·8	124·7
Health and Personal Social Services	271·7	341·6	278·0	349·2	280·6	96·8	121·7	99·1	124·4
Social Security	509·3	522·3	538·3	559·8	513·4	99·2	101·7	104·9	109·0
Other Public Services	17·2	38·0	26·8	22·2	19·7	87·3	192·9	136·0	112·7
Common Services	11·7	12·2	9·5	16·9	11·8	99·2	103·4	80·5	143·2
Planning Total	1,418·9	1,803·5	1,567·1	2,116·1	1,481·0	95·8	121·8	105·8	142·9

Table 3a: Identifiable public expenditure 1982-83

£ million

	England	Scotland	Wales	Northern Ireland	United Kingdom	As a percentage of United Kingdom identifiable expenditure: England	Scotland	Wales	Northern Ireland
Agriculture, Fisheries, Food and Forestry	680·9	198·7	83·5	137·5	1,100·6	61·9	18·1	7·6	12·5
Industry, Energy, Trade and Employment	2,764·5	672·5	342·3	364·8	4,144·1	66·7	16·2	8·3	8·8
Arts and Libraries	549·6	73·1	32·7	—	655·4	83·9	11·2	5·0	—
Roads and Transport	4,404·5	537·3	322·9	110·8	5,375·5	81·9	10·0	6·0	2·1
Housing	2,664·4	693·9	125·6	284·4	3,768·3	70·7	18·4	3·3	7·5
Other Environmental Services	3,239·5	501·6	266·9	140·2	4,148·2	78·1	12·1	6·4	3·4
Law, Order and Protective Services	3,804·5	408·8	182·6	380·9	4,776·8	79·6	8·6	3·8	8·0
Education and Science	12,321·7	1,884·0	774·1	535·5	15,515·3	79·4	12·1	5·0	3·5
Health and Personal Social Services	13,821·7	1,911·4	858·9	589·1	17,181·1	80·4	11·1	5·0	3·4
Social Security	27,234·1	3,058·8	1,721·6	1,005·1	33,019·6	82·5	9·3	5·2	3·0
Other Public Services	862·2	198·4	77·5	37·2	1,175·3	73·4	16·9	6·6	3·2
Common Services	599·0	68·5	29·4	28·7	725·6	82·6	9·4	4·1	4·0
Planning Total	72,946·6	10,207·0	4,818·0	3,614·2	91,585·8	79·6	11·1	5·3	3·9

Table 3b: Identifiable public expenditure 1982-83

£ per head

	England	Scotland	Wales	Northern Ireland	United Kingdom	As a percentage of United Kingdom identifiable expenditure per head: England	Scotland	Wales	Northern Ireland
Agriculture, Fisheries, Food and Forestry	14·6	38·5	29·7	87·7	19·5	74·9	197·4	152·3	449·7
Industry, Energy, Trade and Employment	59·1	130·2	121·9	232·8	73·6	80·3	176·9	165·6	316·3
Arts and Libraries	11·7	14·1	11·6	—	11·6	100·9	121·6	100·0	—
Roads and Transport	94·1	104·0	115·0	70·7	95·4	98·6	109·0	120·5	74·1
Housing	56·9	134·3	44·7	181·5	66·9	85·1	200·7	66·8	271·3
Other Environmental Services	69·2	97·1	95·1	89·5	73·6	94·0	131·9	129·2	121·6
Law, Order and Protective Services	81·3	79·1	65·1	243·1	84·8	95·9	93·3	76·8	286·7
Education and Science	263·3	364·6	275·8	341·7	275·4	95·6	132·4	100·1	124·1
Health and Personal Social Services	295·4	369·9	306·0	375·9	305·0	96·9	121·3	100·3	123·2
Social Security	582·0	592·0	613·3	641·4	586·1	99·3	101·0	104·6	109·4
Other Public Services	18·4	38·4	27·6	23·7	20·9	88·0	183·7	132·1	113·4
Common Services	12·8	13·3	10·5	18·3	12·9	99·2	103·1	81·4	141·9
Planning Total	1,558·9	1,975·4	1,716·4	2,306·4	1,625·7	95·9	121·5	105·6	141·9

Table 4a: Identifiable public expenditure 1983-84

£ million

	England	Scotland	Wales	Northern Ireland	United Kingdom	As a percentage of United Kingdom identifiable expenditure: England	Scotland	Wales	Northern Ireland
Agriculture, Fisheries, Food and Forestry	689·9	209·3	101·1	150·2	1,150·5	60·0	18·2	8·8	13·1
Industry, Energy, Trade and Employment	3,183·8	597·2	320·5	377·8	4,479·3	71·1	13·3	7·2	8·4
Arts and Libraries	592·9	73·4	35·4	—	701·7	84·5	10·5	5·0	—
Roads and Transport	4,509·6	554·2	374·6	122·5	5,560·9	81·1	10·0	6·7	2·2
Housing	3,051·4	717·2	198·5	314·8	4,281·9	71·3	16·7	4·6	7·4
Other Environmental Services	3,372·4	536·1	268·0	152·8	4,329·3	77·9	12·4	6·2	3·5
Law, Order and Protective Services	4,168·6	458·9	201·3	400·6	5,229·4	79·7	8·8	3·8	7·7
Education and Science	12,907·0	1,968·0	817·4	565·5	16,257·9	79·4	12·1	5·0	3·5
Health and Personal Social Services	14,725·6	2,036·2	915·6	634·2	18,311·6	80·4	11·1	5·0	3·5
Social Security	29,475·3	3,327·5	1,879·5	1,094·4	35,776·7	82·4	9·3	5·3	3·1
Other Public Services	1,062·7	237·9	100·4	44·9	1,445·9	73·5	16·5	6·9	3·1
Common Services	−76·5	4·9	1·1	33·4	−37·1	206·2	−13·2	−3·0	−90·0
Planning Total	77,662·7	10,720·8	5,213·4	3,891·1	97,488·0	79·7	11·0	5·3	4·0

Table 4b: Identifiable public expenditure 1983-84

£ per head

	England	*Scotland*	*Wales*	*Northern Ireland*	*United Kingdom*	*As a percentage of United Kingdom identifiable expenditure per head* *England*	*Scotland*	*Wales*	*Northern Ireland*
Agriculture, Fisheries, Food and Forestry	14·7	40·6	36·0	95·5	20·4	72·1	199·0	176·5	468·1
Industry, Energy, Trade and Employment	68·0	116·0	114·1	240·2	79·5	85·5	145·9	143·5	302·1
Arts and Libraries	12·7	14·3	12·6	—	12·4	102·4	115·3	101·6	—
Roads and Transport	96·3	107·6	133·4	77·9	98·6	97·7	109·1	135·3	79·0
Housing	65·1	139·3	70·7	200·1	76·0	85·7	183·3	93·0	263·3
Other Environmental Services	72·0	104·1	95·4	97·1	76·8	93·7	135·5	124·2	126·4
Law, Order and Protective Services	89·0	89·1	71·7	254·7	92·8	95·9	96·0	77·3	274·5
Education and Science	275·5	382·1	291·1	359·5	288·4	95·5	132·5	100·9	124·7
Health and Personal Social Services	314·3	395·4	326·1	403·2	324·8	96·8	121·7	100·4	124·1
Social Security	629·2	646·1	669·3	695·7	634·6	99·1	101·8	105·5	109·6
Other Public Services	22·7	46·2	35·8	28·5	25·6	88·7	180·5	139·8	111·3
Common Services	−1·6	1·0	0·4	21·2	−0·7	228·6	−142·9	−57·1	−3,028·6
Planning Total	1,657·8	2,082·0	1,856·6	2,473·7	1,729·2	95·9	120·4	107·4	143·1

Table 5a: Identifiable public expenditure 1984-85

£ million

	England	*Scotland*	*Wales*	*Northern Ireland*	*United Kingdom*	*As a percentage of United Kingdom identifiable expenditure* *England*	*Scotland*	*Wales*	*Northern Ireland*
Agriculture, Fisheries, Food and Forestry	651·6	244·6	103·9	176·3	1,176·4	55·4	20·8	8·8	15·0
Industry, Energy, Trade and Employment	3,251·6	687·0	367·0	424·7	4,730·3	68·7	14·5	7·8	9·0
Arts and Libraries	613·3	78·1	35·5	—	726·9	84·4	10·7	4·9	—
Roads and Transport	4,743·3	574·6	337·9	123·6	5,779·4	82·1	9·9	5·8	2·1
Housing	3,162·9	651·2	129·3	332·8	4,276·2	74·0	15·2	3·0	7·8
Other Environmental Services	3,539·1	572·0	268·4	160·3	4,539·8	78·0	12·6	5·9	3·5
Law, Order and Protective Services	4,585·3	499·2	216·9	434·8	5,736·2	79·9	8·7	3·8	7·6
Education and Science	13,338·2	2,017·8	828·8	593·7	16,778·5	79·5	12·0	4·9	3·5
Health and Personal Social Services	15,778·5	2,203·9	987·1	667·7	19,637·2	80·4	11·2	5·0	3·4
Social Security	31,878·8	3,583·6	2,025·6	1,218·2	38,706·2	82·4	9·3	5·2	3·1
Other Public Services	1,187·7	251·0	104·7	49·3	1,592·7	74·6	15·8	6·6	3·1
Common Services	−29·3	11·1	5·1	41·9	28·8	−101·7	38·5	17·7	145·5
Planning Total	82,701·0	11,374·1	5,410·2	4,223·3	103,708·6	79·7	11·0	5·2	4·1

Table 5b: Identifiable public expenditure 1984-85

£ per head

	England	*Scotland*	*Wales*	*Northern Ireland*	*United Kingdom*	*As a percentage of United Kingdom identifiable expenditure per head* *England*	*Scotland*	*Wales*	*Northern Ireland*
Agriculture, Fisheries, Food and Forestry	13·9	47·5	37·0	111·7	20·8	66·8	228·4	177·9	537·0
Industry, Energy, Trade and Employment	69·2	133·5	130·7	269·1	83·7	82·7	159·5	156·2	321·5
Arts and Libraries	13·1	15·2	12·6	—	12·9	101·6	117·8	97·7	—
Roads and Transport	101·0	111·7	120·4	78·3	102·3	98·7	109·2	117·7	76·5
Housing	67·4	126·5	46·1	210·9	75·7	89·0	167·1	60·9	278·6
Other Environmental Services	75·4	111·2	95·6	101·6	80·4	93·8	138·3	118·9	126·4
Law, Order and Protective Services	97·6	97·0	77·3	275·5	101·5	96·2	95·6	76·2	271·4
Education and Science	284·1	392·1	295·3	376·2	297·0	95·7	132·0	99·4	126·7
Health and Personal Social Services	336·0	428·3	351·7	423·1	347·6	96·7	123·2	101·2	121·7
Social Security	678·9	696·4	721·6	772·0	685·2	99·1	101·6	105·3	112·7
Other Public Services	25·3	48·8	37·3	31·2	28·2	89·7	173·0	132·3	110·6
Common Services	−0·6	2·2	1·8	26·6	0·5	−120·0	440·0	360·0	5,320·0
Planning Total	1,761·2	2,210·3	1,927·4	2,676·4	1,835·9	95·9	120·4	105·0	145·8

£ million

Table 6 Planning total analysed by territorial area 1984-85

	England	‡Prog 15	Scotland Other	Total	‡Prog 16	Wales Other	Total	‡Prog 17	Northern Ireland Other	Total	*Not Identified	United Kingdom
Defence	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	17,090·6	17,090·6
Overseas Aid and Other Overseas Services	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2,502·0	2,502·0
Agriculture, Fisheries, Food and Forestry	651·6	183·2	61·4	244·6	77·1	26·8	103·9	84·5	91·8	176·3	1,295·3	2,471·7
Industry, Energy, Trade and Employment	3,251·6	215·5	471·5	687·0	109·3	257·7	367·0	421·3	3·4	424·7	4,246·9	8,977·2
Arts and Libraries	613·3	66·1	12·0	78·1	28·4	7·1	35·5	—	—	—	34·1	761·0
Roads and Transport	4,743·3	563·3	11·3	574·6	276·4	61·5	337·9	123·6	—	123·6	−163·5	5,615·9
Housing	3,162·9	651·2	—	651·2	129·3	—	129·3	332·8	—	332·8	—	4,276·2
Other Environmental Services	3,539·1	566·8	5·2	572·0	264·2	4·2	268·4	160·3	—	160·3	298·5	4,838·3
Law, Order and Protective Services	4,585·3	485·6	13·6	499·2	—	216·9	216·9	420·7	14·1	434·8	239·6	5,975·8
Education and Science	13,338·2	1,781·5	236·3	2,017·8	686·1	142·7	828·8	592·0	1·7	593·7	67·2	16,845·7
Health and Personal Social Services	15,778·5	2,203·9	—	2,203·9	987·1	—	987·1	667·7	—	667·7	23·3	19,660·5
Social Security	31,878·8	—	3,583·6	3,583·6	—	2,025·6	2,025·6	1,207·2	11·0	1,218·2	505·7	39,211·9
Other Public Services	1,187·7	102·2	148·8	251·0	30·6	74·1	104·7	23·2	26·1	49·3	426·6	2,019·3
Common Services	−29·3	—	11·1	11·1	—	5·1	5·1	36·3	5·6	41·9	963·6	992·4
Total Expenditure on Programmes	82,701·0	6,819·3	4,554·8	11,374·1	2,588·5	2,821·7	5,410·2	4,069·6	153·7*	4,223·3	27,529·9	131,238·5
Special Sales of Assets	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	−2,100·0	−2,100·0
Adjustments											250·0	250·0
Planning Total	82,701·0	6,819·3	4,554·8	11,374·1	2,588·5	2,821·7	5,410·2	4,069·6	153·7	4,223·3	25,679·9	129,388·5

* Including government net lending to, and the market and overseas borrowing of, the nationalised industries and certain other public corporations

† The 1984-85 figure includes an adjustment to bring the total into line with the estimated outturn at the time the territorial analysis was carried out

‡ Programmes 15, 16 and 17 relate to the Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland programme shown in Table 2.11 of the 1986 public expenditure White Paper Cmnd 9702

Table 7a: Identifiable and Unidentifiable Public Expenditure 1980-81 to 1984-85*

£ million

	Great Britain	Northern Ireland	Unidentified	United Kingdom identified	As a percentage of United Kingdom identifiable* expenditure: Great Britain	Northern Ireland
1980-81	75,408·8	2,988·2	14,283·3	78,397·0	96·2	3·8
1981-82	84,454·7	3,309·6	16,870·9	87,764·3	96·2	3·8
1982-83	90,624·7	3,614·2	19,137·3	94,238·9	96·2	3·8
1983-84	96,360·0	3,891·1	19,931·1	100,251·1	96·1	3·9
1984-85	104,058·1	4,223·3	21,107·1	108,281·4	96·1	3·9

Table 7b: Identifiable and Unidentifiable Public Expenditure 1980-81 to 1984-85*

£ per head

	Great Britain	Northern Ireland	United Kingdom identified	As a percentage of United Kingdom expenditure per head: Great Britain	Northern Ireland
1980-81	1,377·2	1,918·0	1,392·1	98·9	137·8
1981-82	1,540·7	2,116·1	1,556·7	99·0	135·9
1982-83	1,654·7	2,306·4	1,672·8	98·9	137·9
1983-84	1,758·3	2,473·7	1,778·2	98·9	139·1
1984-85	1,895·1	2,676·4	1,916·9	98·9	139·6

* Identifiable relates to the expenditure which can be attributed either to Great Britain or Northern Ireland and therefore has wider coverage than the earlier tables.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Single European Act

Mr. Spearing asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will tabulate the principal subjects and topics which on ratification and implementation of the Single European Act Her Majesty's Government envisage will be subject to majority voting and unanimity, respectively, in the Council of Ministers of the European Economic Community.

Mrs. Chalker: The principal subjects on which the EEC treaty already provides for majority voting are as follows:

Article	
(i)	*Qualified Majority on a proposal from the Commission*
7	—rules to prevent discrimination on the grounds of nationality.
28	—autonomous alteration or suspension of common customs tariff duties etc. not exceeding 20 per cent. of the rate.
42	—application of competition rules to agriculture.
43(2)	—implementing the common agricultural policy.
43(3)	—establishment of common agricultural market organisations.
54(2)	—freedom of establishment.
55	—exclusion of certain activities from freedom of establishment..
56(2)	—co-ordination of certain national provisions concerning special treatment of foreign nationals.
57(1)	—mutual recognition of diplomas and so on.
57(2)	—taking up and pursuit of activities by certain self-employed persons.
63(2)	liberalisation of services
69	free movement of capital.
70(2)	—amendment of national measures restricting free movement of capital.
75(1)	—inland transport policy.
79(3)	—elimination of discrimination between carriers.
87(1)	—competition rules.
92(3)(d)	—additional categories of state aids considered compatible with the common market.
94	—state aids rules.
98	—special authorisation of export refunds or countervailing charges on imports.
101	—directives to remove distortions of competition caused by differences between national laws.
103	—directives to implement conjunctural policy measures adopted under article 103(2).
112(1)	—harmonisation of export aids.
113	—common commercial policy.
116	—common action in international organisations of an economic character.
127	—European social fund.
(ii)	*Qualified Majority not on the basis of Commission proposals*
73(1)	—revocation of Commission authorisation of a member state's protective measures in field of capital movements.
108(2)	—grant of mutual assistance to meet balance of payments difficulties.
108(3)	—revocation or amendment of Commission authorisation of a member state's protective measures to meet balance of payments difficulties.
109	—amendment of a member state's protective measures to meet a sudden balance of payments crisis.
114	—conclusion of certain commercial agreements with third countries.
126(a)	—stopping certain social fund assistance.
154	—salaries of EC staff (now found in article 6 of merger treaty).
203(3)	—establishment of draft budget.
203(5)	—decisions on budget amendments and modifications proposed by European Parliament.
203(9)	—altering maximum rate of increase in budget (with agreement of European Parliament).
204	—authorising expenditure in excess of provisional twelfths at beginning of financial year.
206(9)	—conditions of employment of members of the Court of Auditors.
206(b)	—recommendation to Parliament that Commission be given a discharge in respect of implementation of the budget.
(iii)	*Simple Majority*
49	—free movement of workers (qualified majority after entry into force of Single European Act).
128	—vocational training policy.
139	—request for extraordinary session of the Parliament.
151	—adoption of Council rules of procedure (now in article 5 of merger treaty).
152	—requests for Commission studies.
153	—rules for committees provided for in treaty.
173	—decision to bring an action before the Court of Justice to review the legality of an act.
175	—decision to bring an action before the Court of Justice for failure to act.
196	—request for convention of Economic and Social Committee.
228	—request for an opinion from the Court of Justice on the compatibility of an international agreement with the treaty.
236	—Concil Opinion on on calling a conference of member states to consider proposals for treaty amendments.

The principal subjects on which the EEC treaty currently requires unanimity are as follows (those which, as a result of the Single European Act, will be partly or wholly subject to majority voting are marked with an asterisk):

Article	
28*	—alteration of duties etc. in the common customs tariff by more than 20 per cent.
51	—social security for migrant workers.
56(2)	—coordination of national legislation concerning special treatment for foreign nationals.
57(29*	—taking up and pursuit of activities by certain self-employed persons (as amended by the Single European Act).
59(2)*	—extention of free movement of services to nationals of a third country.
70(1)*	—capital movements between member states and third countries.
75(3)	—common transport policy provisions liable to have a serious effect on standards of living and so on.
76	—safeguard against new discrimination between carriers.
84(2)*	—sea and air transport (as amended by the Single European Act).
93(2)	—derogations from state aids rules.
99	—indirect tax approximation.
100*	—approximation of provisions affecting functioning of common market (supplemented by article 18 and 19 of the Single European Act).
103(2)	—conjunctural policy measures.
121	—delegation to the Commission of implementation of common social measures.
126(b)	—new tasks for European social fund.
138(3)	—direct elections to the European Parliament.
149	—amendments to Commission proposals (amended by Single European Act to introduce procedure for co-operation with European Parliament).
157	—size of Commission (now article 10, merger treaty).
159	—replacement of members of Commission (now article 12, merger treaty).
165	—increasing the number of judges on the ECJ.
166	—increasing the number of advocates-general at the ECJ.
194	—appointment of members of Economic and Social Committee.
196	—approval of rules of procedure of the Economic and Social Committee.
201	—own resources.
26(4)	—appointment of members of the Court of Auditors.
209	—adoption of financial regulations and so on.
217	—languages of Community institutions.
223(3)	—amendments to list of war materials etc
231	—co-operation with OECD.
235	—action in absence of specific powers in the Treaty.
237	—new accessions.
238	—conclusion of association agreements.

In addition to the subjects indicated above, the Single European Act will introduce qualified majority voting on the following:

Article	
28*	—alteration of duties etc. in the common customs tariff by more than 20 per cent.
51	—social security for migrant workers.
56(2)	—coordination of national legislation concerning special treatment for foreign nationals.
57(29*	—taking up and pursuit of activities by certain self-employed persons (as amended by the Single European Act).
59(2)*	—extention of free movement of services to nationals of a third country.
70(1)*	—capital movements between member states and third countries.
75(3)	—common transport policy provisions liable to have a serious effect on standards of living and so on.
76	—safeguard against new discrimination between carriers.
84(2)*	—sea and air transport (as amended by the Single European Act).
93(2)	—derogations from state aids rules.
99	—indirect tax approximation.
100*	—approximation of provisions affecting functioning of common market (supplemented by article 18 and 19 of the Single European Act).
103(2)	—conjunctural policy measures.
121	—delegation to the Commission of implementation of common social measures.
126(b)	—new tasks for European social fund.
138(3)	—direct elections to the European Parliament.
149	—amendments to Commission proposals (amended by Single European Act to introduce procedure for co-operation with European Parliament).
157	—size of Commission (now article 10, merger treaty).
159	—replacement of members of Commission (now article 12, merger treaty).
165	—increasing the number of judges on the ECJ.
166	—increasing the number of advocates-general at the ECJ.
194	—appointment of members of Economic and Social Committee.
196	—approval of rules of procedure of the Economic and Social Committee.
201	—own resources.
26(4)	—appointment of members of the Court of Auditors.
209	—adoption of financial regulations and so on.
217	—languages of Community institutions.
223(3)	—amendments to list of war materials etc.
231	—co-operation with OECD.
235	—action in absence of specific powers in the Treaty.
237	—new accessions.
238	—conclusion of association agreements.

In addition to the subjects indicated above, the Single European Act will introduce qualified majority voting on the following:

Article	
8B	—guidelines and so on for balanced progress on internal market.
118A	—adoption of minimum requirements for health and safety of workers.
130E	—implementing decisons relating to European regional development fund.
130Q(2)	—adoption of certain provisions implementing the framework programme on research and technological development.
130S	—decisions on matters relating to the environment in respect of which the Council decides by unanimity that decisions are to be taken by qualified majority.

This reply does not cover matters falling within the treaties establishing the European Coal and Steel Community and the European Atomic Energy Community, since the Single European Act affects them only in respect of the establishment of a court of first instance.

EC (Security Policy)

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what provision is being made for the development of a European Economic Community security policy; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: Security matters do not come within the scope of the European Communities. The member states do co-operate on the political and economic aspects of security in the framework of European political co-operation. Their co-operation in this field will be covered by article 6 of the new treaty provisions on European political co-operation in the sphere of foreign policy which form part of the Single European Act. I refer the hon. Member to the evidence on European political co-operation which my right hon. and learned Friend gave the Foreign Affairs Committee of this House on 11 December, which has now been published.

Uganda

Mr. Tom Cox asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions his Department is now having with the Government of Uganda as to the payment of compensaton to former residents of Uganda who lost their assets under the Amin régime.

Mr. Eggar: My hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Mrs. Chalker) raised the claims of British nationals with President Museveni during her visit to Uganda last month.

Messrs. Paul Hopler and Clarence Robinson

Mr. Ashdown asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has cleared the visit to the United Kingdom of Mr. Paul Hopler or Mr. Clarence Robinson of the Pentagon; and if he will say what the purpose of Mr. Hopler's and Mr. Robinson's visit is.

Mr. Eggar: We have no knowledge of a joint visit by Mr. Hopler and Mr. Robinson. Mr. Robinson did visit the United Kingdom, but, as my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement pointed out to the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) on 6 March, at column 266, no official approach was made, and no United Kingdom companies were visited. United States officials do not require prior clearance from my right hon. and learned Friend before visiting the United Kingdom, although we would naturally expect them to notify us before making investigations here.

Visual Display Units

Mr. Soley asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the approximate number of visual display units in use by his Department; and how many are Tempest-shielded.

Mr. Eggar: There are approximately 820 visual display units in use at home and overseas. Information regarding the numbers of these which are Tempest-shielded is classified.

Albania

Mr. Rooker asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which member states of the

European Economic Community have diplomatic relations with Albania; and when the Council of Ministers last discussed European Economic Community relations with Albania.

Mr. Renton: The following member states of the European Community have diplomatic relations with Albania: France, Italy, Belgium, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Denmark, Greece and Portugal.

There are no central records on discussions by the Council of Ministers of the European Community's relations with Albania. This topic has not been discussed within the last two years.

Tripartite Commission for the Restitution of Monetary Gold

Mr. Rooker asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many meetings of the Tripartite Commission for the Restitution of Monetary Gold have taken place since January 1984; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: There have been three meetings of the commission since January 1984. These took place on 23 May 1984, 12 March 1985 and 29 May 1985.

Corfu Channel (Vessel Losses)

Mr. Rooker asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list any changes in the amounts and value of gold held under the control of the Tripartite Commission for the Restitution of Monetary Gold since May 1984.

Mr. Renton: There has been no change since May 1984 in the amount of gold held by the Tripartite Commission for the Restitution of Monetary Gold. The value of that gold has changed only in accordance with changes in world prices.

Mr. Rooker asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the current value of the 1949 International Court of Justice award of damagess in respect of the loss of two British naval vessels in the Corfu channel in 1946; and if the survivors or the families of those who lost their lives in the incident will receive any of the award when it is made.

Mr. Renton: The amount awarded by the International Court of Justice was £843,947. Compensation has already been given to those injured or bereaved in the incident in the form of disability and widow's pensions. They are unlikely to benefit further when the award is made.

Foreign Affairs Council

Mr. Nicholls asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will report on the outcome of the Foreign Affairs Council held in Brussels on 10 and 11 March.

Mrs. Chalker: My right hon. and learned Friend and I, together with my hon. Friend the Minister for Trade, attended the Foreign Affairs Council in Brussels on 10 and 11 March.

The Commission reported to the Council on its recent discussions with the United States Administration on current trade disputes, notably United States complaints about the effects on their trade of Spanish and Portuguese accession.

The Council agreed a declaration on the Community's trade and economic relations with Japan, stressing the need to achieve tangible results as soon as possible in order to relieve the increasing strain which Japan's overall surplus is placing on the multilateral trade and payments system. A copy of the declaration has been placed in the Library of the House.

The Council reviewed the work now in hand for the progressive restoration of normal relations between Turkey and the Community. The Council confirmed its intention that there should be a meeting of the Association Council at ministerial level in early autumn.

The Council agreed a mandate for the forthcoming negotiations for renewal of the multi-fibre arrangement. My hon. Friend the Minister for Trade will make a separate statement on this.

The Council decided to refer to Health Ministers the recommendations of the group of national cancer experts set up following the Luxembourg European Council.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Pensioner Households

Mr. Andrew Bowden asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many pensioner households lost housing benefit as a result of the changes which came into effect in November 1985; and how many of these lost *(a)* up to £1 a week, *(b)* between £1 and £2 a week, *(c)* between £2 and £3 a week and *(d)* more than £3 a week.

Mr. Major: I assume my hon. Friend has in mind the changes other than the normal uprating changes. The estimated number of pensioners whose housing benefit was less than it would otherwise have been because of the increase in the rate rebate taper above the needs allowance, offset where appropriate by the real improvement in the dependent child addition to the needs allowance, in November 1985 is as follows:

Thousands, Great Britain

Reduction	*Pensioners affected*
Up to £1	1,310
£1 to £2	140
£2 to £3	10
Over £3	*
TOTAL	1,460

* Less than 5,000.

Cervical Cancer

Mr. John Mark Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what proportion of women suffering, or having suffered, from cervical cancer during the period from 1965 to the present day were at the time under 35 years of age as shown in the annual returns.

Mr. Hayhoe: The Office of Population Censuses and Surveys handles statistics of registrations of newly diagnosed cancers; this provides the nearest available information on the numbers of women suffering from cervical cancer. The table shows the latest available data on registrations of malignant neoplasms of cervix uteri, and of carcinoma-in-situ of cervix uteri.

Number of registrations of malignant neoplasms of cervix uteri, and carcinoma-in-situ of cervix uteri, with those aged under 35 as percentage of total all ages, 1965-82, England and Wales.

Year	Number of registrations of malignant neoplasm of cervix uteri			Number of registrations of Carcinoma-in-situ of cervix uteri		
	Total all ages	Number aged under 35	Under 35 as a percentage of total	Total all ages	Number aged under 35	Under 35 as a percentage of total
1965	4,524	168	3·7	1,434	327	22·8
1966	4,457	178	4·0	2,158	553	25·6
1967	4,468	162	3·6	2,947	748	25·4
1968	4,287	184	4·3	2,816	844	30·0
1969	4,075	215	5·3	2,676	925	34·6
1970	4,099	226	5·5	2,243	838	37·4
1971	4,167	295	7·1	2,221	911	41·0
1972	4,014	274	6·8	2,329	975	41·9
1973	4,090	317	7·8	2,604	1,187	45·6
1974	3,970	346	8·7	2,986	1,492	50·0
1975	4,037	343	8·5	3,208	1,661	51·8
1976	3,964	391	9·9	3,634	2,013	55·4
1977	4,016	461	11·5	3,969	2,203	55·5
1978	3,872	491	12·7	3,934	2,232	56·7
1979	3,879	505	13·0	4,294	2,473	57·6
1980	3,963	537	13·6	4,700	2,685	57·1
1981	4,024	611	15·2	5,568	3,237	58·1
1982	3,909	546	14·0	5,427	3,066	56·5
	ICD code 171 (1965-67) 180 (1968-82)			ICD code 171 (1965-67) 234·0 (1968-78) 233·1 (1979-82)		

Earnings Rule

Mr. Watts asked the Secretary of State for Social Services at what level of income the earnings rule has operated in respect of retirement pensions in each year from 1978-79 to date.

Mr. Major: The weekly limits above which retirement pension is affected are shown in the table. The limit in force since November 1985 will remain unchanged when benefits are next uprated in July 1986.

	£
November	
1978	45
1979	52
1982	57
1983	65
1984	70
1985	75

Local Dental Committees

Mr. Weetch asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) pursuant to the answer of 20 December, *Official Report*, column *420*, what criteria have to be fulfilled before he is satisfied that a local dental committee is representative of the dentists within that area; and how many local dental committees have failed to be so recognised by him in each of the last 10 years;

(2) if he will make regulations to provide that all local dental committees hold elections every four years and that they use postal ballots through an independent agency such as the family practitioner committee; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hayhoe: A local dental committee is considered to be representative of the general dental practitioners in the locality of the family practitioner committee where its members are elected and the electorate comprises all dentists on the dental list of the committee concerned. No local dental committee has failed to be recognised in the last ten years.

The questions of frequency of elections and whether voting should take place at a general meeting or by post are for local decision. The returning officer however is invariably the administrator of the family practitioner committee. I have no plans to alter the present arrangements.

NHS (Private Patients)

Mr. Lewis Stevens asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he intends to raise the National Health Service charges for private patients and overseas visitors in the next financial year.

Mr. Hayhoe: From 1 April 1986, the charges payable by private patients and overseas visitors for accommodation and services at Health Service hospitals will go up to amounts that reflect the total costs that it is estimated will be incurred in the next 12 months. For outpatients, the average increase is 16 per cent., reflecting cost increases and a reassessment of the component for overheads in these charges and follows increases of 13 per cent. and 4 per cent. in 1985 and 1984. The average increase for inpatients is 4 per cent. following increases of 9 per cent. and 14 per cent. in the previous two years.

The basis for all these charges is under review and account will be taken of the report of a study of private patient charges by the National Audit Office expected later this year, and the recommendations of a health service Rayner scrutiny on the marketing of private patient facilities which will be reporting shortly.

Charges for overseas visitors will be increased in line with charges to private patients through regulations which were laid yesterday. Details of charges for private patients are given in the table.

Private resident patients charges 1986-87 (present charges in brackets)

Class of hospital	Charges for patients not paying consultant(s) separately (1) Single room £	(2) Other £	Charges for patients paying consultant(s) separately (3) Single room £	(4) Other £
Class A long-stay hospitals	71(68)	65(62)	67(66)	61(60)
Class B Psychiatric hospitals	59(54)	54(49)	56(52)	51(47)
Class C1 mainly acute (non-teaching) hospitals	120(110)	109(100)	113(106)	103(96)
Class C2 acute (non-teaching) hospitals	132(125)	120(114)	124(120)	113(109)
Class D London teaching (other than A and B)	185(174)	168(159)	173(166)	158(151)
Class E provincial teaching (other than A and B)	146(144)	133(131)	139(137)	126(124)
Class F London postgraduate hospitals managed by special health authorities except the hospitals for Sick Children and the National Heart and Chest hospitals	203(193)	185(176)	191(183)	123(167)
Class G the hospitals for Sick Children and the National Heart and Chest hospitals	282(266)	256(243)	265(253)	241(230)

Notes:

Charges are per day.

Private patients normally pay the rates in columns 3 and 4. The higher rates in columns 1 and 2 apply only to those patients who are paying the hospital for medical services rather than the doctor.

Private outpatient and day care charges 1986-87 (Present charges in brackets)

	All hospitals except London postgraduate hospitals managed by SHAs (Classes A-E) £		London postgraduate hospitals managed by SHAs (Class F and G) £	
1. Consultation	*6·50	(5·50)	11·50	(9·50)
2. Day cases	26·50	(25·00)	27·50	(26·00)
3. Pathology	6·50	(6·00)	12·50	(11·50)
4. Radiodiagnosis				
Unit value:	0·75	(0·66)	0·92	(0·88)
Minimum charge:	12·00	(10·50)	14·50	(14·00)
5. CT Scanning	96·00	(96·00)	115·00	(115·00)
6. Radiotherapy				
Superficial:	7·50	(6·00)	19·50	(11·00)
Other:	16·00	(12·50)	41·50	(25·00
7. Physiotherpy and Remedial Gymnastics for each attendance	4·50	(4·00)	8·50	(7·00)
8. Occupational Therapy	7·00	(6·00)	10·00	(9·50)
9. Audiometry	4·50	(4·00)	4·50	(4·00)
10. ECG	9·00	(7·50)	15·00	(10·50)
11. EEG	34·00	(29·00)	66·00	(52·00)
12. Electro-myography	21·00	(18·00)	40·50	(31·50)
13. Use of operating theatre				
Under 10 minutes:	21·00	(20·00)	26·00	(25·50)
10-30 minutes:	41·00	(39·00)	52·00	(49·00)
Over 30 minutes:	62·00	(58·00)	78·00	(72·00)

* Where there was more than one charge in 1985-86 an illustrative figure is shown.

Research

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list the social security research currently being undertaken by or on behalf of his Department; what are his priorities for future social security research; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fowler: I shall let the right hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

London Postgraduate Hospitals (Inpatient Costs)

Mr. Donald Stewart asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish figures to show the costs per inpatient week for each of the London postgraduate hospitals in each of the last three financial years.

Mr. Whitney: The table shows the weekly cost of an inpatient for each of the hospitals concerned:

Hospital	1982-83 £	1983-84 £	1984-85 £
Bethlem Royal Hospital and the Maudsley Hospital	561·95	542·94	556·43

Hospital	1982-83 £	1983-84 £	1984-85 £
Eastman Dental Hospital*	—	—	—
Hammersmith & Queen Charlotte's Hospital	740·73	777·76	859·38
Hospitals for Sick Children	1,010·85	1,121·17	1,205·89
Moorfields Eye Hospital	785·74	879·81	992·00
National Heart & Chest Hospitals	1,038·95	1,108·92	1,257·93
National Hospitals for Nervous Diseases	826·76	869·11	954·10
Royal Marsden Hospital	853·38	921·09	894·95

* There is no inpatient treatment given at this hospital.

Terrence Higgins Trust

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he has any proposals to increase the grant which his Department has allocated to the Terrence Higgins trust; and what factors he took into account when deciding to allocate the present amount of grant to the Terrence Higgins trust.

Mr. Whitney: No decision has been reached on the level of the grant for next year.

Residential Care (Working Party)

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services, pursuant to the replies to the right hon. Member for Stoke on Trent, South on 24 February, *Official Report*, column *469*, if he will appoint representatives of relevant voluntary organisations to the joint working party on residential care; and if he will make a further statement.

Mr. Newton: Since the working party will be primarily concerned with the balance between central and local public spending on residential care, we have agreed with the local authority associations that membership should be limited to central and local government representatives. However, we and the local authority associations recognise the important implications of this work for the voluntary sector and have agreed that it should be given a prominent role in the working party's consultations.

Chlamydia Trachomatis

Mr. Ian Lloyd asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what information he has on the scale and rate of increase of non-specific genital infection caused by the organism chlamydia trachomatis in the United Kingdom over the past five years;

(2) what information he has on the incidence of pelvic infection and sterility caused by long-term failure to diagnose chlamydial infection in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Hayhoe: The information collected centrally does not identify this information, but there are indications that the incidence of chlamydia has risen in the last few years. My Department is funding research studies on the incidence and prevalence of this infection in defined groups of women at university college hospital, and on the epidemiology of chlamydial infections at the social medicine and health services research unit at the united medical school of Guys and St. Thomas' hospitals.

Mr. Ian Lloyd asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what funds have been made available within the National Health Service to public health or National Health Service laboratories to control the spread of chlamydia trachomatis by making generally available diagnostic kits for this purpose.

Mr. Hayhoe: I am aware that testing for chlamydia trachomatis is becoming more widely available now that diagnostic tests have been developed. But as it is for health authorities and the public health laboratory service to determine the allocation of their resources in the light of their particular needs and priorities no specific National Health Service funds have been allotted for such tests.

Immunodiagnostic Testing

Mr. Ian Lloyd asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) whether he will describe the costing of immunodiagnostic testing in the National Health Service, public health and blood transfusion service laboratories, with particular reference to the recent criticism of current procedures;

(2) what information he has on the rate at which immunodiagnostic testing employing radioactive isotopes is being replaced by commercially available products which do not require such isotopes.

Mr. Hayhoe: I regret that this information is not available centrally, and I am not aware of the criticism to which my hon. Friend refers.

Diagnostic Procedures

Mr. Ian Lloyd asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) whether he will make a statement on the availability of suitable non-isotopic diagnostic procedures within the National Health Service in the light of the general trend away from radioactive testing in Europe and North America;

(2) what funds have been made available to enable the National Health Service to purchase diagnostic kits which will facilitate the withdrawal from radioisotopic testing and its replacement by modern diagnostic procedures which create no radiation or disposal hazards.

Mr. Hayhoe: It is for health authorities themselves to make decisions about the deployment of resources and the purchase of the most suitable products to meet their needs. I am not aware of any evidence to suggest that these decisions are not well informed and based on developments in practice.

Blood

Mr. Ian Lloyd asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) why the blood products laboratory at Elstree continues to manufacture and supply radioisotopic immune assays for hepatitis B surface antigen to the blood transfusion service, despite the availability of non-isotopic kits similar to those now being used for the testing of acquired immune deficiency syndrome;

(2) whether he is satisfied that funds currently being used within the National Health Service for the manufacture of radioisotopic immune-assays for hepatitis B could not be more effectively employed in areas not adequately covered by the private biotechnology sector.

Mr. Hayhoe: The Department's circular, HC(83)3, states that health authorities should not engage in the manufacture of such products unless there is no suitable commercial alternative, or unless it is significantly

cheaper to do so. I have no evidence that this policy is not being generally observed. The policy applies to the Central Blood Laboratories Authority which is responsible for the blood products laboratory at Elstree. Regional transfusion centres are free to use whatever products they consider are safe, suitable and cost-effective whether manufactured by a health authority or the private sector.

Abortions

Mr. Chope asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the number of legal abortions, broken down between National Health Service and non-National Health Service, to women usually resident in the area of the Southampton and South-West Hampshire district health authority in each of the last five years.

Mr. Hayhoe: The table shows the numbers of notifications of abortions carried out under the Abortion Act 1967 to women usually resident in the Southampton and South-West Hampshire health area for 1980 to 1985 by category of premises.

The figures for 1985 are provisional as they exclude late notifications for 1985 received after the end of January 1986.

Legal abortions: usual residents of Southampton and South-West Hampshire health area, by category of premises 1980-1985

	Category of premises	
	National Health Service	non-National Health Service
1980	650	192
1981	790	191
1982	708	192
1983	700	231
1984	755	212
*1985	816	234

* provisional.

Departmental Office (Southampton)

Mr. Chope asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the approximate turnover in 1985 of staff in the grades of clerical assistant and clerical officer in the Southampton social security office.

Mr. Major: Following is the information for the year ender 31 December 1985.

Turnover is defined as those staff who leave the Department (including those who retire), change offices within the Department or are promoted within an office. The number of staff who leave the Department (including those who retire) is lower. Both sets of figures are set out in the table:

		Per cent.
Clerical Assistant		
Total turnover	25	54·3
Total leavers	10	21·7
Clerical Officer		
Total turnover	26·5	21·5
Total leavers	19·5	15·9

Students (Benefits)

Mr. Chope asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he expects to receive the report of the social security advisory committee on proposed changes to the eligibility of students for housing and other benefits.

Mr. Newton: I understand that the committee hopes to submit its report within a few weeks.

Southampton and South-West Hampshire Health Authority

Mr. Chope asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what has been the income received by the Southampton and South-West Hampshire health authority in each of the last 10 years from the disposal of land and buildings.

Mr. Whitney: The information required was not collected centrally in respect of district health authorities until 1982-83. The figures since then are as follows:

	£
1982-83	22,292
1983-84	152,605
1984-85	Nil

Mr. Chope asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what was the annual expenditure per person on primary health care in the Southampton and South-West Hampshire district health authority in each of the last five years.

Mr. Hayhoe: Following are the figures requested:

Expenditure per head of population on Primary Health Care Southampton and South-West Hampshire Health Authority*

	£
1980-81	61
1981-82	69
1982-83	78
1983-84	82
1984-85	89

* Current expenditure on community health services plus net expenditure on family practitioner services. The latter expenditure cannot strictly be attributed to particular districts but has been included (pro-rata to population) from the annual accounts of the family practitioner committee which accounts for it.

Mr. Chope asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement on the capital projects completed within the Southampton and South-West Hampshire district health authority area in each of the last eight years and their costs.

Mr. Whitney: Information is held centrally only on schemes each costing at least £2 million and is as follows:

(1) Southampton general phase 5 maternity — building and engineering cost £5·4 million — building completion 1979.

(2) Southampton general phase 5, west ward block — building and engineering cost £6·4 million — building completion 1981.

(3) Royal south Hants phase 2 mental illness unit — building and engineering cost £2·8 million — building completion 1978.

For information on schemes costing less than £2 million I suggest that my hon. Friend contacts the chairman of the Wessex regional health authority.

Hospital Patients (Hampshire)

Mr. Chope asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what was, at the most recent date for which records are available, the number of patients registered on waiting lists for each category of inpatient and outpatient treatment at hospitals in *(a)* the Southampton and South-West Hampshire health authority, and *(b)* the Portsmouth and South-East Hampshire health authority.

Mr. Whitney: I am sorry I cannot give my hon. Friend all the information he seeks. Some of it is not collected centrally. My hon. Friend may wish to write to the chairmen of the district health authorities in which he is interested for information on outpatient waiting lists. The available information is given in the table.

Number of cases on inpatient waiting list for admission to NHS hospitals at 30 September 1985 (provisional)

Speciality	*Number*
Southampton and South-West Hampshire District Health Authority	
General medicine	15
Dermatology	7
Neurology	131
Cardiology	182
Rheumatology	31
Geriatrics	57
General surgery	2,058
Ear, nose & throat	1,389
Traumatic and Orthopaedic surgery	1,064
Ophthalmology	616
Radiotherapy	8
Urology	501
Thoracic surgery	61
Oral surgery	842
Neurosurgery	143
Gynaecology	823
Mental handicap	19
G.P. Other	6
Other specialist units	216
Total	8,169
Portsmouth and South-East Hampshire District Health Authority	
General medicine	59
Dermatology	37
Rheumatology	4
Geriatrics	22
General surgery	947
Ear, nose & throat	1,215
Traumatic and Orthopaedic surgery	1,060
Ophthalmology	541
Radiotherapy	17
Urology	679
Oral surgery	378
Gynaecology	1,114
Mental handicap	6
Other specialist units	1
Total	6,080

Accident Victims (Treatment)

Mr. Chope asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he will set out the income of the National Health Service in England and Wales derived directly from patients and indirectly from insurance companies, in respect of treatment to accident victims in each of the last five years.

Mr. Whitney: Payments under sections 154 and 155 of the Road Traffic Act 1972 are due from the owners or users of vehicles, or their insurers, and not from patients as such. The annual accounts of health authorities record income from this source in total only. The totals for England and Wales are:

	£'000
1980-81	2,887
1981-82	4,434
1982-83	6,210
1983-84	7,224
1984-85	7,631

Southampton General Hospital

Mr. Chope asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement on the facilities to be provided in phase 5 of the development of the west ward, Southampton general hospital, Southampton together with their cost and the expected date of completion.

Mr. Whitney: Information held centrally records that the building of Southampton general hospital—phase 5 west ward block was completed in December 1981. The building and engineering cost was £6·4 million. It contains 425 beds, a professorial suite, rehabilitation services, staff changing facilities, a chapel, and university teaching accommodation.

Royal South Hampshire Hospital

Mr. Chope asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will make a statement on the facilities to be provided in phase 3 of the development of the royal south Hampshire hospital, Southampton together with their cost and the expected date of completion.

Mr. Whitney: Information held centrally records that the Royal south Hampshire hospital phase 3 will provide 35 oncology beds, 40 bed day unit with three theatres, endoscopy suite, 10 X-ray rooms, pharmacy, pathology department, ear nose and throat services, and catering facilities. The building and engineering cost is £11 million. The estimated date for completion is October 1986, following which a period of commissioning will take place before the hospital opens.

Health Authorities (Accommodation)

Mr. Spearing asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what are the criteria he applies to applications for district health authorities for *(a)* the disposal and *(b)* the retention of residential accommodation for their employees;

(2) if he will publish in the *Official Report* that part of his circular on accommodation for health service staff which defines the types of accommodation which should be sold or retained by health authorities.

Mr. Hayhoe: I have sent the hon. Member a copy of the policy circular he refers to and have placed one in the Library. Under its provisions, health authorities have discretion to decide on the level of accommodation to provide for those training to become doctors, nurses or members of the profession allied to medicine. The circular makes it clear that in general authorities should not provide accommodation for other staff but that exceptional cases should be considered.

Mr. Spearing asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what consultation he had and what response he

received from the Royal College of Nursing concerning his proposal for health authorities to cease to provide accommodation for second and third year student nurses and other personnel.

Mr. Hayhoe: The Rayner scrutiny on residential accommodation recommended that in future accommodation for nurses in training should be limited to first year students. As a result of comments on the scrutiny, including those of the Royal College of Nursing, it was decided that authorities should continue to have discretion to provide accommodation for any professional trainees.

Mr. Nigel Spearing asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what are the names of the district health authorities which have given notice to any of their employees to quit accommodation owned by them, consequent on his circular on surplus accommodation, together with the number of units of accommodation in each case.

Mr. Hayhoe: So far only plans for the health authorities listed in the table have beeen approved. The number of units of accommodation currently provided, and the number to be provided from 1 January 1988, are shown. It is not known whether any of these authorities has yet given any members of staff notice to quit; I will let the hon. Member have a further reply when I have this information. Under present policy, anyone no longer to be provided with accommodation must be given at least a year to make alternative arrangements.

	Current units	*Units from 1 January 1988*
Chester	435	272
Crewe	425	261
Halton	122	74
Macclesfield	306	233
Warrington	330	217
Southport	308	208
South Sefton	531	268
Liverpool	1,082	753
Wirral	461	438

Retirement Benefit (Widows)

Mr. Butterfill asked the Secretary of State for Social Services, whether underpayments of graduated retirement benefit made to some women widowed during the period April 1975 to October 1977 have now been corrected.

Mr. Newton: The records of over 31,000 women widowed during the period April 1975 to October 1977 have now been examined and arrears of graduated retirement benefit due have been paid to some 10,000 of them. Action is continuing in a small number of residual cases where further information is required.

Industrial Injuries Scheme

Mr. Butterfill asked the Secretary of State for Social Sevices whether he has received the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council's response to the consultation paper on the industrial injuries scheme issued by his Department in December 1985.

Mr. Newton: We are considering the council's response. I have placed copies in the Library.

Housing Benefit

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what information he has as to the proportion of council house tenants in *(a)* Inverclyde, *(b)* Strathclyde and *(c)* Scotland who receive housing benefit.

Mr. Major [*pursuant to his reply*, 6 March 1986, c. *244*]: Information is not available in the precise form requested. However, estimates based on local authority subsidy claims indicate that the proportion of council tenants (including new town and Scottish Special Housing Association tenants) who receive rate rebates is: 51 per cent. in Inverclyde, 67 per cent. in Strathclyde and 61 per cent. in Scotland.

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what information he has as to the proportion of domestic ratepayers in *(a)* Inverclyde, *(b)* Strathclyde and *(c)* Scotland who receive housing benefit.

Mr. Major [*pursuant to his reply*, 6 March 1986, c. *244*]: Information is not available in the precise form requested. However, we estimate that the number of rate rebate recipients, based on local and regional authority subsidy claims, as a proportion of the number of domestic ratepayers, is about 47 per cent. in Strathclyde and about 38 per cent. for Scotland as a whole. Rate rebates for Inverclude are the responsiblity for the regional rating authority whose subsidy claim does not separately identify rate rebate recipients in that district. I regret therefore that an estimate for Inverclyde is not available centrally.

Mrs. Beckett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish in the *Official Report* the latest estimates of the number of households receiving housing benefit in Great Britain, showing *(a)* the division between standard and certificated cases, *(b)* the division between home owners, council tenants and others, *(c)* the division between pensioner households, families with children and others, *(d)* the number receiving rent rebates or allowances only, *(e)* the number receiving both a rent rebate or allowance and a rate rebate and *(f)* the number receiving a rate rebate only.

Mr. Major [*pursuant to his reply*, 5 December 1986, c. *342*]: The latest available estimates, based on inquiry information which relates to the autumn of 1984, are given in the following table. Estimates for later dates are currently available only on the basis of a computer simulation model using family expenditure survey data.

Housing benefit: autumn 1984

Great Britain, thousands

	Standard housing benefit(1)	*Certificated housing benefit(2)*	*All housing benefit*
All households	3,810	3,210	7,020
—home owners	1,580	690	2,270
—council tenants	1,760	1,970	3,730
—others	470	550	1,020
—pensioners	2,570	1,460	4,030
—families with children	730	920	1,650
—others	510	830	1,340
—rent rebate/allowance and rate rebate only	1,700	2,400	4,100
—rent rebate/allowance only	200	100	300
—rate rebate only	1,900	700	2,600

Notes:

(1) Estimates of standard housing benefit recipients are mainly derived from the DHSS September 1984 Standard Enquiry of local authorities.

(2) Estimates of certificated housing benefit recipients are derived from the August 1984 supplementary benefit Quarterly Enquiry. These estimates relate to those certificated to receive housing benefit. A very small proportion may not actually receive housing benefit because of the effect of deductions for non-dependent members of the household but reliable information is not available to quantify this.

(3) Estimates of the numbers receiving rent and rate help, rent help only and rate help only are subject to considerable proportionate error and are therefore rounded to the nearest 100,000. The remaining estimates are rounded to the nearest 10,000.

Supplementary Benefit

Mrs. Beckett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what will be the *(a)* gross and *(b)* net savings to the social security budget of abolishing the rent addition paid to 21 to 24-year-olds from 28 July 1986 in (i) 1986-87, (ii) 1987-88 and (iii) in a full year after the policy affects all claimants at current benefit rates assuming no other major changes in social security.

Mr. Newton [*pursuant to his reply*, 10 March 1986, c. *376*]: The information available on non-householder additions in supplementary benefit is based on 1983 returns. On these figures the change in arrangements would suggest a gross saving of about £8 million to £9 million in 1986-87 and £26 million in 1987-88. We do not collect information centrally on non-dependant deductions from housing benefit, but our estimates suggest that the increase in the number of households where a deduction would not be made in future might reduce the gross saving by somewhere around a tenth. 1987-88 is the only full year before the wider social security changes which are planned, and since the change applies to new claims it will not affect all claimants. However, we estimate that abolition of the addition in all cases would result in an annual gross saving of about £35 million.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 13 March 1986

TRANSPORT

A46 Leicester Bypass

Sir Adam Butler asked the Secretary of State for Transport when a public inquiry will be held into whether or not to proceed with the A46 Leicester western bypass.

Mr. Ridley: We hope to publish the draft line and side roads orders for the A46 Leicester western bypass towards the end of this year. If required, a public inquiry would be held about nine months later.

Local Authorities (Grants)

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list all specific type grants paid by his Department to local authorities, showing the size of each grant, which were hypothecated to any individual service or services or where local authorities had to bid for specific grants.

Mr. Ridley: The table shows the specific grants for which my Department is responsible.

Grant	*Rate per cent.*	*1985-86 £ million*	*Purpose*	*Bidding*	*Hypothecation*
Transport Supplementary Grant	50	160	To support highways capital spending on roads of more than local importance	Through Transport Policies and Programme submissions	Block grant, not hypothecated to particular schemes
Transport Facilities Grant	50	*6	To support new or improved public transport facilities costing over £5 million	By specific submission containing financial and economic appraisal	Specific grant
Basic Service Grant	30	*1·5	To support industrial estate access-roads in assisted areas	By specific submission	Specific grant

* Forecast outturn.

A38 Ripley Bypass

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim asked the Secretary of State for Transport what information was available about the stability of the route chosen for the A38 Ripley bypass at the time of the public inquiry.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The Department was aware of the geological conditions which existed on the line of the Ripley bypass at the time of the public inquiry in 1972.

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim asked the Secretary of State for Transport how much the repairs to the recent slippage on the A38 Ripley bypass are likely to cost: and how long they are expected to take.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Temporary remedial measures are now being carried out to stabilise the cutting where the recent slippage has occurred. The northbound inside lane of A38 was closed on 5 March 1986 as a safety measure. The temporary repairs are expected to be completed by 26 March when two-lane traffic flow will be restored.

I am awaiting a report from our agents, Derbyshire county council, on the permanent remedial works required. Preliminary estimates indicate a total cost, including temporary works, of around £100,000. The permanent measures will take approximately eight weeks and may be delayed until completion of carriageway strengthening works on A38. These are currently scheduled to be carried out between the middle of May and end of July.

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether he intends to hold a public inquiry into the recent slippage on the A38 Ripley bypass.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: It is not considered necessary to hold a public inquiry into the recent slippage.

Seat Belts

Mr. Patrick Thompson asked the Secretary of State for Transport what information he has on regulations relating to the wearing of seat belts or restraining harnesses by children aged under 14 years in *(a)* Europe and *(b)* the United States of America.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I shall write to my hon. Friend shortly.

Mr. Patrick Thompson asked the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he has any plans to seek to amend the age conditions governing the compulsory wearing of a seat belt in the front seat of a motor vehicle;

(2) if he has any plans to seek to amend the age conditions governing the compulsory use by a child in the front seat of a motor vehicle of child restraining harnesses.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: No. I do want to encourage motorists to fit and use child restraints in the rear of their cars. We shall shortly be launching national press advertising and a revision of the leaflet "Protect Your Child in the Car". I shall make the leaflet widely available.

The safest place for young children to travel is in the rear seat of the car, wearing approved child restraints appropriate to their age.

If restraints are not fitted in the rear, it is safer for children to wear an adult belt in the front with a booster cushion as necessary to ensure the belt fits.

Motor Vehicles (Children)

Mr. Patrick Thompson asked the Secretary of State for Transport how many children aged under 14 years were killed or seriously injured in a motor vehicle in the last three full years for which figures are available.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Child* motor vehicle occupants, killed or seriously injured, 1982-1984:

Great Britain

	1982	*1983*	*1984*
Killed	70	76	74
Seriously injured	1,321	1,142	1,295

* aged between 0 and 13, inclusive.

Mr. Patrick Thompson asked the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has had suggesting the introduction of legislation concerning the restraining of children in the back of motor vehicles.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The regulations made in January will require the fitting of rear seat belts or child restraints to all new cars manufactured from this October. A small number of individuals and road safety organisations have suggested that we should also introduce legislation requiring the wearing of rear belts or restraints. Compulsory fitting will make it easier for parents to follow the safe course and use restraints in the back of the car. It is sensible and often easy to fit rear seat belts or child restraints to older cars.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Water Cannon, Greenwich

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the Metropolitan police have requested the removal of the two water cannon sited at the Riverway centre in Greenwich; what scientific tests are proposed on the use of these water cannon; and whether live animals will be used in these tests.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The Metropolitan police are working with the Home Office in evaluating the two prototype water cannon with the aim of establishing whether water cannon have a role to play in the policing of serious public disorder. In this connection, the two prototypes have been temporarily moved from Greenwich. There are no plans for tests involving live animals.

Metropolitan Police (Baton Rounds)

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish the results of the Metropolitan police review of equipment and procedures for the firing of baton rounds.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The Commissioner's review is not yet complete. The principles governing the use of plastic baton rounds were set out most recently in the reply given to a question from the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mr. Parry) on 25 November, at column 391.

Police Air Support

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects the review of policy air support to be completed; what are its terms of reference; which persons sit on the review body; in what capacities; and from whom they are taking evidence.

Mr. Giles Shaw: I understand that the safety aspects of police air support are under review by the Civil Aviation Authority with the assistance of officials of the Department and representatives of the police service. Detailed questions about the review should be addressed to the authority.

Court House, Basildon

Mr. Amess asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the provision of a new court house in Basildon.

Mr. Giles Shaw: There is nothing to add to the reply given to a question from my hon. Friend on 23 January, at column 268. Further action on the scheme still rests with Essex county council.

Beat Police Officers (County Durham)

Mr. Dormand asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will call for a report from the chief constable of Durham concerning the number of home beat police officers who are currently operating in County Durham; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The term "home beat officer" is not used by Durham constabulary. I understand from the chief constable that there are currently 35 sergeants and 270 constables in his force whose responsibilities equate to those of home beat officers.

Independent Broadcasting Authority

Mr. Livsey asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he last met the chairman of the Independent Broadcasting Authority.

Mr. Giles Shaw: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary last met the chairman of the Independent Broadcasting Authority on 16 January.

Local Authorities (Grants)

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list all specific type grants paid by his Department to local authorities, showing the size of each grant, which were hypothecated to any individual service or services, or where local authorities had to bid for specific grants.

Mr. Hurd: Details of the Home Office specific grants are as follows, together with the amounts provided for England and Wales in Class IX, votes 6 and 7 of the Supply Estimates 1985-86 and the Supply Estimates 1985-86, Supplementary Estimates:

	£ million
Police	1,399·724
Magistrates' courts	128·606
Probation	129·539
Commonwealth immigrants (section 11 of the Local Government Act 1966)	89·424
Civil Defence	11·989

Grants under section 11 of the Local Government Act 1966 are paid towards the salaries of staff in a range of local authority services, following applications to the Home Office. The other grants are paid on the basis of expenditure on the services identified.

Cigarette Sales (Children)

Mr. Pavitt asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions were brought in

during the years 1980 to 1984 against retailers under section 7 of the Children and Young Persons Act for selling cigarettes to children.

Mr. Mellor: The information available to me, which may be incomplete, is published annually in "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales, Supplementary Tables, Volume 1" (table S1.1(A) of the issue for 1984 under offence classification 144 and corresponding tables for earlier years).

Smoking (Fire Accidents)

Mr. Pavitt asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the total number of injuries and fatalities in fires caused by smoking for the most recent year for which figures are available.

Mr. Mellor: The readily available information is of accidental fires, attended by local authority fire brigades, for which the source of ignition was reported as cigarettes, lighters, cigars or other similar smokers' materials, other than matches. In 1984 there were 262 fatal and 1,874 non-fatal casualties from such fires in the United Kingdom.

Sunday Trading

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what additional funds have been set aside contingently for local authorities during the financial year 1986-87 to provide such services as may be required for Sundays and weekends in the event that the Shops Bill *[Lords]* is passed;

(2) what estimates have been supplied to him by local authorities of the additional costs likely to arise to them in providing municipal services if the Shops Bill *[Lords]* is enacted; and what information he has as to the nature of additional services that will be required.

Mr. Waddington: Consultations with local authority associations have shown that no reasonable estimates of any additional services or expenditure can be prepared until the extent of additional opening of shops can be assessed. The Auld committee concluded that any increase in the cost of public services would be trivial; subsequently, one association, the Association of County Councils, has suggested that something over £1 million could be required and another, the Association of District Councils, predicts no marked effect on the rate burden.

Mrs. Peacock asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many representations the Government have received from hon. and right hon. Members writing on behalf of their constituents concerning the proposed legislation on Sunday trading.

Mr. Waddington: Since the publication of the Shops Bill the Government has received 974 representations from right hon. and hon. Members concerning the proposed legislation on Sunday trading.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what have been the average fines for convictions for Sunday trading in each of the last three years.

Mr. Waddington: The information readily available indicates only the number of persons fined within specified monetary limits. I shall write to the hon. Member when I have the information he seeks.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has as to the costs to local authorities in each of the last three years arising from enforcement of the Shops Act.

Mr. Waddington: I regret that I have no information on the costs to local authorities of enforcing the Shops Act.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has on the current state of compliance with Sunday trading legislation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waddington: In 1984, the last year for which information is available, there were 743 convictions for illegal trading on a Sunday. It is clear, however, that this does not reflect the extent to which the law is being disregarded. The Auld committee concluded (Cmnd. 9376, paragraph 25) that the existing law was not generally enforced by local authorities and was being widely disregarded by shopkeepers all over the country.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received from shops as to the anticipated changes in turnover and profit expected to arise from unrestricted Sunday trading and as to the likely additional costs to them, particularly wages costs.

Mr. Waddington: Since the Shops Bill *[Lords]* was published the Govenment have received 44 representations from retailers about possible changes in turnover, profits and costs. Some expect increased turnover and profits, others fear increased costs.

Data Protection Act 1984

Mr. Grylls asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many representations he has received from businesses about alleged difficulties in understanding the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1984; and whether he will take steps to simplify registration requirements.

Mr. Waddington: Since the beginning of this year we have received six letters about alleged problems created by the Data Protection Act 1984. The Data Protection Registrar, who is responsible for the arrangements for registration under the Act, is keeping the procedures under review and will be looking to simplify the procedures if that proves possible from experience of the working of the Act.

Small Businesses (Fire Precautions)

Mr. Grylls asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has had from businesses, especially small businesses, in response to his consultation on the Fire Precautions Act 1971; and how these representations are being taken into account.

Mr. Giles Shaw: The Home Office has received responses from 19 business organisations (including three specifically representing small businesses) and from 13 companies, commenting on various aspects of the proposals made in the consultative document on the review of the Fire Precautions Act 1971. All the responses are being carefully considered and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and I will be reporting the outcome of the consultative exercise in a further document to be published later in the spring.

Metropolitan Police

Mr. Hickmet asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what restrictions have been imposed upon working overtime of Metropolitan police officers in each year since 1979, what effect such restrictions have had upon the amount of crime being investigated or not investigated, categorised in the most convenient form; and what effect such restrictions have upon individual police officer's enquiries and upon policing as a whole.

Mr. Giles Shaw [*pursuant to his reply*, 19 February 1986, c. *178*]: It has been the policy of successive Commissioners of Police of the Metropolis that overtime should be authorised only when it is operationally necessary. In May 1985, as part of a package of planned expenditure reductions, the force's overtime budget for 1985-86 was reduced from £58 million to £49 million. It is not possible to quantify the effect which this measure has had on the investigation of crime or on policing as a whole in London. The strength of the Metropolitan police increased between 31 May and 31 January by 171 officers.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Foreign Language Teaching

Mr. Holt asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many students currently studying at colleges of education have a formal qualification in the Japanese or Chinese language.

Mr. Walden: This information is not collected centrally.

Mr. Holt asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he has any proposals to seek to increase the awareness of teaching Japanese, Chinese and other Asian languages in primary and secondary schools.

Mr. Chris Patten: The range of languages on offer in schools is an important issue and will be among those matters addressed in a forthcoming statement of policy on foreign languages in the school curriculum.

Mr. Holt asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) how many pupils have qualified with an O-level or A-level GCE in Japanese or Chinese in each of the past 10 years;

(2) how many pupils in 1985 entered the General Certificate of Educaion O-level and A-level examinations in Japanese or Chinese.

Mr. Chris Patten: The information requested is not available centrally for school pupils. The table gives, for the most recent five years for which information is available, the numbers of graded results in Chinese and Japanese at GCE O and A-level achieved by all candidates entered for home examinations set by the English examination boards. The table also shows the numbers of entries for those examinations for the latest available year.

GCE O-level and A-level graded results in Chinese and Japanese
Summer examinations

	1980	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*
O-LEVEL					
Chinese (Modern)					
higher graded results*	1,597	1,278	1,049	1,145	1,236
all graded results†	1,796	1,388	1,172	1,268	1,362
entries					1,381
Chinese (Classical)					
higher graded results	49	47	—	—	158
all graded results	49	48	—	—	177
entries					178
Japanese (Modern)					
higher graded results	84	82	121	138	103
all graded results	84	84	129	144	104
entries					106
A-LEVEL					
Chinese (Modern)					
graded results ‡	162	185	178	144	184
entries					196
Chinese (Classical)					
graded results	—	3	—	—	2
entries					2
Japanese (Modern)					
graded results	41	68	70	78	91
entries					94

Source: Survey of Examining Boards in England.
Notes:
* higher graded results are defined as O-level grades A-C.
† graded results are defined as O-level grades A-E.
‡ graded results are defined as A-level grades A-E.

Local Authorities (Grants)

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list all specific type grants paid by his Department to local authorities, showing the size of each grant, which were hypothecated to any individual service or services, or where local authorities had to bid for specific grants.

Mr. Chris Patten: The Department is responsible for two specific grants: education support grants and the in-service teacher training grant; and for the grant paid on the mandatory awards to students. All these can only be paid to local education authorities and are hypothecated to specific activities. The other information is as follows:

Grant	*Purpose*	*Size of Grant in 1985-86 (£ million)*	*How allocated*
Education Support Grant	To support specific activities in the interest of education in England and Wales. The activities are specified in the Education Support Grant Regulations.	27·5	LEAs are invited by Departmental circular to bid for grant support.

Grant	Purpose	Size of Grant in 1985-86 (£ million)	How allocated
In-service Teacher Training Grant	To encourage the release of teachers for in-service training in the priority areas specified in the Education (Grants for Teacher Training) Regulations.	17·5	LEAs are notified of the sums up to which they may claim grant in respect of the specified areas of training.
Mandatory Student Award	To support LEAs in providing for the maintenance and tuition fees of students in higher education, where LEAs have a statutory duty to pay grant, as laid down in the Education (Mandatory Awards) Regulations.	640	Grant is paid at a 90 per cent. rate on actual expenditure incurred.

Medical Research Council

Mr. Carter-Jones asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Eccles on 20 February, *Official Report*, column *286*, about the composition of Medical Research Council boards, when a reply from the Medical Research Council can reasonably be expected; if he expects to receive a copy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Walden: I understand that the Medical Research Council replied to the hon. Member on 11 March. I have received a copy of the council's letter.

Hearing-impaired Students

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will request the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals to provide him with information on the extent and nature of the provision that is made to meet the special needs of hearing-impaired students at the colleges and universities for which they are responsible.

Mr. Walden: Provision for the particular needs of hearing-impaired students has to be planned on an individual basis and the Government see this as the responsibility of the universities themselves. The Government would, however, encourage universities to consider carefully and sympathetically what provision they can make to ensure that well-qualified applicants with hearing impairment can benefit from a course of higher education.

Standards and Achievements

Mr. Alan Howarth asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish the reports of Her Majesty's inspectors who have visited other countries in order to compare standards and achievements of schools there with standards and achievements of schools in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Keith Joseph: Her Majesty's inspectors undertake a number of visits abroad each year, for a variety of purposes. None is concerned directly to compare standards and achievements in schools, although some do focus on aspects of provision and assessment which bear on these issues. They are often short, informal visits by one or two HMI which do not lead to full written reports. However, in June 1985 a group of Her Majesty's inspectors spent two weeks in the Federal Republic of Germany studying curriculum and examinations for 16 to 19-year-olds in ordinary schools and arrangements for the periodic assessment of pupils aged 10 to 19 throughout the school system. It is hoped that a report of that visit will be published later this year.

Local Education Authorities (Rates)

Mr. Greenway asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he has any plans to introduce legislation to require local education authorities to pay rates on maintained schools and other educational institutions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chris Patten: No. Local education authorities already pay rates on the schools and other educational institutions which they maintain.

Teachers (Salaries)

Sir Peter Hordern asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is a teacher's salary at scale one, at the new rates recently negotiated, expressed per hour and per day, of actual attendance at school.

Mr. Chris Patten: The following table shows the salary of teachers at scale 1 (points 0, 6 and 13) at 31 March 1986, expressed per annum, per hour and per day.

The length of the school year or day is not strictly prescribed, nor is detailed information on practice collected by the Department. Maintained schools are, however, required to open for a minimum of 190 days a year. For illustrative purposes, this has been taken as the number of days worked. The length of the timetabled school week is also not prescribed. A typical primary timetable might involve 25 hours per week, excluding midday and other breaks and after-school activities. A typical secondary timetable on the same basis would be about 27 hours. For the purposes of this table an average of 26 hours per week has been taken. It must be stressed that these figures represent a minimum assumption.

Scale 1
Teachers salaries at 31 March 1986

	Rates per annum	Rates per day [annual salary ÷ 190]	Rates per hour [(daily salary × 5) ÷ 26]
	£	£	£
Minimum point 0	5,904	31·07	5·98
Point 6 (graduate new entrants)	7,305	38·45	7·39
Maximum point 13	9,285	48·87	9·40

Sir Peter Hordern asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish a table showing the level of teachers' salaries at each scale in June 1983, and what they will be when the recent increases are implemented; and if he will show the proportionate increases at such scale, allowing for the increase in the cost of living.

Mr. Chris Patten: The following table sets out the level of teachers' salaries in April 1983 (there was no change between April and June of 1983) and April 1986. The information is provided for the minimum and maximum point on each of the teachers' scales and for selected groups of deputy headteachers and headteachers. The increase in all cases—allowing for minor rounding—is 14 per cent. This figure should be compared with an increase in the retail prices index of 12·45 per cent. from April 1983 to April 1985 (not April 1986 as there has not yet been a pay settlement for the year beginning April 1986). The real increase in teachers' pay at all levels over the period concerned is thus 1·55 per cent.

Teachers' salary rates at 1 April 1983 and 31 March 1986

	1 April 1983		*31 March 1986*	
	Minimum £	*Maximum* £	*Minimum* £	*Maximum* £
Scale 1	5,178	8,142	5,904	9,285
Scale 2	5,949	9,132	6,783	10,413
Scale 3	7,359	10,497	8,391	11,970
Scale 4	8,754	11,763	9,984	13,413
Senior teacher	9,435	12,744	10,758	14,532
Deputy head groups 1-3	6,477	9,279	7,386	10,581
Deputy head group 14	14,622	15,879	16,674	18,108
Head group 1	9,108	10,137	10,386	11,559
Head group 14	20,610	21,828	23,502	24,891

Note:

Although the minimum—point 0—of scale 1 is quoted it should be noted that the majority of new entrant teachers begin on point 6 of scale 1. This group received £6,405 on 1 April 1983 and shall receive £7,305 from 31 March 1986.

Postgraduate Certificate of Education (Physics)

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many applicants there are for postgraduate certificates of education in physics *(a)* in the current year and *(b)* on average; how many of these are considered likely to proceed into teaching; and how many physicists left the teaching profession in 1985 other than through retirement.

Mr. Chris Patten: The available information is as follows. Up to 26 February 1986 the Graduate Teacher Training Registry had received 272 applications for entry to postgraduate certificate in education courses in physics beginning in September 1986. Students still have some months in which to make applications for any courses which are not yet full. It is not possible to estimate how many of these applications will be accepted as this is a matter for the admitting institutions. At the same time last year, 367 applications had been received.

In recent years some 80 per cent. of students who entered PGCE courses of all kinds completed their training successfully and entered teaching in the maintained sector; there is some evidence that wastage from physics courses may be higher than average.

During the year ending 31 March 1984, 311 physics graduates aged under 60 gave up teaching in full-time posts in maintained nursery, primary and secondary schools in England. This includes teachers taking premature retirement. Figures for the year ending 31 March 1985 are expected to be available shortly.

GCSE Examination

Mr. Patrick Thompson asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether it remains his intention that the general certificate of secondary education examinations should go ahead as planned; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Keith Joseph: The GCSE will start this year as planned, so that the benefits of this important reform can be achieved as soon as possible.

To ensure the successful start of the new examinations, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales and I have established a national programme of in-service training for teachers unprecedented in its scale and scope. That training is currently under way.

In response to requests from local education authorities and many others for more help with the preparations and with resources, we have decided upon the following additional measures.

First, I will be proposing to the local authority associations that, subject to the consent of Parliament, £20 million of expenditure in England be supported by education support grants in the first two to three years of GCSE courses in order to help secondary schools purchase necessary additional books and equipment. My right hon. Friend is making similar arrangements for Wales.

Secondly, we will be making available a further £200,000 to the GCSE examining groups to enable them to mount additional training seminars for subject representatives from schools who failed to take advantage of seminars held since January — provided that the groups have reason to believe that those teachers will use this second opportunity.

Thirdly, in view of the wholly exceptional nature of this large reform of the school examinations system, we will be bringing regulations before the House to enable local education authorities in England and Wales to close their schools to pupils for two days in the summer term in order to allow teaching staff to undertake more GCSE in-service training than would otherwise be possible.

We are taking these measures in order to ensure that pupils starting GCSE courses this autumn gain maximum benefit from this new educational opportunity. We call upon all concerned to take advantage of these steps and to work together to make the GCSE the success it deserves to be.

Assisted Places Scheme

Mr. D. E. Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science how much has been spent on the assisted places scheme in each local education authority in England in each year since the scheme was introduced.

Mr. Dunn [*pursuant to his reply*, 10 March 1986, c. *334*]: The further information requested is as follows:

Local Education Authority	*Total expenditure (£) (school year) 1981-82*	*1982-83*
Barking and Dagenham	Nil	Nil
Barnet	18,345	67,735

Local Education Authority	Total expenditure (£) (school year) 1981-82	1982-83
Bexley	Nil	Nil
Brent	Nil	Nil
Bromley	50,805	110,147
Croydon	84,925	188,756
Ealing	38,078	72,645
Enfield	Nil	Nil
Haringey	11,373	26,989
Harrow	30,177	68,218
Havering	Nil	Nil
Hillingdon	4,581	10,766
Hounslow	Nil	Nil
Kingston-upon-Thames	29,905	67,956
Merton	28,871	74,336
Newham	Nil	Nil
Redbridge	33,589	69,742
Richmond-upon-Thames	59,762	149,155
Sutton	16,118	31,098
Waltham Forest	12,622	70,835
Inner London Education Authority	548,979	1,233,290
Birmingham	78,770	170,052
Coventry	35,159	59,433
Dudley	Nil	Nil
Sandwell	Nil	Nil
Solihull	Nil	Nil
Walsall	Nil	Nil
Wolverhampton	50,258	124,294
Knowsley	Nil	Nil
Liverpool	110,923	239,869
St. Helens	Nil	Nil
Sefton	88,109	200,738
Wirral	91,219	253,149
Bolton	61,074	152,737
Bury	42,988	96,384
Manchester	151,008	347,348
Oldham	48,765	121,553
Rochdale	Nil	Nil
Salford	Nil	Nil
Stockport	58,240	87,045
Tameside	Nil	Nil
Trafford	16,704	56,351
Wigan	Nil	Nil
Barnsley	Nil	Nil
Doncaster	Nil	Nil
Rotherham	Nil	Nil
Sheffield	17,596	37,275
Bradford	35,188	75,531
Calderdale	Nil	Nil
Kirklees	35,003	73,279
Leeds	81,613	212,972
Wakefield	49,942	96,755
Gateshead	Nil	Nil
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	131,692	308,038
North Tyneside	Nil	Nil
South Tyneside	Nil	Nil
Sunderland	Nil	Nil
Avon	258,109	590,698
Bedfordshire	94,027	191,355
Berkshire	40,291	95,592
Buckinghamshire	3,871	7,300
Cambridgeshire	42,561	107,284
Cheshire	69,297	141,646
Cleveland	Nil	Nil
Cornwall	39,071	82,440
Cumbria	48,261	109,460
Derbyshire	65,757	133,904
Devon	113,758	230,225
Dorset	40,741	85,603
Durham	Nil	Nil
East Sussex	46,950	121,915
Essex	89,389	181,486
Gloucestershire	18,849	42,615
Hampshire	152,871	491,727
Hereford and Worcester	87,656	204,057
Hertfordshire	154,549	367,393
Humberside	50,281	108,979
Isles of Scilly	Nil	Nil
Isle of Wight	Nil	Nil
Kent	56,284	185,988
Lancashire	136,972	312,806
Leicestershire	40,605	101,137
Lincolnshire	15,834	43,912
Norfolk	62,344	136,285
North Yorkshire	31,243	46,406
Northamptonshire	51,593	125,403
Northumberland	Nil	Nil
Nottinghamshire	32,509	68,281
Oxfordshire	83,324	208,739
Shropshire	18,583	34,332
Somerset	112,242	267,005
Staffordshire	91,398	220,689
Suffolk	86,197	194,552
Surrey	160,029	389,468
Warwickshire	43,714	137,934
West Sussex	Nil	Nil
Wiltshire	14,941	34,555

PRIME MINISTER

Westland plc

Q46. **Mr. Dalyell** asked the Prime Minister if any consideration was given to bringing into the public domain the letter of 7 January from the Solicitor-General to the then Secretary of State for Defence, the right hon. Member for Henley, (Mr. Heseltine) immediately after a copy of the letter was received in her office; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I have nothing to add to the account which I gave to the House in my statement on 23 January at columns 449-60, and in the debate on 27 January, at columns 651-58.

Northern Ireland

Q48. **Sir John Biggs-Davison** asked the Prime Minister (1) if she will take steps to institute an Ulster Grand Committee; and if she will make a statement;

(2) if she will take steps to seek to replace the current procedure for Northern Ireland legislation with a system based on primary legislation applicable throughout the United Kingdom or applicable only to Northern Ireland, as appropriate in the particular circumstances of each case; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I made it clear on 25 February that I am willing to discuss with leaders of the Ulster Unionist party and the Democratic Unionist party the arrangements for handling Northern Ireland business at Westminster.

Sir John Biggs-Davison asked the Prime Minister if she will seek to arrange an early meeting of the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference to be attended by Defence Ministers to arrange staff talks aimed at concerted military action against terrorism on both sides of the border, including specifically co-ordination of military and police intelligence, arrangements for over-flying of the border by the Irish Air Corps, Royal Air Force and Army Air Corps and the pursuit of suspected terrorists across the border by the armed forces of the Irish Republic and the United Kingdom, and co-ordination of maritime patrols for the

interception of terrorists and their shipments in Irish Republic and United Kingdom territorial waters and on the high seas.

The Prime Minister: The Intergovernmental Conference has already discussed security co-operation and the co-ordination of security force activity on both sides of the border. In both jurisdictions it is the police who have primary responsibility for dealing with terrorism under the law. The Chief Constable and Garda Commissioner have been meeting about a programme of work to be undertaken by their respective police forces aimed at enhancing co-operation in a range of areas. I am satisfied this is the right way of taking forward our mutual interest in eradicating terrorism.

European Parliament (Members' Salaries)

Sir Russell Johnston asked the Prime Minister what information she has about the annual salary of Members of the European Parliament in each of the countries of the European Community, expressed in pounds sterling.

The Prime Minister: Information of this kind is not readily available because the salaries of Members of the European Parliament are determined and paid by their national Governments. The latest information, based on July 1985 figures, is as follows:

	£
Belgium	24,154
Denmark	*14,089
France	29,400
Germany	25,368
Greece	11,400
Ireland	14,012
Italy	30,630
Luxembourg	16,500
Netherlands	21,000
Portugal	Not known
Spain	Not known
United Kingdom	†16,904

* Plus variable tax-free living expenses supplement of approximately £2,200.

† Now £17,702, wef 1 January 1986.

Engagements

Mr. Spencer asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 13 March.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 13 March.

Mr. Pike asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 13 March.

Mr. Greenway asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 13 March.

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House I shall be having further meetings later today.

Dr. Anahita Ratebzad

Mr. Ron Brown asked the Prime Minister if Her Majesty's Government will grant permission to Dr. Anahita Ratebzad for a visit to the United Kingdom to publicise Afghanistan's peace proposals; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: We do not regard the Karmal regime as a legitimate regime. It would not, therefore, be appropriate for Dr. Anahita Ratebzad, as a senior member of that regime, to visit this country. If the Karmal regime were sincere about peace it would open the way to progress in the United Nations negotiations by agreeing to the withdrawal of the 118,000 Soviet troops currently occupying Afghanistan.

EMPLOYMENT

Devon and Cornwall (EC Aid)

Mr. Penhaligon asked the Paymaster General if he will indicate for the years 1976 to 1985 the aid granted by the European Community under the European social fund for projects in Devon and Cornwall separately.

Mr. Lang: Allocation from the European social fund to vocational training and job creation schemes in Devon and Cornwall from 1983 to 1985 were as follows:

Year	*Devon* £	*Conwall* £
1983	7,000	56,531
1984	339,804	58,106
1985	654,537	31,072

Fund assistance to training schemes run by the Manpower Services Commission on a national basis (including Devon and Cornwall) are not included in the above figures.

Allocations from the fund were not analysed on a county basis before 1983.

Work Permits

Mr. Nicholas Baker asked the Paymaster General if he will introduce legislation imposing a requirement that companies obtaining work permits for the employment of foreign nationals should state what steps they will take to train a citizen of the United Kingdom to take over the job at the expiry of the work permit.

Mr. Lang: In many cases it is not practical to fix an expiry date, nor is it always reasonable to expect the employer to replace the overseas worker.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Kennedy asked the Paymaster General if, further to his answer to the hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye of 10 March, he will publish in the *Official Report* all relevant recent analysis from the 1984 labour force survey into the numbers of unemployed people who had previously been self-employed and are thus excluded from the unemployed count; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: The labour force survey showed that in Great Britain in the spring of 1984 there were about 30,000 previously self-employed people without jobs and seeking work who were excluded from the unemployment count. However, there were also some 20,000 previously self-employed claimants included in the count who were not actively looking for work and a further 30,000 claimants who did some paid work in the reference week and said they were self-employed.

Bitter and Whisky (Prices)

Mr. Allan Roberts asked the Paymaster General if he will list the average price used in compiling the retail prices index of *(a)* a pint of ordinary bitter, 1037 original gravity, and *(b)* of a standard measure, one-sixth of a gill, of a typical blended Scotch whisky in the years 1960, 1965, 1970, 1975, 1980 and 1985.

Mr. Lang [*pursuant to his reply*, 12 March 1986, c. *476*]: National average prices for beer and whisky are not used in the compilation of the retail prices index. Average prices are compiled and published only for certain items of food.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Steel Industry (EC Aid)

Mr. Hickmet asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether the European Community Commission has reached a decision on further non-quota aid under the European regional development fund for areas in the United Kingdom affected by the decline of the steel industry.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Yes. The EC Commission has announced that in principle this further aid will be made available in respect of the counties of Clwyd and Gwent in Wales, Cleveland, Humberside (together with that part of the old travel-to-work area of Scunthorpe situated in the county of Lincolnshire), South Yorkshire (including all the old travel-to-work area of Sheffield) and the Scottish region of Strathclyde.

The United Kingdom should receive about £7·5 million from the ERDF as a result of this decision. The aid will be available after the amendments required to the existing five-year programme under Council regulation (EEC) 216/1984, and the proposals for the division of aid between qualifying areas, have been drawn up by the Government and agreed with the Commission. In drawing up these proposals the Government intend to concentrate the aid available in respect of Humberside on Scunthorpe TTWA and that in respect of Strathclyde on the districts of Strathkelvin, Motherwell, Monklands and Hamilton.

In accordance with the regulation the aid will be for the clearance of rundown areas, the conversion of disused industrial buildings, the modernisation of premises for small and medium-sized enterprises, and also for aid to small firms, including grants for consultancy, the establishment or development of common services, the promotion of innovation, and market research.

Council of Industry Ministers

Mr. Hanley asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the outcome of the European Community Council of Industry Ministers on 3 March.

Mr. Butcher: The Industry Council, at which I represented the United Kingdom, provided an opportunity for a preliminary exchange of views on the Community regime for state aids to shipbuilding which should apply after the fifth directive expires at the end of 1986. A further discussion will take place in the June Council.

The Council also discussed the trade in steel between Spain and Portugal and the 10 other member states. Small increases in the limits to Spanish and Portuguese exports were agreed. I registered the United Kingdom's opposition to the increase in the Spanish limit, but the decision was taken on a majority vote.

The Council made limited progress in agreeing the terms of the draft directive on the mutual acceptance of test data for the type approval of telecommunication terminal equipment and heard a progress report on the draft directive for legal protection against the copying of semiconductor chip designs. A regulation proposing a non-energy raw materials exploration loans scheme was also discussed but not agreed. I maintained our reserve on this proposal which has a low priority for the United Kingdom.

Multi-Fibre Arrangement

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information he collects, in the context of the multi-fibre arrangement, concerning the comparative average annual incomes for industrial workers in *(a)* Brazil, *(b)* Turkey, *(c)* India, *(d)* Pakistan, *(e)* Korea, *(f)* Hong Kong, *(g)* Taiwan and *(h)* the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark [*pursuant to his reply*, 12 March 1986, c. *491*]: Data on the earnings of United Kingdom manual employees is published in *Employment Gazette*. The Government do not collect data on the incomes of workers in the other countries, although some information is available from the OECD's monthly publication "Main Economic Indicators".

DEFENCE

Departmental Telephones

Mr. Soley asked the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has further to safeguard information communicated on his Department's telephones; and if he will make a statement on the present arrangements.

Mr. Younger: I have nothing to add to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Mr. Atkins) on 28 February 1986, at column 709.

Heart Disease (Army Personnel)

Mr. Pavitt asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will institute a departmental inquiry into the rate of coronary heart disease among Army personnel and its correlation with the rate of cigarette smoking; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lee: During the last few years the rate of smoking among Army personnel has decreased steadily. It now approximates to the civilian rate. At the same time, possibly as a direct result, the rate of death from ischaemic heart disease amongst Army personnel has also decreased and is now lower than the rate in the comparable civilian population.

The importance of achieving further reduction in smoking amongst Army personnel is fully appreciated. Considerable effort is made to reduce smoking, including films and discussions led by medical personnel during educational periods. Initiatives such as the national no smoking day are fully supported by the services.

In the light of these considerations, an inquiry is not considered necessary.

Fulbeck Airfield

Mr. Douglas Hogg asked the Secretary of State for Defence if there are any restrictive covenants or any other user restrictions which limit the use to which Fulbeck airfield may be put by his Department or anybody acting with its authority.

Mr. Lee: No.

Nuclear Submarines

Mr. Donald Stewart asked the Secretary of State for Defence what obligations United Kingdom nuclear submarine commanders have to report immediately any leaks of radioactivity or accidents likely to endanger the public.

Mr. Stanley: There are established procedures for the immediate reporting to the Ministry of Defence of all nuclear incidents or accidents likely to endanger the public involving Royal Navy nuclear submarines.

SCOTLAND

Radioactive Milk (Holy Loch)

Mr. Donald Stewart asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent information he has as to the levels of radioactivity in milk from cows in the areas adjacent to the Holy Loch.

Mr. Rifkind: The source of man-made radioactivity in milk produced around the Holy Loch is atmospheric fall-out which affects the whole of the United Kingdom. The concentrations in milk from the area are similar to those in other areas of the country of comparable rainfall.

Measurements are made of milk produced at representative dairies throughout Scotland by the National Radiological Protection board as part of its programme of surveillance of environmental radioactivity. The most recent published results are for 1983 and they are available in the report entitled "Environmental Radioactivity Surveillance Programme: Results for UK for 1983" (NRPB-R174). The main contributors to the radioactivity are strontium 90 and caesium 137 and the average concentrations during 1983 are shown in the following table:

Country	*Concentration, becquerels per litre*	
	Strontium 90	*Caesium 137*
England	0·07	0·05
Scotland	0·10	0·07
Wales	0·13	0·08
Northern Ireland	0·10	0·10

I understand that the most recent results, which will be published in detail in due course, show that the concentrations of strontium 90 have not changed significantly since 1983 whilst those of caesium 137 have decreased. The levels remain of no concern radiologically and are equivalent in terms of dose of people to a tiny fraction of that due to naturally occurring background radiation.

Regular monitoring of the Holy Loch itself has continued on my behalf by the fisheries research laboratory of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. The most recent results are published in the report entitled "Radioactivity in Surface and Coastal Waters of the British Isles, 1984" (Aquatic Environment Monitoring Report No. 13, MAFF, Lowestoft, 1985) which is available in the Library. They confirm that the very small discharges of low level radioactive waste from the US base have no significant effect on the environment.

Greater Glasgow Health Board

Mr. Donald Stewart asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has any plans to reduce *(a)* the amount of money available to and *(b)* the number of administrators working for the Greater Glasgow health board.

Mr. Rifkind: I have no such plans. I announced today a net revenue allocation to the Greater Glasgow health board for 1986-87 of £380·323 million, £21·083 million more than the corresponding figure for 1985-86. The staffing complement is a matter for the health board, and I understand that the board has a policy of no compulsory redundancies.

Agricultural Colleges

Mr. Home Robertson asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on his policy towards the proposal that the three Scottish agricultural colleges should be combined within a unified structure, with particular reference to the financial arrangements if any one of the colleges were to remain outside the proposed new structure.

Mr. John MacKay: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Health Boards

Mrs. McCurley asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what financial allocations he has made to health boards for 1986-87.

Mr. Rifkind: I have allocated £1,445 million to health boards to meet their gross recurrent expenditure commitments on hospitals and community health services in 1986-87, and a gross amount of £37 million for their ordinary capital programmes. After expected income is taken into account, the net cash limited allocations to individual health boards are as follows:

Health board	*Recurrent expenditure (net) £ million*	*Ordinary capital programme (net) £ million*	*Total £ million*
Argyll and Clyde	104·172	2·700	106·872
Ayrshire and Arran	75·440	2·230	77·670
Borders	21·576	0·610	22·186
Dumfries and Galloway	37·045	0·930	37·975

Health board	Recurrent expenditure (net) £ million	Ordinary capital programme (net) £ million	Total £ million
Fife	70·721	2·030	72·751
Forth Valley	67·638	1·720	69·358
Grampian	129·102	3·130	132·232
Greater Glasgow	380·323	6·890	387·213
Highland	53·408	1·300	54·708
Lanarkshire	118·058	3·640	121·698
Lothian	232·075	5·280	237·355
Orkney	3·991	0·130	4·121
Shetland	4·789	0·160	4·949
Tayside	134·218	2·990	137·208
Western Isles	7·440	0·210	7·650
TOTAL	*1,439·996	33·950	1,473·946

* Includes £13·5 million allocated for specific commitments.

In addition to these sums I shall be allocating a further £20 million to health boards specifically for the improvement and upgrading of the NHS estate.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Lands Tribunal (Member's Correspondence)

Mr. John David Taylor asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the Lands Tribunal for Northern Ireland will be in a position to reply to the letter of 16 January from the right hon. Member for Strangford in which he requested that the order following the decision of the Lands Tribunal be forwarded to Mr. Robert James Magilton of 87 Mountain Road, Whitespots, Newtownards, Co. Down, with reference to the case LDV/4/1977.

Dr. Boyson: A reply was issued on 6 March 1986.

Montefibre Plant, Coleraine

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the total of financial support given to the Montefibre plant in Coleraine by Government agencies during and since the takeover of that plant by the Montefibre Company.

Dr. Boyson: The Government were not in a position, because of the European Community's control on state aid to the synthetic fibre industry, to provide selective financial assistance or standard capital grant in respect of the acquisition of the business or any capital expenditure since. The only financial support given to the plant relates to an extensive programme of research and development which was primarily designed to find new products for the Coleraine plant. The company had a total research and development budget of £2·265 million; the Industrial Development Board's contribution to this programme amounted to some £0·448 million. The company is now liable to repay these grants.

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the total level of investment by the Montefibre Company in the Coleraine plant since it took over, excluding the purchase price and Government grants.

Dr. Boyson: It is estimated that the company has invested £920,000 in fixed assets since the takeover of the Coleraine plant; in addition, the Industrial Development Board has verified over £1·07 million of research and development expenditure. Thus, total investment by the company, excluding the purchase price, is £1·99 million which includes some £0·448 million of research and development grants, which are now repayable.

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement outlining fully what investigations the Department of Economic Development made into the profitability of the Montefibre plant in Coleraine.

Dr. Boyson: From its examination of the audited accounts the Industrial Development Board is aware that, despite an increased turnover, the company lost £858,000 in 1985. The Industrial Development Board has also discussed the prospects for the future with the company both at local and headquarters level and is satisfied that the company has been unable to identify a way of reversing the loss-making trend.

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement outlining fully what investigations the Department of Economic Development has made into alternative uses for the Montefibre site in Coleraine.

Dr. Boyson: The Montefibre site is owned by the company. The Industrial Development Board in discussions with the company has offered to co-operate in an effort to ensure that the site is utilised in the most beneficial way for the community.

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement outlining what assessment the Department of Economic Development has taken of the market for the fibres produced at Montefibre, Coleraine.

Dr. Boyson: The Industrial Development Board has not made a separate assessment of the market for the fibres produced at Montefibre Coleraine. After discussion with the Montefibre management the Industrial Development Board considers that the company has taken into accord all the relevant factors in arriving at its decision.

Alcoholism

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement outlining how his Department's aim of building care in the community is to

be pursued in relation to the treatment of alcoholism and funding for centres for advice, treatment, education and research on alcoholism.

Mr. Needham: The recently issued strategic planning guidelines drew the attention of health and social services boards to the need for a shift in emphasis and transfer of resources from hospital care towards the development of community alternatives. The need to change the balance of care applies to services for a wide range of problems including those caused by alcohol abuse. Boards have been asked to reflect this objective in the future planning of services.

Substantial financial support is provided to three voluntary agencies working in the field of alcohol advice, treatment, education and research. The Department and boards will continue liaising with those bodies to ensure that such resources are being used efficiently and effectively.

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the future of the three alcohol advice centres in the western area administered by the Northlands centre in Derry.

Mr. Needham: The Department of Health and Social Services will continue to fund the centres for a further three-month period when the present temporary arrangement for support ends on 31 March. The limited extension of departmental funding will enable consideration to be given by the Western health and social services board and the Department to the arrangements which might be appropriate in providing financial assistance in the future to the Northlands centre.

Armagh Prison

Mr. Archer asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will give a monthly breakdown of the numbers of women prisoners in Armagh prison during 1985 and January 1986 falling into the following categories: *(a)* on remand, *(b)* attending remand hearings, *(c)* attending trials, *(d)* attending appeal hearings, *(e)* attending bail hearings, *(f)* on pre-release or compassionate home visits, *(g)* on interprison visits, *(h)* on visits to outside hospitals, *(i)* attending pre-release programmes, *(j)* attending police stations and *(k)* serving prison sentences.

Mr. Scott: Information is not easily available in the form requested. The same prisoners could fall into more than one of the categories specified in any one month, and could attend a number of remand, appeal or other hearings during the same period.

Tobacco Industry

Mr. Pavitt asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many persons were employed in the tobacco industry in Northern Ireland at the latest date for which figures are available.

Dr. Boyson: I would refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave him on 17 February 1986, at column *11*.

ENERGY

Sellafield

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for Energy if he will indicate what proportion of the protective coating *(a)* above ground and *(b)* below ground of pond 5 at British Nuclear Fuels Ltd., Sellafield, is in steel; what proportion only in concrete; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad: I am advised by BNFL that there are three main operations in pond 5, which are fuel receipt, fuel storage and fuel decanning. All these operations are carried out above ground level in concrete shielded structures. The structures for both fuel receipt and fuel decanning consist of enclosed concrete shielded rooms. These rooms are steel lined across the base and partially up the walls. The structure of storage facilities consist of water retaining concrete ponds in which the fuel is stored in enclosed steel boxes under water.

Plutonium

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for Energy whether any plutonium has been exported from the United Kingdom to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics since 1962.

Mr. Goodlad: No.

British Gas Corporation

Mr. Hardy asked the Secretary of State for Energy if, when he next meets the chairman of the British Gas Corporation, he will raise with him the corporation's action in advising employees in the gas industry that they should not offer comment upon the subject of privatisation outside working hours; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: No. Employee relations are a matter for the British Gas Corporation.

Mr. Hardy asked the Secretary of State for Energy what is his estimate of the expenditure which will be incurred in promoting the sale of British Gas during the next financial year and in meeting the costs, fees and charges to which this sale will lead.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: Estimates povision for expenditure on the sale of British Gas will be sought in the usual way. Main supply estimates for the Department's expenditure in 1986-87 will be published on 18 March.

Mr. Hardy asked the Secretary of State for Energy what information has been provided by his Department to foreign stock markets in regard to preparations for the privatisation of the British Gas Corporation.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: Goldman Sachs, Wood Gundy, Nomura and Swiss Bank Corporation International have been appointed to advise on possible overseas sales of British Gas shares. Foreign stock markets have not yet been approached.

Mr. Hardy asked the Secretary of State for Energy what estimate he has now made of the receipts which will accrue from the planned sale of British Gas in each of the next three financial years.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave him on 16 January at column *634*.

Sizewell Inquiry

Dr. Twinn asked the Secretary of State for Energy what is his latest estimate of the date when the report of the Sizewell inquiry will be submitted to him.

Mr. Peter Walker [*pursuant to the reply*, 19 November 1985, c. *101*]: I now have the advice of the inspector on when he expects to deliver to me his report on the Sizewell B public inquiry.

Sir Frank Layfield has recently reviewed progress to date and what remains to be done. The inquiry over which he presided was the longest ever planning inquiry in this country; it sat for 340 days and received as evidence some 5,000 documents. It dealt with an extremely complex set of issues and Sir Frank envisages that his report will contain over 100 chapters.

The inspector has assured me that he has been provided with all the resources that were required for the work that had to be done up to now. He has discussed with the assessors arrangements that can now be made to assist him in the final stages of the work on the complex nuclear safety issues in particular. I will, of course, facilitate those arrangements so that the report can be completed as soon as possible.

The inspector has told me that, on that basis, he now hopes to deliver his report to me in September. When I receive it, I intend to reach my decisions on the inspector's report as soon as I possibly can.

Arrangements are already in hand for my Department to have available the resources that will be required for an urgent examination of the report.

ENVIRONMENT

Sports Sponsorship

Mr. Sims asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has about voluntary or statutory restrictions on sponsorship of sport by tobacco companies in other European Economic Community countries; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Tracey: I understand that sports sponsorship by the tobacco industry is controlled in the majority of member states of the Community, whether by law or by voluntary restrictions as in the United Kingdom. I have recently seen the Tobacco Products (Control of Advertising, Sponsorship and Sales Promotion) Regulations 1986 which come into force in Eire on 1 July 1986; I am seeking further detailed information on the practice in other member states. I shall write to my hon. Friend.

Cadmium (Research)

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list any research projects he is funding, has funded or intends to fund on the effects of cadmium on, and its occurrence in *(a)* agricultural livestock, *(b)* wildlife and *(c)* cereal crops.

Mrs. Rumbold: My Department has funded a number of investigations of cadmium contamination at various sites. These investigations included measurements of cadmium levels in soil and vegetables. The most important investigations were at Shipham (Somerset), Beaumont Leys (Leicestershire), Cassington (Oxfordshire) and Royston (Hertfordshire). Investigations of the possible toxic effects on, and measurements of accumulations of cadmium in, agricultural livestock, wildlife and cereal crops were not included in these studies. No further work is planned.

The main responsibility for the health of crops and of farm animals and for the quality of food lies with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, which supports research relevant to this responsibility.

River Rother (Pollution)

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the concentrations and quantities of *(a)* tributyltin and *(b)* dieldrin released into the River Rother during pollution incidents in 1985; and if he will state the source of the pollution.

Mrs. Rumbold: In October 1985 there was a leakage of tributyltin and dieldrin from a timber treatment tank into the Newmill Channel, a tributary of the River Rother. Prompt action by the Southern water authority contained the spillage, and none entered the River Rother until it had been diluted very considerably. No adverse effect was observed in the River Rother.

Anti-fouling Paints

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the brand names and manufacturers of products banned from retail sale under legislation relating to the use of tributyltin anti-fouling paints for yachts and small boats.

Mrs. Rumbold: The Control of Pollution (Anti-fouling Paint) Regulations 1985 set maximum levels of organotin compounds in anti-fouling paints which may be sold by retail. It follows that any anti-fouling paint which does not meet the criteria set out in the regulations is banned from retail sale. I understand that British manufacturers of anti-fouling paints have withdrawn the following brands since the intention to regulate was announced in July 1985:

Blakes Paints Ltd.	— Tiger Anti-fouling
Hempels Marine Paints Ltd.	— Hard Racing
International Paint plc	— Micron Clear 25

In addition, I understand that other products have been reformulated to comply with the regulations. A list of paints which manufacturers and distributors have indicated comply with the regulations was given in my answer to the question from my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen) on 27 February 1986, at columns *673-75*. This same list, together with a circular, has now been sent to all local authorities, as an aid in enforcing the regulations.

Land (Darlington)

Mr. Fallon asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many acres of land are in public ownership in the borough of Darlington; and how many were so in March 1983.

Sir George Young: Information about the amount of land in public ownership is not available centrally. The register of unused or underused publicly owned land for the borough of Darlington contains details of 559 acres of such land. Comparable information for March 1983 is not available, but in January 1983 the register for Darlington contained details of 728 acres of land.

Country Footpaths

Mr. Tom Cox asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussions he is having with county councils to seek to open up more country footpaths; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: Local authorities are empowered to create new footpaths in the light of the needs of their area. The Department's circular 1/83 reminds county councils of their duties and responsibilities, including advice that obstructions on existing public rights of way should be removed promptly.

In addition, the Countryside Commission grant-aids the improvement of footpaths. The recently announced farm and countryside initiative will also be considering the improvement of local footpaths.

Enterprise Agencies

Mr. William Shelton asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has on the estimated cost of each job created by each of the enterprise agencies established by the metropolitan county councils.

Mr. Tracey: The metropolitan county councils and some other local authorities have established enterprise boards which they fund under discretionary powers. There is no statutory requirement to notify their actions and my Department does not maintain records of the cost of each job that an enterprise board may have helped to create.

Greater London Enterprise Board

Mr. William Shelton asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimate he has of the total rights and liabilities to be transferred to the residuary body arising from the activities of the Greater London enterprise board.

Mr. Tracey: No liabilities in relation to the Greater London enterprise board will pass to the London Residuary Body.

The London Residuary Body will have rights to receive payments in respect of mortgage loans made to the Greater London enterprise board by the Greater London council and, in the event of a winding up of the board, to receive the company's net assets.

Mr. William Shelton asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many consents he has given under section 137 of the Local Government Act 1985 in respect of grants to the Greater London enterprise board; and for what sums.

Mr. Tracey: My right hon. Friend has given five consents to the GLC under section 7 of the Local Government (Interim Provisions) Act 1984 to expenditure totalling £11·092 million by the GLC under section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972 in relation to the Greater London enterprise board. They are as follows:

1.—27 FEBRUARY 1985
£4·896 million—sufficient to:
(a) meet GLEB's staffing and overheads costs first quarter of 1985-86;
(b) allow GLEB to discharge all its 1985-86 section 137 contractual liabilities;
(c) provide for some continuation investment.

2.— 5 JULY 1985
£1·107 million maintenance funding for GLEB's existing company investments.

3.—25 JULY 1985
£0·964 million for GLEB's staffing and overheads for the second quarter of 1985-86.

4.—14 OCTOBER 1985
£2 million for the balance of GLEB's staffing and overheads costs in 1985-86.

In addition, consent was given on 14 October 1985 for the GLC to provide continuation funding of £2·125 million for the five technology networks set up by GLEB. This funding will be via GLEB's subsidiary Technet Ltd.

Consent to a further grant to GLEB for £8 million was refused on 12 March 1986.

Radioactive Waste

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if, pursuant to his reply of 6 March, *Official Report*, column *271*, he will list the annual quantity of authorised discharges of uranium and other radioactive materials for each of the sites referred to since 1980.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Details of the amount of radioactive waste discharged from these sites are not held centrally. However, authorisations issued under the Radioactive Substances Act 1960 specify the amounts of radioactive waste which may be discharged and I am placing copies of the relevant authorisations in the Library of the House.

Mr. Michael Brown asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects the final report of his Department's study into the best practicable environmental options for the management of radioactive wastes to be made public.

Mr. Waldegrave: The report of the study carried out under my Department's direction, to establish the best practicable environmental options (BPEO) for the management of low and intermediate level radioactive wastes, is being made available today. Copies have been placed in the Library of the House.

This report is an essential element in our proposals for increasing public understanding of and involvement in the development of our policies for managing radioactive wastes. The House of Commons Select Committee on the Environment, in its report published yesterday, laid great stress on the importance of a well-informed, open and public debate, and welcomed this study in that context.

It demonstrates that for every type of waste several storage and disposal options are practicable and safe. All the main options for the disposal and storage of low-level and intermediate level wastes were examined. A range of assumptions about future growth in nuclear power and the level of reprocessing were considered.

Costs and radiological impacts were calculated; since the BPEO is a matter of judgment of relative priorities options were evaluated using four different sets of weights. These reflect a range of views, from those who would wish to minimise costs to those who would wish to minimise risks, local impact, or the widespread dispersion of radioactivity in the environment.

The other main conclusions of the report are that:

i. long-term storage is least attractive on economic and radiological grounds. It is attractive only if an ability to retrieve wastes easily is an overriding concern;
ii. on economic and radiological grounds an optimum strategy for storage and disposal would involve early use of all disposal options, including sea disposal;
iii. the BPEO for most low-level and some short-lived intermediate level waste is near-surface disposal, as

soon as practicable, in appropriately designed trenches;

iv. no preference can be established between deep cavity disposal or off-shore borehole disposal for those intermediate level wastes with more alpha-emitting radionuclides than is acceptable for near-surface disposal or sea disposal;

v. the division, at the margin, between what is suitable for near-surface disposal in an engineered trench and deep disposal can only be explored in more detail when site-specific information is available;

vi. if future sea disposal operations are carried out this could be the preferred option for about 15 per cent. of the intermediate level waste expected to arise by 2030.

Local Government Reform

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the cost of the leaflets on the new structure of government in the metropolitan areas, published by his Department in March; how many have been printed so far; to whom they will be delivered; and what will be the cost of delivery.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Seven million leaflets have been produced at a total cost of £74,454. I have no plans to have further copies printed. The leaflets are being distributed to all households and business premises in the Greater London and metropolitan county areas at a total cost, including VAT, of £158,504.

Non-domestic Rates

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the total of non-domestic rates paid to local authorities in Great Britain in each year from 1974-75 to 1985-86 *(a)* gross and *(b)* net of all tax relief.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Estimates of non-domestic rates are as follows:

Non-domestic rate income—Great Britain

	£'000 million
1974-75	1·7
1975-76	2·2
1976-77	2·4
1977-78	2·7
1978-79	3·5
1979-80	4·0
1980-81	5·1
1981-82	6·2
1982-83	7·0
1983-84	7·4
1984-85	7·9
1985-86	8·5

Note: The estimates are derived from total rate income allocated to the non-domestic sector on the basis of its rateable value share.

Non-domestic rates are treated as a normal business expense and there is no separately identified tax relief on rates.

Voluntary Organisations (Funds)

Mr. Terry Lewis asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to allocated additional funds to approved voluntary organisations in cases where district councils have declined to make up the difference between their provisional allocations and their final allocations.

Sir George Young: No.

Mr. Terry Lewis asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will take steps to restore the amount of transitional grant to voluntary organisations in Greater Manchester to the level provisionally allocated in November 1985.

Sir George Young: No. The final allocations were based on the detailed bids made by authorities in Greater Manchester. The provisional allocations issued last year were purely illustrative.

Mr. Terry Lewis asked the Secretary of State for the Environment why final funding falls short of 75 per cent. of operating budgets for voluntary organisations in Greater Manchester for 1986-87.

Sir George Young: Local authorities are expected to fund voluntary bodies out of their own resources, as supplemented by rate support grant. Transitional grant is temporary additional assistance directed at local, not countrywide, projects taken on by individual districts. Six of the 10 Greater Manchester authorities got allocations which fully matched their bids for eligible projects. Final funding of voluntary projects in Greater Manchester depends entirely on the decisions of local authorities.

African Methodist Evangelical Church (Grant)

Mr. Tony Lloyd asked the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will make a decision on the consent for a grant from the Greater Manchester council to the African Methodist Evangelical Church under the Local Government (Interim Provisions) Act 1984.

Mr. Tracey: Further information on this application is awaited from Greater Manchester council. A decision will be reached as quickly as possible after this has been received.

Gateshead (Urban Renewal)

Mr. Merchant asked the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has reached a decision on proposals submitted to his urban housing renewal unit by Gateshead metropolitan borough council; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: I am pleased to announce my right hon. Friend's favourable response to a proposal for a scheme in Gateshead which the metropolitan borough council has worked up in close consultation with my Department's urban housing renewal unit. We hope to reach agreement with the council on further schemes in due course.

The estate which will benefit from today's decision is the Old Fold estate in Gateshead. The council has already introduced responsive locally-based management arrangements on the estate, and is seeking to deliver a comprehensive housing service and to involve the residents in day-to-day decisions which affect their lives. The proposal agreed with the unit will be a major further step in the process of improving the quality of life on this rundown estate.

The Old Fold estate is a cottage estate of 492 dwellings built in the 1930s. The estate will benefit from a community refurbishment scheme, the aim of which is to enable unemployed people drawn mainly from the estate to work on improvements to the environment and communal areas. This scheme will provide up to 100 jobs,

and will be funded by the Government's community programme, subject to the agreement of the Manpower Services Commission's area board, and my Department's urban programme. Resources of the order of £1,245,000 will be involved, including some £714,000 of urban programme funding, which I am pleased to approve in principle.

I warmly welcome the development of this package, and the close co-operation between the council and my Department's regional office and the staff and consultants of the urban housing renewal unit, which has made it possible.

Bonamy Estate, Southwark

Mr. Simon Hughes asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the results of the recent survey of demand for owner-occupation on the Bonamy estate, Southwark.

Sir George Young: The results show that over half (53 per cent.) of all tenants aged between 18 and 30 and over a third (38 per cent.) of those between 31 and 50 might try to buy a house or flat within the next 10 years, either privately or through the council. The results also show that if new houses were available this year at adjoining Bramcote Grove 31 Bonamy households would be prepared to buy. I have written to Councillor Ritchie, leader of Southwark council, expressing the hope that the new development can start soon. I have also offered to meet him.

Chemical Leak, Belvedere

Mr. Evennett asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has received any representations following the recent chemical leak at Belvedere.

Mrs. Rumbold [*pursuant to her reply*, 7 March 1986, c. 287]: I have received one letter, which has been redirected to the Secretary of State for Employment, since the leak, which affected employees of the factory concerned. This is a matter for investigation by the Health and Safety Executive.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Stanley Royd Hospital (Inquiry)

Mrs. Peacock asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he has received the reports of the Wakefield health authority and the Yorkshire regional health authority on points raised by the Stanley Royd inquiry; whether they are to be published; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fowler: I have received a letter from the chairman of the Yorkshire regional health authority enclosing both reports. The authorities are publishing their reports and the letter today. I have placed copies in the Library.

The district's report records a wide range of changes designed to achieve the highest possible catering and hygiene standards in the kitchens at Stanley Royd and elsewhere in the district. They include the production of comprehensive written instructions relating to all aspects of catering and good hygiene practice throughout the district; regular training; frequent unannounced inspections by supervisors and managers; the introduction of quality control procedures; and the appointment of a district catering manager with full responsibility and authority for catering services. The Stanley Royd kitchen staffing level and bonus scheme are being reviewed as recommended in the report. A replacement kitchen is being built at Stanley Royd and is due to be completed early next year. Substantial interim improvements to the kitchen structure and equipment have been made.

The RHA has instituted the quarterly review of capital schemes recommended by the inquiry and has made other changes designed to improve its capital planning. It has also appointed a regional catering hygiene adviser from 7 April to be responsible for ensuring high standards throughout the region. Each of the districts in the region has responded to a request from the regional health authority that it considers the inquiry report's recommendations and a summary of what went wrong at Stanley Royd. The RHA will follow up these responses.

I am pleased to note that the ratio of nurses to patients at Stanley Royd has improved considerably since September 1984 and that further improvements are being sought. The district's report reiterates that problems of recruitment rather than finance are the source of difficulty. On finance, the RHA's response confirms that it is to review its policy for the withdrawal of funds from institutions as patient numbers fall.

The responses record that the authorities decided that eight individuals should be the subject of disciplinary investigation. Subsequently, it has been decided that no further action should be taken in the case of one of these individuals while another has been dismissed as a result of disciplinary proceedings which were already in train.

The inquiry report showed that the basic cause of the outbreak was a failure in management. As the chairman of the RHA said in his letter,

"there can be no doubt that the root cause of that failure lay in the defective system of management, common throughout the health service, in which accountability and the roles of both officers and authorities was unclear".

The reports show that both authorities are making substantial changes to their management arrangements. In the case of the regional health authority the changes extend to the nature of its relationship with districts and to the development of a monitoring policy, though it is clear that much more work remains to be done on the details of monitoring. I welcome the broad thrust of the changes being made.

In the short time since the publication of the inquiry report on 21 January it would not have have been practicable for the two authorities to complete all relevant action. However, their reports show that substantial progress on a wide front has been made since the outbreak occurred: in particular, great efforts have been made to raise standards of kitchen hygiene in Wakefield's hospitals. This progress reflects close collaboration with the local environmental health officers who are satisfied that every effort is being made to raise standards at Wakefield to the highest levels.

More generally, as the House is aware, on 6 February I announced the Government's intention to bring forward legislation to apply the requirements of the Food Act 1984 to health authorities. This legal change, along with the strengthened guidance which we shall be issuing on hygiene issues, will underpin the new management measures being introduced by Wakefield and Yorkshire health authorities.

Departmental Office, Camberwell New Road

Mr. John Fraser asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he is satisfied with the level of staffing and speed of response to public inquiries at his Department's office at Camberwell new road, SE5.

Mr. Major: I refer the hon. Member to the reply by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services to my hon. Friend the Member for Nuneaton (Mr. Stevens) on 7 March at column *322* in which he gave details of an extra 5,000 posts for local offices in the Department for 1986-87. I am confident that this increase will result in satisfactory staffing levels in individual local offices, including the local office at 6 Camberwell new road, SE5. The office's speed of response to public inquiries has shown a steady and considerable improvement since the beginning of the year.

Greenock and Port Glasgow

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many people are at present awaiting the hearing of tribunal appeal cases at the Greenock and Port Glasgow offices of his Department; and how many people have experienced delays of three, four, five and six months respectively.

Mr. Major: There are 41 social security benefit appeals outstanding at the Greenock office and 76 at the Port Glasgow office.

The latest available statistics giving the period between the lodgement of an appeal and the subsequent hearing are for the quarter ended 31 December 1984 and relate to Scotland. Equivalent figures are not available for localities smaller than a social security region.

Clearance rate (in weeks) from lodgement of appeal to hearing

Weeks	*Great Britain*	*Scotland*
1	9	1
2	19	—
3	167	9
4	722	35
5	1,507	97
6	2,150	122
7	2,169	123
8	2,182	133
9	1,916	90
10	1,733	86
11	1,453	86
12	1,319	69
13	1,168	61
Over 13	9,626	445
Average	13·9	13·3

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many claims for single payments have been made in each quarterly period for the last three full years for which figures are available at the Greenock and Port Glasgow offices of his Department.

Mr. Major: The following figures relate to decisions on single payment claims—separate figures for claims are not kept—for each four-week period in the past three years. Figures are not kept quarterly.

Single Payment Decisions

Four Weeks Ending	*Greenock*	*Port Glasgow*
15 March 1983	423	359
12 April 1983	401	307
10 May 1983	393	281
7 June 1983	413	269
5 July 1983	485	359
2 August 1983	246	246
30 August 1983	565	328
27 September 1983	493	365
25 October 1983	490	390
22 November 1983	551	336
20 December 1983	624	402
17 January 1984	315	172
4 February 1984	565	444
13 March 1984	599	374
10 April 1984	549	388
8 May 1984	604	503
5 June 1984	578	628
3 July 1984	661	775
31 July 1984	722	610
28 August 1984	888	601
25 September 1984	885	445
23 October 1984	979	713
20 November 1984	973	702
18 December 1984	1,119	848
15 January 1985	526	398
12 February 1985	1,080	845
12 March 1985	1,142	845
9 April 1985	1,232	688
7 May 1985	1,010	707
4 June 1985	1,096	792
2 July 1985	1,155	877
30 July 1985	1,221	797
27 August 1985	1,000	719
24 September 1985	1,092	606
22 October 1985	1,140	935
19 November 1985	1,277	999
17 December 1985	1,318	1,185
14 January 1986	477	638
11 February 1986	1,441	1,415

Notes:

(1) A single payment claim may result in more than one decision.

(2) These figures include decisions not to pay single payments.

(3) The basis for recording decisions changed on 11 April 1984. Up to then only one decision resulted from a claim covering items under different single payment regulations. Since then a decision has been recorded for each appropriate single payment regulation covered by the claim.

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary or State for Social Services how many new claims for social security were made in the past 12 months to the Greenock and Port Glasgow offices of his Department; how many of these are still awaiting assessment; and how long they have, on average, been awaiting assessment.

Mr. Major: The following figures relate to supplementary benefit claims:

	Greenock	*Port Glasgow*
Decisions given in 12 months up to 11 February 1986*	12,969	5,723
Awaiting assessment on 11 February 1986	507	229
Average clearance times	10 days	7½ days

* Separate figures are not collected for supplementary benefit claims received.

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many live claims for social security the Greenock and Port Glasgow offices of his Department are currently handling.

Mr. Major: On 11 February 1986 the supplementary benefit live load at Greenock was 11,386 and at Port Glasgow 5,030. The figures are marginally higher than the numbers of live claims being handled at that time because they include some claims which had recently finished.

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many requests for home visits have been received by the Greenock and Port Glasgow offices of his Department in the past 12 months; how many are currently outstanding; and on average, for how long they have been outstanding.

Mr. Major: Information is not available in the precise form requested because records are not kept of the number of requests for home visits. In the 12 months up to 11 February 1986, 7,685 home visits were made (including those initiated by the Department), 317 are currently outstanding and the average clearance time was just under 12 days. The comparable figures for Port Glasgow show that 3,293 home visits were made, 53 are currently outstanding and the average clearance time was just over 11 days.

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will state the approved and actual staffing levels at the Greenock and Port Glasgow offices of his Department in March 1980, March 1982, March 1985 and the latest available date; and if he will give the number of live claims in the two offices for each of these dates.

Mr. Major: The information requested is as follows:

Greenock ILO

			Number of Cases in Action			
	Complement	*Staff in Post*	*Supplementary Benefit*	*Short-term Benefits*	*Severe Disablement Allowance*	*Disablement Benefit*
1980	134	140	6,465	N/A	N/A	472
1982	144	146	8,480	N/A	N/A	555
1985	162	176	10,664	3,380	370	573
1986	164	172	11,386	4,023	442	560

Port Glasgow ILO
As Port Glasgow ILO did not open until October 1981, information is provided from 1982 onwards.

			Number of Cases in Action			
	Complement	*Staff in Post*	*Supplementary Benefit*	*Short-term Benefits*	*Severe Disablement Allowance*	*Disablement Benefit*
1982	71	74	3,813	N/A	N/A	375
1985	70	76	4,826	1,501	232	423
1986	74	74	5,030	1,647	272	391

Note: Complement and staff in post relate to March in the stated year. All other figures relate to February.
Abbreviation: N/A—Not Available; ILO—Integrated Local Office.

Dr. Godman asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many urgent needs payments have been made to claimants in the last 12 months by the Greenock and Port Glasgow offices of his Department; and how many are currently outstanding.

Mr. Major: In the 12-month period up to 11 February 1986, 884 urgent needs payments were made at Greenock and 380 at Port Glasgow. Neither office had any outstanding on that date.

Community Care

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services, of the money set aside for the help the community to care scheme, how much of the original sum has been spent; and on what projects.

Mr. Whitney: I refer the right hon. Member to my reply to him on 27 January at columns *397-98*.

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what consideration has been given to giving funding to organisations whose work load has increased as a consequence of the help the community to care project, notably the Association of Crossroads Care Attendant Schemes.

Mr. Whitney: It is open to any organisation, including Crossroads, to charge for its services when its help or advice is sought by those managing individual elements of the helping the community to care programme. In general, we provide core support to national voluntary organisations through our scheme of grants under section 64 of the Health Services and Public Health Act 1968. I am pleased that we have been able to increase our grant to Crossroads under that scheme to £75,000 a year.

Mr. Ashley asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how much money from the help the community to care scheme has been given to *(a)* Age Concern, *(b)* the British Red Cross, *(c)* the King's Fund Centre, *(d)* MENCAP, *(e)* Dr. Barnardo's, *(f)* the Save the Children Fund and *(g)* Crossroad Care Attendant schemes in the last year.

Mr. Whitney: Figures for 1985-86 are not yet available, but the table shows the payments made to the bodies concerned in 1984-85:

	£
Age Concern	13,500
King's Fund Centre	20,984
MENCAP	50,000
Save the Children Fund	82,000

Mr. Bowen Wells asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what plans the Government have to encourage the growth of community care.

Mr. Whitney: For a detailed discussion of our aims and our action in relation to community care for mentally handicapped and mentally ill people, I refer my hon.

Friend to the Government response to the second report from the Social Services Committee, on community care (Cmnd. 9674), published in November last year. We seek to encourage the development of good quality integrated local services to meet a range of needs by publicising policies, disseminating good practice, and promoting co-operation between statutory bodies and between them and voluntary bodies and the private sector in making the best use of the available resources.

Health Authorities

Mr. Spearing asked the Secretary of State for Social Services (1) what are the names of those district health authorities where the most senior adviser to the health authority is the director of nurse education;

(2) what are the names of those district health authorities which, consequent on the Griffiths committee recommendations, have *(a)* abolished the post of chief nursing officer or its equivalent and *(b)* appointed such officers but have not made them members of the district management board.

Mr. Hayhoe: Every health authority has identified a chief nursing adviser to be the principal source of professional advice on nursing matters to the authority and to be responsible for monitoring professional standards of nursing care throughout the authority. Titles vary although I understand that 73 health authorities have retained the title of chief or district nursing officer. Where the chief nursing adviser is not a full member of an authority's management board or team it should be by agreement locally. I regret that information is not held centrally on the members of authorities where this is the case, or where the chief nursing adviser role is also combined with that of director of nurse education although I understand that only a small number of authorities are involved.

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list in the *Official Report* the numbers of district health authority chairmen and chairwomen who wished to continue in office but who were not reappointed in each year since 1979, together with their length of service.

Mr. Hayhoe: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Mr. Spearing asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what are the names of those health authorities which, consequent on the implementation of the Griffiths committee's recommendations, have proposed early retirement or required termination of employment of nurses, together with the relevant number in each authority.

Mr. Hayhoe: I regret that no information is held centrally on termination of employment other than by early retirement. To date my Department has been informed of nine early retirements of nurses resultant to the implementation of general management, one in each of the following health authorities:

North West Durham
Great Yarmouth and Waveney
Peterborough
South West Hertfordshire
Hillington
Isle of Wight
Winchester
Cheltenham
Solihull

Residential Care

Mr. Bowen Wells asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what Government regulations there are on the opening and operation of private residential care homes; and whether the Government carry out regular inspections of the homes.

Mr. Whitney: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Bruinvels) on 16 December 1985 at column *80*.

Mr. Bowen Wells asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the amount given to National Health Service residential care homes for the mentally handicapped; and what it was in 1984 and 1985.

Mr. Whitney: The term "residential care home" is defined in the Registered Homes Act 1984 in connection with private and voluntary sector homes and not used for National Health Service provision. We are planning, for 1985-86, for the first time to collect and analyse information on expenditure in respect of small National Health Service units in the community for mentally handicapped people. Information on the allocation of funds to these units is not available centrally.

Mr. Bowen Wells asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what are the qualifications necessary to work in a National Health Service residential care home; what they are to work in a private home; why the qualifications differ; and whether the Government have any intention of changing this.

Mr. Whitney: No specific qualifications are laid down centrally for the staff of residential homes, which are either operated by local authorities (not by the National Health Service) or are privately owned and registered with local authorities. It is for local authorities to decide what qualifications or experience they require of their own staff and whether the staff of homes registered with them are suitably qualified and competent. In a circular, LAC (86) 6, about to be issued, local authorities are reminded that they should be broadly consistent about standards across the public and private sectors and should not expect higher standards in registered homes than they have in their own homes. A copy of the circular will be placed in the Library.

Mr. Bowen Wells asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the increase of residential places provided by local authorities since 1981 for the elderly, the mentally ill and the handicapped.

Mr. Whitney: The increase in residential places provided by local authorities between 31 March 1981 and 31 March 1985, the latest date for which provisional figures are available, is shown in the table.

Places in Local Authorities Homes in England

	at 31 March 1981	*at 31 March 1985 (provisional)*
Elderly/disabled people	114,921	116,100
Mentally handicapped people	12,712	15,200
Mentally ill people	3,981	4,400

Mr. Bowen Wells asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what are the Government's reasons for giving board and lodging benefits to those in private residential care homes.

Mr. Newton: Supplementary benefit is paid to people without enough resources to meet their requirements as specified in regulations. The regulations define the requirements of people in homes as equivalent to the charge they have to pay, subject to maximum limits which are related to the types of care which the home is registered to provide.

Mr. Bowen Wells asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what changes have been made in benefits to those in private residential care homes since 1979.

Mr. Newton: The history is given in the introduction to the report of the joint working party on supplementary benefit and residential care, publication of which I announced in my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe) on 28 January at column *501*. A copy of the report is in the Library.

Mr. Bowen Wells asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the current waiting period for someone seeking admission into National Health Service homes for the elderly and into National Health Service homes for the mentally ill in Hertfordshire.

Mr. Whitney: I am sorry I cannot give my hon. Friend the information he seeks in precisely the form requested. Information available centrally concerns the numbers of persons awaiting admission to consultant departments of NHS hospitals and is given in the table.

Number of cases on in-patient waiting list for selected specialties—NHS hospitals in Hertfordshire at 30 September 1985 (provisional)*

Specialty	*All cases*	*Cases on list for more than one year*
Geriatrics	33	—
Mental illness	22	16
Psychogeriatrics	7	—

* None of these cases was reported as urgent.

Mr. Bowen Wells asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what amount of money has been given in supplementary benefit to people receiving care in private homes for the elderly, the mentally ill and the handicapped; and what was the increase from 1984 and 1985.

Mr. Newton: In 1983 the amount paid in supplementary benefit to people in all private voluntary residential care and nursing homes was £102 million. The estimated figure for 1984 is £190 million. No figures are yet available for 1985. It is not possible to break down the figures by all the client groups requested, or to distinguish between private and voluntary homes.

Carers

Mr. Bowen Wells asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what changes have been made in benefits to those caring for the elderly, mentally ill or disabled persons since 1979.

Mr. Newton: Eligibility for invalid care allowance was extended in 1981 to those caring for non-relatives. In 1982 the amount that beneficiaries are allowed to earn was doubled from £6 to £12 a week. As regards supplementary benefit, the qualifying period for moving from the ordinary to the long-term scale rate was reduced from two years to one year in 1980.

Mr. Bowen Wells asked the Secretary of State for Social Services as invalid care allowance is not extended to married women, what steps are taken to ensure that married women are able to have the necessary home help, such as a visiting nurse.

Mr. Whitney: Domestic help is available for those who are assessed to be in need of it from local authority home help services. It rests with district health authorities to assess, in individual cases, the need to provide community nursing services.

Rotherham Health Authority

Mr. Hardy asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he is satisfied with the discharge of its functions by Rotherham health authority.

Mr. Hayhoe: The regional health authority concerned is generally responsible for monitoring the way in which individual district health authorities discharge their functions but I am not aware of any general dissatisfaction with the Rotherham health authority.

Mr. Hardy asked the Secretary of State for Social Services for what reasons the services of Mr. Vernon Thomas as chairman of the Rotherham health authority are being terminated.

Mr. Hayhoe: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Supplementary Benefit

Ms. Harman asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many people are in receipt of supplementary benefit in the area of Oxted, Surrey.

Mr. Major: Separate figures showing the number of people receiving supplementary benefit in Oxted, Surrey, are not available. Oxted forms a small part of the area covered for supplementary benefit purposes by the Department's office at Redhill. On 11 February 1986, the latest date for which information is available, there were 7,945 people receiving supplementary benefit from Redhill office.

Mr. Sean Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many people are presently awaiting single payments in the north-west region of his Department and nationally; and how many have been waiting for more than four weeks, eight weeks and 12 weeks, respectively.

Mr. Major: I regret that this information is not available.

Mr. Sean Hughes asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many single payments were made from the Huyton office of his Department during each of the last five years and in 1986 to date.

Mr. Major: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Severe Weather Payments

Ms. Harriet Harman asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many people successfully claimed exceptionally severe weather payments in Oxted, Surrey, in 1985; and what was the average amount paid.

Mr. Newton: The information is not available in the form requested. Oxted, Surrey, forms part of the area covered by Redhill local office. In 1985 that office paid 174 claimants an average of £11·71 in respect of extra fuel used during the period of exceptionally severe weather.

Departmental Achievements

Mr. Soames asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he expects to answer the question concerning his Department's achievements tabled by the hon. Member for Crawley on 18 February.

Mr. Fowler: As soon as possible.

Smoking-related Diseases

Mr. Pavitt asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many days were lost from work in 1985 through emphysema, bronchitis and other chest and heart diseases which have connections with cigarette smoking.

Mr. Whitney: Most recent figures for the main conditions are:

Days of Certified Incapacity for Sickness and Invalidity Benefit: Great Britain—5 April 1982 to 2 April 1983

Cause	*ICD Code**	*Million Days*
Emphysema	492	1·9
Bronchitis	490, 491	19·9
Other Obstructive Lung Disease	496	1·4
Malignant Neoplasm of Trachea, Bronchus and Lung	162	0·3
Ischaemic Heart Disease	410-414	30·9

* International Classification of Diseases, 9th Revision.

No information is available on uncertified absences from work.

Drugs

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he intends to implement the proposals made to him by the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry to terminate the parallel import of drugs.

Mr. Hayhoe: I am not aware of any such proposals from the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry.

Mr. Cyril D. Townsend asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what changes are intended in National Health Service pharmaceutical prices and distribution costs from 1 April; what are his intentions for the recovery of discounts on parallel import drugs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hayhoe: There will be no general change in the manufacturers' prices of medicines covered by the pharmaceutical price regulation scheme (PPRS) until the present negotiations for a renewal of the scheme are completed and the changes thus agreed are implemented. These negotiations continue, with a view to introducing a renewed scheme during 1986-87.

The majority of NHS medicines are subject to control under the PPRS, but prices reimbursed to pharmacies for generic medicines are determined separately. Agreement has been reached with representatives of generic manufacturers on a number of changes, which will reduce the average NHS price of generic medicines. Agreement has also been reached with representatives of NHS community pharmacies for an interim increase of 1·5 per cent. in the average rate of deduction from their reimbursement to reflect the discounts now widely obtainable on the published prices of pharmaceutical products generally. The new rates of discount recovery will average nearly 7·5 per cent. and are subject to revision in the light of the results of a full inquiry into discount levels which will start shortly and be completed by early 1987. Details of the changes in generic prices and the discount recovery scale will be published in the April amendment to the drug tariff. Taken together, these changes should bring a saving of nearly £30 million in NHS expenditure.

I also intend to establish an informal working group involving representatives of manufacturers, wholesalers and NHS retail pharmacies which will assess more generally and for the longer term the arrangements for the financial regulation of NHS pharmaceutical distribution. I have invited the interests concerned to nominate members of the working group, and hope to appoint an independent chairman. I expect the group to report this summer.

Estimates from various sources suggest that parallel imports account for a small fraction of NHS medicines. All discounts on both domestic and parallel imported drugs will be identified by the discount inquiry. When this information is available I will consider how to modify the reimbursement system to ensure that the arrangements are fair to all concerned.

National Maritime Board

Mr. Barnett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services on what date the National Maritime Board obtained the status of a community health council; and by which statutory instrument that status was given effect.

Mr. Whitney: The National Maritime Board has not been granted the status of a community health council.

Technical Services Agency Ltd

Mr. Craigen asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish in the *Official Report* a copy of his response to the letter dated 5 March from the Technical Services Agency Ltd., Glasgow, on Scottish climate and severe weather energy penalties in tenanted housing.

Mr. Newton: The letter dated 5 March from the Technical Services Agency Ltd., was received on 11 March. This is being considered and I will send the hon. Member a copy of the reply.

NHS Hospitals (Private Patients)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many private patients had appointments with consultants in National Health Service hospitals in the west midlands region in each of the last seven years; what sums were paid to each authority in the region for the use of rooms for such consultations; and

what was the length of the waiting lists for different categories of treatments in each authority each year during the same period.

Mr. Hayhoe [*pursuant to his reply*, 7 March 1986, c. *317*.]: The available information is given in the tables.

Private out-patients attending at NHS hospitals in West Midlands RHA

Year	*Total attendances*
1978	3,001
1979	4,245
1980	4,907
1981	5,761
1982	6,629
1983	7,795
1984	8,828

Numbers of cases on in-patient waiting list for admission to NHS hospitals in West Midland RHA at 30 September

Specialty	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	**1985*
General medicine	228	126	223	217	179	135	203
Paediatrics	7	—	2	—	3	6	3
Dermatology	66	80	98	71	53	106	154
Neurology	269	221	405	408	356	405	273
Cardiology	591	458	386	384	370	339	318
Rheumatology	190	182	149	224	258	376	101
Geriatrics	752	770	710	436	327	204	181
Younger disabled	10	20	34	20	19	7	15
General surgery	23,745	22,257	20,688	22,606	21,649	20,035	18,567
ENT	13,821	11,860	13,339	14,247	13,899	14,159	15,020
Traumatic and Orthopaedic	17,052	15,451	15,204	16,807	16,824	16,531	15,937
Ophthalmology	7,124	6,333	5,980	6,705	7,010	7,666	7,055
Radiotherapy	126	141	86	58	49	17	20
Urology	2,104	2,200	2,120	2,750	2,886	3,076	3,315
Plastic surgery	4,270	4,230	4,470	4,242	3,402	2,943	2,845
Thoracic surgery	821	816	580	646	597	609	399
Oral surgery	2,718	2,524	2,764	3,142	2,755	3,381	3,536
Neurosurgery	572	617	619	841	986	1,004	914
Gynaecology	11,168	10,659	10,484	12,189	11,594	11,798	11,728
Psychiatry children	23	11	5	1	9	6	17
Mental handicap	80	64	42	26	23	6	—
Mental illness	220	250	241	184	175	149	120
Adolescent psychiatry	3	—	—	3	—	—	—
GP other	1,475	1,457	1,045	—	—	—	—
Other specialist units	258	210	278	337	175	161	253
Total	87,693	80,937	79,952	86,544	83,598	83,119	80,974

* Provisional.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Common Agricultural Policy (Budget)

Mr. Deakins asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what would be the reduction in each case in the common agricultural policy budget for 1986 as a result of a 1 per cent. price reduction on the EEC Commission's price proposals for each of the following commodities: cereals, milk, beef and olive oil

Mr. Gummer: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Dairy Products (Subsidy)

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if, pursuant to his reply of 10 March concerning the decision of the Commission not to publish the rates of subsidy for export of dairy products, it will still be the practice of Her Majesty's Government to make such details available to hon. Members in reply to parliamentary questions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: We intend to continue to answer hon. Members' questions in the usual way.

Broilermeat and Chickenmeat

Mr. Eadie asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the imports of broilermeat and chickenmeat in Scotland, England and Wales in the years 1983, 1984, 1985 and to the nearest available date in 1986; and if he will give the ports of entry.

Mr. Gummer [*pursuant to his reply*, 11 March 1986, c. *437*]: The table shows the information requested.

United Kingdom imports of chicken and broiler meat

Ports of entry	*1983*		*1984*		*1985*	
	Tonnes	*£'000*	*Tonnes*	*£'000*	*Tonnes*	*£'000*
London	90	78	20	19	—	—
Medway	178	150	402	355	421	395
Ramsgate	17	13	73	63	57	51

Ports of entry	1983 Tonnes	1983 £'000	1984 Tonnes	1984 £'000	1985 Tonnes	1985 £'000
Dover	11,918	9,506	11,213	9,690	8,730	8,192
Folkestone	27	29	85	103	60	84
Newhaven	34	41	72	66	6	10
Portsmouth	38	30	1,242	1,025	1,528	1,238
Southampton	—	—	16	13	3	8
Poole	857	805	2,111	1,960	4,865	4,294
Weymouth	19	15	—	—	91	74
Plymouth	1,094	977	4,895	4,177	9,706	8,107
Newport	27	15	293	207	104	63
Dundee	—	—	—	—	20	20
Greenock	—	—	—	—	42	34
Grangemouth	1,622	1,477	1,247	1,229	666	669
Fishguard	—	—	—	—	11	8
Leith	—	—	403	396	1,614	1,663
Blyth	—	—	17	15	—	—
Fleetwood	19	16	—	—	—	—
Tyne	1,616	1,271	783	669	2,300	1,964
Middlesborough	490	444	57	51	—	—
Hull	1,198	973	2,756	2,614	2,532	2,435
Immingham	157	129	281	255	375	340
Grimsby	4,584	3,871	2,686	2,467	1,993	1,792
Felixstowe	8,118	6,696	7,083	6,377	5,907	5,676
Great Yarmouth	239	190	—	—	—	—
Ipswich	16	14	437	389	73	69
Harwich	8,555	7,078	5,841	5,228	6,553	5,762
Liverpool	—	—	9	8	12	11
Holyhead	14	11	—	—	—	—
Guernsey	151	134	144	139	134	123
Jersey	332	310	329	323	365	360
Irish Land Boundary	1,104	928	754	670	684	657
Heathrow	—	—	2	4	—	—
Other air ports	—	—	8	8	10	6
Total	42,514	35,202	43,259	38,520	48,862	44,105

Notes:
1. No information is available for 1986.
2. Figures for broiler meat and chicken meat are not recorded separately.
3. Imports into Scotland, England and Whales are not recorded separately but only by mainland port of entry.

Source: UK Trade Statistics.

Pesticides

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in which counties in England and Wales pesticide registration authorities require products for home and garden use to be packed in child-restraint packages and rodenticides to be used only in tamper-proof bait stations; and what proposals are presently being considered by his Department under the Food and Environment Protection Act 1985 to control packaging on a nationwide basis.

Mr. Gummer [*pursuant to his reply*, 12 March 1986, c. *483*]: There are no local pesticide registration authorities in the United Kingdom. Registration of pesticides is at present carried out on a nationwide basis under the non-statutory pesticides safety precautions scheme. It has not been possible to control packaging precisely as the hon. Member suggests under these non-statutory arrangements, but it has been a fundamental principle of the scheme that only low toxicity products in small volume packs are cleared for home and garden use and that the labels carry warnings to keep the products or baits away from children or pets. In addition, certain products are supplied in child-resistant bait stations.

It is proposed that under the regulations to be made under part III of the Food and Environment Protection Act 1985 it be made a condition of the approval of a pesticide that the container in which it is supplied be approved by the Government for that purpose; supply in a different container thus becoming a criminal offence. In setting standards for containers the Government will rely on the advice of the Advisory Committee on Pesticides and the newly constituted Panel on Labelling and Container Design.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Construction Industry

16. **Mr. Simon Hughes** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has received from the construction industry about the incidence of taxation on that industry.

Mr. Moore: My right hon. Friend has received a number of representations, covering a variety of proposals.

Income Tax

17. **Mr. Neil Hamilton** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the yield of all taxation from those earning £30,000 or more in 1985-86.

Mr. Moore: The total income tax yield in 1985-86 from individuals with taxable income above £30,000 is £4½ billion, of which nearly £2 billion is paid on taxable income in excess of £30,000. It is not possible to estimate the yield of other taxes from this group.

33. **Mr. Greenway** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what changes there have been in the number of people paying income tax since 1979; how this compares with the previous five year period; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moore: The estimated numbers of individual taxpayers (including earning wives) since 1973-74 are as follows:

(thousands)

	Individual taxpayers
1973-74	23,100
1974-75	24,300
1975-76	25,300
1976-77	25,900
1977-78	24,800
1978-79	25,900
1979-80	25,900
1980-81	25,200
1981-82	24,800
1982-83	24,600
*1983-84	24,300
*1984-85	24,050
*1985-86	24,000

* Provisional.

Mr. Wrigglesworth asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the effects of changes in personal taxation on disposable incomes for each year since 1978-79 for single people, married couples (both working, without children) and married couples (husband only working, with two children) on 50 per cent., 75 per cent., 100 per cent., 150 per cent., 200 per cent. and 500 per cent. of average earnings expressed in current and constant prices and as a percentage of gross earnings; and what is his estimate for 1986-87 on the basis of the conventional assumptions of index-linked allowances and duties.

Mr. Moore: The information is in the following tables.

Earnings after income tax, national insurance contributions and child benefit*

Earnings†	*Single*			*Married couple (two earners)*‡ *no children*			*Married couple (one earner) two children*‖		
	At current prices £	*At constant (1978-79) prices* £	*As per cent. of gross income* Per cent.	*At current prices* £	*At constant (1978-79) prices* £	*As per cent. of gross income* Per cent.	*At current prices* £	*At constant (1978-79) prices* £	*As per cent. of gross income* Per cent.
50 per cent. average earnings									
1978-79	35·48	35·48	76·5	63·98	63·98	84·2	45·26	45·26	97·5
1979-80	42·15	36·39	77·1	75·57	65·25	84·2	53·90	46·54	98·6
1980-81	49·49	36·73	75·3	89·03	66·08	81·9	62·48	46·38	95·1
1981-82	53·34	35·51	73·1	95·51	63·59	79·1	67·65	45·04	92·7
1982-83	57·23	35·59	72·7	102·94	64·01	79·0	73·25	45·55	93·1
1983-84	62·45	37·09	73·0	113·04	67·14	79·6	80·46	47·79	94·1
1984-85	67·99	38·45	73·5	123·22	69·68	80·4	87·88	49·70	95·0
1985-86	73·66	39·30	73·7	134·89	71·96	81·5	94·68	50·51	94·8
1986-87¶	78·68	40·55	73·6	143·96	74·20	81·3	100·50	51·80	94·0
75 per cent. average earnings									
1978-79	49·51	49·51	71·1	87·27	87·27	76·6	59·41	59·41	85·4
1979-80	59·50	51·37	72·6	104·17	89·94	77·3	71·25	61·52	86·9
1980-81	70·27	52·16	71·3	123·39	91·59	75·7	83·26	61·80	84·5
1981-82	76·05	50·63	69·5	133·10	88·62	73·5	90·36	60·16	82·6
1982-83	81·33	50·57	68·9	142·85	88·83	73·1	97·35	60·54	82·5
1983-84	88·53	52·59	69·0	156·35	92·87	73·4	106·53	63·28	83·1
1984-85	96·20	54·40	69·3	169·95	96·11	74·0	116·10	65·65	83·7
1985-86	104·13	55·55	69·5	184·04	98·18	74·2	125·15	66·76	83·5
1986-87¶	111·28	57·36	69·4	196·56	101·31	74·0	133·10	68·60	83·0
100 per cent. average earnings									
1978-79	63·55	63·55	68·5	110·26	110·26	72·5	73·45	73·45	79·1
1979-80	76·85	66·35	70·3	132·68	114·55	73·9	88·60	76·50	81·1
1980-81	91·04	67·58	69·3	157·75	117·09	72·6	104·03	77·22	79·2
1981-82	98·76	65·75	67·7	170·70	113·65	70·7	113·06	75·27	77·5
1982-83	105·44	65·57	67·0	182·75	113·64	70·1	121·45	75·52	77·2
1983-84	114·61	68·08	67·0	199·66	118·60	70·3	132·61	78·77	77·5
1984-85	124·42	70·36	67·3	216·67	122·53	70·7	144·31	81·61	78·0
1985-86	134·60	71·81	67·4	234·50	125·10	70·9	155·62	83·02	77·9
1986-87¶	143·89	74·17	67·3	250·56	129·15	70·8	165·70	85·41	77·5
150 per cent. average earnings									
1978-79	92·87	92·87	66·7	155·37	155·37	68·1	102·77	102·77	73·8
1979-80	113·43	97·93	69·2	189·61	163·71	70·4	125·18	108·08	76·4
1980-81	134·77	100·04	68·4	224·27	166·47	68·8	147·76	109·68	75·0
1981-82	145·63	96·96	66·5	242·92	161·73	67·0	159·94	106·49	73·1
1982-83	155·05	96·42	65·7	258·89	160·99	66·2	171·06	106·37	72·5
1983-84	168·70	100·21	65·8	282·39	167·74	66·3	186·70	110·90	72·8
1984-85	183·32	103·67	66·1	305·97	173·03	66·6	203·21	114·91	73·2

Earnings†	Single			Married couple (two earners)‡ no children			Married couple (one earner) two children‖		
	At current prices £	At constant (1978-79) prices £	As per cent. of gross income Per cent.	At current prices £	At constant (1978-79) prices £	As per cent. of gross income Per cent.	At current prices £	At constant (1978-79) prices £	As per cent. of gross income Per cent.
1985-86	198·66	105·98	66·3	331·34	176·76	66·8	219·68	117·19	73·3
1986-87¶	212·31	109·43	66·2	354·16	182·55	66·7	234·13	120·68	73·0
200 per cent. average earnings									
1978-79	123·06	123·06	66·3	202·10	202·10	66·5	133·85	133·85	72·1
1979-80	151·30	130·63	69·2	248·39	214·46	69·2	163·44	141·11	74·8
1980-81	178·75	132·68	68·0	295·81	219·57	68·1	193·23	143·43	73·5
1981-82	191·26	127·34	65·5	318·34	211·95	65·9	207·58	138·20	71·1
1982-83	206·28	128·27	65·5	341·73	212·50	65·6	232·99	144·88	74·0
1983-84	225·86	134·16	66·0	374·02	222·16	65·8	245·80	146·00	71·9
1984-85	244·54	138·29	66·1	404·21	228·58	66·0	266·64	150·78	72·1
1985-86	264·03	140·85	66·1	436·69	232·96	66·0	287·45	153·35	71·9
1986-87¶	281·95	145·33	65·9	466·59	240·50	65·9	306·30	157·88	71·6
500 per cent. average earnings									
1978-79	221·83	221·83	47·8	396·19	396·19	52·1	237·79	237·79	51·2
1979-80	312·45	269·76	57·2	536·54	463·24	59·7	327·95	283·15	60·0
1980-81	366·09	271·74	55·7	633·40	470·15	58·3	383·52	284·67	58·4
1981-82	390·72	260·14	53·6	676·97	450·72	56·0	409·47	272·62	56·1
1982-83	425·72	264·73	54·1	737·02	458·31	56·6	446·82	277·85	56·8
1983-84	469·43	278·84	54·9	813·52	483·22	57·3	493·26	292·99	57·7
1984-85	506·02	286·15	54·7	875·63	495·17	57·2	532·54	301·15	57·6
1985-86	543·98	290·20	54·5	942·16	502·62	56·9	572·21	305·26	57·3
1986-87¶	580·53	299·23	54·3	1,005·68	518·36	56·8	609·96	314·39	57·1

Notes

*Estimates do not include income-related benefits to which some taxpayers may be entitled.

†Earnings are based on adult rates for those in full time work with pay unaffected by absence.

‡Assuming husband and wife have earnings at the same multiple of the earnings distribution for full time males and full time females respectively.

‖Child benefit assumes two children aged under 11.

¶Average earnings are assumed to increase by 7 per cent. between 1985-86 and 1986-87, as in the Autumn Statement, 1985.

Mr. Wrigglesworth asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the effects of changes in personal taxation on disposable incomes for each year since 1978-79 for single people, married couples (both working, without children), and married couples (husband only working, without children), for the lowest decile, lowest quartile, median, upper quartile, median, upper quartile and highest decile of all males and females, expressed in current and constant prices and as a percentage of gross earnings; and what is his estimate for 1986-87 on the basis of the conventional assumptions of index-linked allowances and duties.

Mr. Moore: Information in the following tables is based on estimates of earnings for those in full-time work paid at adult rates, with pay unaffected by absence. Estimates are based on information from the annual new earnings surveys. Latest information is for April 1985.

Income tax rates and allowances for April 1979 are those specified in the Finance Act 1979, later replaced by those announced in June 1979; for other Aprils, they are the rates and allowances for the financial year immediately following. Taxpayers are assumed to have no reliefs or allowances other than the appropriate personal allowance. National insurance contributions are at the contracted-in rate.

The calculations take no account of income-related benefits to which those at the lowest decile and quartile may be entitled. Changes in the purchasing power of net earnings have been calculated by reference to movements in the general index of retail prices between Aprils.

Earnings after income tax, National Insurance contributions and Child Benefit

	Single			Married Couple (two earners)† No Children			Married Couple (one earner) 2 Children*		
	At current prices £	At constant April 85 prices £	As per cent. of gross income Per cent.	At current prices £	At constant April 85 prices £	As per cent. of gross income Per cent.	At current prices £	At constant April 85 prices £	As per cent. of gross income Per cent.
Lowest Decile of earnings									
April 78	39·35	75·61	74·5	73·17	140·59	80·7	48·71	93·59	92·3
April 79	44·09	76·96	73·9	81·77	142·73	79·8	55·90	97·58	93·6
April 80	53·47	76·66	74·3	98·48	141·19	79·7	65·93	94·52	91·6
April 81	57·67	73·79	72·2	105·71	135·27	77·0	71·62	91·65	89·6
April 82	61·95	72·45	71·7	114·03	133·36	76·8	77·53	90·67	89·7
April 83	66·91	75·24	72·1	123·66	139·06	77·6	84·43	94·94	91·0

	Single			Married Couple (two earners)† No Children			Married Couple (one earner) 2 Children*		
	At current prices £	At constant April 85 prices £	As per cent. of gross income Per cent.	At current prices £	At constant April 85 prices £	As per cent. of gross income Per cent.	At current prices £	At constant April 85 prices £	As per cent. of gross income Per cent.
April 84	71·96	76·94	72·7	133·29	142·51	78·5	91·59	97·93	92·5
April 85	76·83	76·83	73·1	144·46	144·46	79·9	97·74	97·74	93·0
Lower Quartile of earnings									
April 78	46·55	89·44	71·9	83·70	160·82	77·4	55·91	107·42	86·4
April 79	52·62	91·85	71·3	94·36	164·71	76·5	64·43	112·47	87·3
April 80	64·10	91·90	72·2	114·17	163·68	76·9	76·55	109·75	86·2
April 81	69·44	88·86	70·3	123·08	157·49	74·5	83·39	106·71	84·4
April 82	74·93	87·63	69·6	133·26	155·85	74·1	90·51	105·85	84·1
April 83	81·00	91·09	69·9	144·58	162·58	74·6	98·52	110·79	85·0
April 84	87·21	93·25	70·3	157·02	167·89	75·3	106·84	114·23	86·2
April 85	93·79	93·79	70·6	168·99	168·99	75·6	114·70	114·70	86·3
Median of earnings									
April 78	56·29	108·15	69·7	99·13	190·47	74·2	65·65	126·14	81·2
April 79	63·94	111·61	69·1	115·73	202·01	75·7	75·75	132·23	81·9
April 80	78·52	112·57	70·4	137·00	196·41	74·3	90·97	130·42	81·5
April 81	85·56	109·48	68·6	148·67	190·24	72·1	99·51	127·33	79·8
April 82	93·00	108·77	67·8	161·99	189·45	71·5	108·58	126·99	79·2
April 83	100·64	113·17	68·0	175·81	197·70	71·8	118·17	132·88	79·8
April 84	109·53	117·11	68·2	192·88	206·23	72·1	129·17	138·11	80·4
April 85	118·13	118·13	68·4	208·33	208·33	72·3	139·04	139·04	80·5
Upper Quartile of earnings									
April 78	68·75	132·09	67·8	118·91	228·47	71·5	78·11	150·08	77·0
April 79	78·28	136·64	67·4	135·07	235·77	70·9	90·08	157·24	77·5
April 80	97·62	139·95	68·8	167·43	240·04	72·0	110·07	157·80	77·6
April 81	108·72	139·12	67·2	185·64	237·55	69·9	122·67	156·97	75·8
April 82	118·36	138·43	66·3	202·47	236·80	69·1	133·94	156·65	75·0
April 83	127·91	143·84	66·3	219·37	246·68	69·4	145·43	163·54	75·4
April 84	139·42	149·07	66·5	242·08	258·83	69·4	159·06	170·07	75·9
April 85	150·76	150·76	66·6	262·68	262·68	69·7	171·68	171·68	75·9
Highest Decile of earnings									
April 78	85·50	164·28	66·7	144·40	277·45	69·3	94·86	182·26	74·0
April 79	96·89	169·13	66·5	161·13	281·26	68·0	108·69	189·73	74·5
April 80	123·64	177·26	68·2	206·57	296·15	70·2	136·09	195·11	75·1
April 81	139·36	178·33	66·4	228·91	292·91	67·1	153·32	196·19	73·0
April 82	151·76	177·49	65·6	249·29	291·55	66·3	167·34	195·71	72·3
April 83	165·83	186·48	65·7	273·97	308·08	66·8	183·36	206·19	72·6
April 84	181·85	194·43	66·0	302·48	323·41	66·8	201·48	215·42	73·2
April 85	196·28	196·28	66·2	324·88	324·88	66·9	217·19	217·19	73·3

* Both children under 11.

† Assuming husband and wife have earnings at the same quantile of the earnings distribution for full-time males and full-time females respectively.

Mr. Pike asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the increase in take-home pay for *(a)* a single person and *(b)* a married couple from an increase of 10 per cent. in the threshold for the basic rate of income tax.

Mr. Moore: For basic rate taxpayers in 1986-87 the increase would be £1·27 per week for a single person and £2·02 per week for a married couple.

Sir Peter Hordern asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what a single person earning £140 a week would pay now, in income tax and national insurance contributions, at current rates, allowances and rate bands; and what such a person would pay at 1978-79 rates, allowances and rate bands;

(2) what a single person earning £8,500 a year would have to pay in income tax *(a)* at current rates, allowances and rate bands and *(b)* at rates, allowances and rate bands obtaining in June 1979.

Mr. Moore: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of average earnings has been represented by personal income tax allowances in each of the last 20 years for which figures are available; and what was the percentage change in such allowances in each of those years on the previous year's figures.

Mr. Moore [*pursuant to his reply*, 5 February 1986, c. *185*]: The information is given in the table. Tax thresholds are shown as percentages of both average manual earnings and (for 1970-71 onwards) average earnings for all occupations.

Tax thresholds 1966-67 to 1985-86—Single person and married man without children

	Single person				Married man without children			
Tax year	*Threshold at current prices* £	*Percentage increase on previous year* Per cent.	*Threshold as percentage of average manual earnings** Per cent.	*Threshold as percentage of average earnings† for all occupations* Per cent.	*Threshold at current prices* £	*Percentage increase on previous year* Per cent.	*Threshold as percentage of average manual earnings** Per cent.	*Threshold as percentage of average earnings† for all occupations* Per cent.
1966-67	283	0·0	26·8	na	437	0·0	41·4	na
1967-68	283	0·0	25·5	na	437	0·0	39·3	na
1968-69	283	0·0	23·7	na	437	0·0	36·5	na
1969-70	328	15·9	25·4	na	482	10·3	37·3	na
1970-71	418	27·4	28·7	26·1	598	24·1	41·0	37·3
1971-72	418	0·0	25·8	23·7	598	0·0	37·0	33·9
1972-73	591	41·4	32·1	29·6	771	28·9	41·8	38·6
1973-74	595	0·7	28·0	26·4	775	0·5	36·5	34·3
1974-75	625	5·0	24·4	22·7	865	11·6	33·7	31·4
1975-76	675	8·0	21·4	19·8	955	10·4	30·3	28·0
1976-77	735	8·9	20·6	19·1	1,085	13·6	30·5	28·2
1977-78	945	28·6	24·4	22·5	1,455	34·1	37·6	34·7
1978-79	985	4·2	22·0	20·4	1,535	5·5	34·3	31·8
1979-80	1,165	18·3	22·2	20·5	1,815	18·2	34·5	31·9
1980-81	1,375	18·0	22·7	20·1	2,145	18·2	35·4	31·4
1981-82	1,375	0·0	20·6	18·1	2,145	0·0	32·1	28·3
1982-83	1,565	13·8	21·8	19·1	2,445	14·0	34·1	29·9
1983-84	1,785	14·1	23·1	20·1	2,795	14·3	36·1	31·4
1984-85	2,005	12·3	24·1	20·8	3,155	12·9	37·9	32·8
1985-86‡	2,205	10·0	24·6	21·2	3,455	9·5	38·5	33·3

* Full time males aged over 21 working a full week

† Full time males paid at adult rates working a full week

‡ Provisional

Job Creation

18. **Mr. Maclennan** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has received from the Confederation of British Industry concerning the scale of resources currently allocated to measures designed to deal with unemployment.

Mr. MacGregor: My right hon. Friend has received a number of representations from the Confederation of British Industry in recent weeks.

Mr. David Atkinson asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he is able to give an estimate of the number of jobs created as a result of the measures introduced by each Budget statement since 1979.

Mr. MacGregor: Changes in employment since 1979 have been due to a whole range of factors. It is not possible to attribute the changes directly to the various measures announced in successive Budget statements since that time.

29. **Mr. Livsey** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has received concerning the effect of his taxation policies on employment.

Mr. Moore: My right hon. Friend has received a number of representations on this issue.

Mortgage Interest Relief

19. **Mr. Nicholls** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received advocating the abolition of income tax relief on mortgage interest.

Mr. Moore: My right hon. Friend has received a few such representations.

Public Sector Borrowing Requirement

20. **Mr. Alton** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the level of the public sector borrowing requirement over the last 10 months.

Mr. MacGregor: Public sector borrowing in the first 10 months of 1985-86 was £3·2 billion, as announced on 18 February.

Public Expenditure

21. **Mr. Kenneth Carlisle** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has received about his latest forecasts for public expenditure.

Mr. MacGregor: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave earlier to my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, West (Mr. Sackville).

22. **Mr. Willie W. Hamilton** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the increase in central Government's current spending in each year since 1980; and what are the corresponding figures for local government.

Mr. MacGregor: Between 1980-81 and 1984-85 central Government current spending rose by 46·3 per cent. and local authority current spending relevant for RSG by 37·5 per cent. Two of the major factors behind the increase in public expenditure — defence and the increase in numbers unemployed — have had a significant impact on central Government current spending. The 1984-85 figures are also affected by the impact of the coal strike. The full figures are given in the table.

Current expenditure: central and local government

£ billion except where stated

	1980-81 outturn	*1981-82 outturn*	*1982-83 outturn*	*1983-84 outturn*	*1984-85 outturn*
Central government					
Current spending*	61·2	70·3	78·2	82·0	89·5
Increase in cash		9·2	7·9	3·8	7·5
Percentage increase		+15·0	+11·2	+4·9	+9·1
Local authority					
Current spending *Relevant for RSG**	18·7	21·0	22·8	24·3	25·8
Increase in cash		2·2	1·9	1·5	1·4
Percentage increase		+11·8	+8·9	+6·6	+5·9

* Including finance for public corporations.

32. **Mr. Wood** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about representations he has received on public expenditure in 1986-87.

Mr. MacGregor: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave earlier to my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, West (Mr. Sackville).

34. **Mr. Fallon** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will review the working of the public expenditure territorial block formulae.

Mr. MacGregor: The working of the territorial block formulae is kept under constant review.

35. **Mrs. Virginia Bottomley** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received about the public expenditure in 1985-86; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: We receive representations on public expenditure matters throughout the year. The latest estimated outturn for 1985-86 will be given on Budget day.

Departmental Staff

23. **Mr. Watts** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the reduction in the number of staff in post in central Government Departments between May 1979 and the latest date for which figures are available; and which is the last year in which a lower number was in post.

Mr. Brooke: At 1 January 1986 (against a target of 600,475 on 1 April 1986), there were 596,506 staff in central Government Departments, a reduction of 135,769 since 1 April 1979. There was a lower figure at 1 October 1985 (595,764). The next comparable figure was in 1939 when there were 347,000 staff in Government Departments. No figures are available for the years 1940-43, but by 1 April 1944 staff in post numbers had risen to nearly 1·2 million.

Gross Domestic Product

24. **Mr. Baldry** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the United Kingdom's gross domestic product per head; and how this compares with each of the United Kingdom's Community partners in the latest year for which figures are available.

25. **Mr. Michael Forsyth** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what information he has on the gross domestic product per head of population for *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* Puerto Rico, *(c)* Yugoslavia and *(d)* Taiwan for the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. MacGregor: In 1984 United Kingdom gross domestic product per head stood at £5,600. The table gives a set of comparative figures for the countries requested.

Country	*GNP per head 1984 (US dollars)*
Denmark	10,690
Germany, Federal Republic	10,030
Luxembourg	9,240
France	8,910
Netherlands	8,530
Belgium	7,700
United Kingdom	7,500
Italy	6,110
Ireland	4,990
Spain	4,190
Puerto Rico	*3,890
Greece	3,380
Taiwan	*2,600
Portugal	1,910
Yugoslavia	*1,640

* Figures are for 1983: 1984 figures are not yet available.

Dr. Cunningham asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish the proportion of gross domestic product taken by *(a)* central Government current expenditure, *(b)* central Government capital expenditure, *(c)* local government current expenditure, *(d)* local government capital expenditure and *(e)* all public expenditure in each year from 1979-80 to 1985-86.

Mr. MacGregor: General Government expenditure, and the components requested, as a percentage of GDP are as follows:

	1979-80 outturn	*1980-81 outturn*	*1981-82 outturn*	*1982-83 outturn*	*1983-84 outturn*	*1984-85 outturn*	*Per cent. 1985-86 estimated outturn*
Central Government Current	28½	30½	32	32½	32	33	32

	1979-80 outturn	1980-81 outturn	1981-82 outturn	1982-83 outturn	1983-84 outturn	1984-85 outturn	Per cent. 1985-86 estimated outturn
Capital	3	3	2½	2½	1½	1	1½
Local authorities							
Current	10	10½	10½	10½	10½	10½	10
Capital	2	2	1½	1½	1½	1½	1
General Government expenditure	43½	46	46½	46½	46	45½	44½

It should be noted that central Government current spending includes most defence expenditure, much of which is of a capital nature, and that both central government and local authority capital spending include sales of physical assets. This particularly affects local authority capital spending which is reduced as a result of council house sales. Table 1.14 of the 1986 public exenditure White Paper adjusts for these factors.

International Monetary Conference

26. **Mr. Ashdown** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received concerning the need for an international monetary conference.

Mr. Ian Stewart: My right hon. Friend has received no such representations recently.

Infrastructure Projects

27. **Mr. Hicks** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has any plans to bring forward measures to increase investment in public infrastructure projects; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: The 1986 public expenditure White Paper (Cmnd. 9702) set out the Government's spending plans for future years. It showed increases over previous plans in capital spending, notably on housing renovation and roads.

Civil Service Catering Organisation

28. **Mr. Thurnham** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he is satisfied with the working of the Civil Service Catering Organisation; how he monitors its effectiveness; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: I am satisfied with the working of the Civil Service Catering Organisation. Catering is one of the services which is subject to competition and the organisation now operates on an almost wholly commercial basis. Having only a token Vote, the organisation is required to meet all its expenditure from the receipts from restaurant customers and the Departments it serves. The chief executive reports to me regularly throughout the year on its performance. In addition, the organisation has developed value for money indicators and established targets for 1985-86 which it has more than met. Further improvements are expected in 1986-87.

Share Ownership

30. **Mr. Sayeed** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to increase share participation by employees in their own and other publicly quoted companies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moore: I cannot anticipate my right hon. Friend's Budget statement. However the Government remain firmly committed to supporting both employee share ownership and wider share ownership generally. Our policies have already encouraged the introduction and operation of large numbers of employee share schemes, and have enabled millions of people to obtain shares in privatised companies.

VAT and Income Tax

31. **Mr. Maclean** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received on the levels of value added tax and income tax for 1986-87.

Mr. Moore: A number.

Manufacturing Output

36. **Mr. Hunter** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what measures he intends taking to encourage an increase in United Kingdom manufacturing output.

Mr. MacGregor: Our policies to exert downward pressure on inflation and to stimulate the supply side of the economy will continue to maintain an environment in which all sectors of the economy can flourish. Supply side policies promote the flexible operation of labour, goods and financial markets by sharpening incentives, encouraging competition and enterprise, and promoting deregulation. Measures include privatisation, contracting out of public services, the simplification of taxes to remove distortions and improve incentives to work, and reforms to ease rigidities in the labour market. The fall in oil prices and its effects will of course bring substantial benefits to the manufacturing sector. The Government also provide substantial direct assistance to manufacturing industry. In 1984-85 over £2 billion, largely going to manufacturing industry, was provided through regional and territorial spending, through support to particular sectors, support to exports and through expenditure on training. [A detailed breakdown is given in the annex to the Government's reply to the report of the House of Lords Select Committee (Cmnd. 9697).]

Oil

37. **Mr. Portillo** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will make a statement on the role of oil in the United Kingdom economy.

Mr. MacGregor: Like other industrialised countries the United Kingdom is a major oil consumer. Unlike most of the other countries the United Kingdom is also an oil producer. But North sea oil and gas accounts for only 5 to 6 per cent. of national income and only 5 per cent. of

our capital investment. Net oil exports make up 8 per cent. of total exports. North sea revenues constitute 8½ per cent. of total United Kingdom tax revenues. And North sea related employment represents under ½ per cent. of total United Kingdom employment.

Unemployment Costs

38. **Mr. Strang** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of net average cost to the Treasury of an unmarried man who is unemployed, as against one in employment on average earnings.

Mr. MacGregor: The estimated average cost per beneficiary of benefits paid in respect of unemployment is £2,400 for 1985-86. The corresponding figure for an unmarried man is not available. It is not possible to estimate the revenue foregone.

Public Sector Investment

39. **Mr. Wrigglesworth** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his most recent estimate of the proportion of gross domestic product spent on public sector investment.

Mr. MacGregor: Total public sector capital spending, as shown in table 1.14 of the 1986 public expenditure White Paper, was some £21 billion in 1984-85, representing 6·5 per cent. of GDP.

Petrol (Revenue Tax and Duty)

40. **Mr. Jessel** asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the current yields of petrol revenue tax and petrol duty.

Mr. Moore: Receipts of petroleum revenue tax (including advance payments) and petrol duty in 1984-85 were £7,177 million and £4,680 million respectively.

Inflation

Mr. Spencer asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about the current level of inflation.

Mr. Ian Stewart: Over the 12 months to January 1986, the retail prices index increased by 5·5 per cent.

Devon and Cornwall (EC Aid)

Mr. Penhaligon asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list separately for the counties of Devon and Cornwall for the period 1976 to 1985 the moneys received in each of the counties as loans from the European investment bank.

Mr. Brooke: The value of loans signed for the period 1976 to 1985 is shown in the following table:

Direct loans from EIB Own Resources

£ million

	Devon	*Cornwall*
1976	—	4·0
1977	—	2·5
1978	4·0	—
1979	7·2	—
1980	*2·1	*3·9
1981	*2·1	*6·9
1982	*3·6	*1·4
1983	4·0	—
1984	*7·6	*1·4
1985	10·0	—
Total	40·6	20·1

* Includes EIB rough estimate of allocations to Cornwall/Devon in respect of four EIB loans for water supply and sewerage treatment in the south-west region conducted by the South West water authority.

In addition, the two counties may have benefited from global loans to help small and medium-sized enterprises in the assisted areas, but detailed information on these loans is not readily available.

Mr. Penhaligon asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will indicate for the years 1976 to 1985 the value of aid granted for projects in Devon and Cornwall separately by the European Community under the supplementary measures.

Mr. Brooke: Supplementary measures did not begin until 1980, when the United Kingdom's transitional own resources arrangements agreed on accession expired.

Payments under the 30 May 1980 agreement to reduce the United Kingdom's net contribution by supplementary measures were made in respect of the 1980, 1981 and 1982 budgets. They included expenditure in support of public expenditure programmes in the assisted areas of the south-west region, that is the whole of Cornwall and the western part of Devon. The total money involved was

£ million

	1980 (paid in 1981)	*1981 (paid in 1982)*	*1982 (paid in 1983)*
Roads programme		0·3	6·4
Rail programme	3·7		0·6
Electricity		2·0	
Water & sewerage	5·3	7·6	3·9
Telecommunications	13·8	12·8	5·1
Total	22·8	22·7	16·0

Most of these programmes covered a large number of small projects and it is not possible to allocate them between Devon and Cornwall. Two projects in Cornwall which did receive specific support from the 1980 and 1981 refunds were the St. Neots-Colliford impounding reservoir and the Camborne-Redruth main drainage scheme.

Arrangements for refunds in respect of 1983 were different, and the payments were all allocated to individual projects. Those in the Devon and Cornwall area which received support were work on the M5 near Tiverton (Devon) (£4·7 million) and work on the A38 at the Tamar bridge (£10·8 million).

Westland plc

Mr. Dalyell asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has had any discussions with the Governor of the Bank of England regarding the role of the bank in the financial restructuring of Westland plc; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lawson: No.

Council House Sales

Mr. Blair asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will introduce legislation to permit private developers involved in the refurbishment or redevelopment for sale of local authority housing to pass on value added tax invoices to the local housing authority for recovery of the tax; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: I cannot anticipate my right hon. Friend's Budget statement.

Budget

Mr. Canavan asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many representations he has received about his forthcoming Budget.

Mr. Brooke: A considerable number.

Revenue

Dr. Cunningham asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish the estimated total yield of *(a)* income tax, *(b)* value added tax, *(c)* all other taxes, *(d)* all Customs and Excise duties, *(e)* all miscellaneous income to the Exchequer (other than borrowing), *(f)* public sector borrowing and *(g)* rates in each year from 1979-80 to 1985-86.

Mr. MacGregor: The figures are as follows:

£ billion

		Customs and Excise duties					
	Personal income tax	*Value added tax*	*Other*	*Local authority rates*	*Other taxes (including royalties)*	*Miscellaneous income*	*Public sector borrowing requirement*
1979-80	20·9	10·1	10·0	6·9	12·8	16·4	10·0
1980-81	24·9	11·8	10·9	8·7	14·9	19·6	12·7
1981-82	28·6	13·5	13·3	11·0	19·2	22·3	8·6
1982-83	30·4	14·5	14·4	12·2	20·4	25·1	8·9
1983-84	31·3	16·1	15·9	12·3	21·3	27·6	9·7
1984-85	32·6	18·3	17·0	13·0	24·5	29·7	10·1

Spirits (Excise Duty)

Mr. George Gardiner asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his latest forecast of receipts from excise duty on spirits in 1985-86; and how much of this figure is attributable to the change in the rate of duty in the Finance Act 1985.

Mr. Brooke: I have nothing further to add to the reply I gave my hon. Friend on 20 December 1985, at column 361.

Savings Schemes (Advertising)

Mr. Freud asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing the amount of money spent on advertising each of the different Government savings schemes together with a table of the interest paid on capital for each scheme.

Mr. Ian Stewart: I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible.

Customs Officers (Drug Enforcement)

Mr. Evennett asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many Customs officers were permanently assigned to drug enforcement duties at the latest available date; and how many were so assigned *(a)* five and *(b)* 10 years ago.

Mr. Brooke: The number of Customs investigators and preventive staff will be 3,262 at 31 March 1986; five years ago it was 3,179; the figure for 10 years ago is not available. Within these totals, effectiveness has been increased by shifting resources to specialist drugs investigation, where numbers have more than doubled, and to mobile and other specialised units supported by improved training and equipment.

A further 300 preventive officers are being appointed in the course of 1986-87, and £10 million is being made available for the development and purchase of drugs detection equipment over the next three years.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 14 March 1986

NORTHERN IRELAND

Montefibre, Coleraine

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement detailing what Government grant-aid was given in repect of the producer-dyed acrylic fibre spinning machine which Monsanto introduced to the plant in Coleraine now owned by Montefibre and explaining what had happened to this machine.

Dr. Boyson: I am unable to provide details of grant assistance paid to Monsanto plc prior to October 1980 as this information is confidential under the terms of the agreement entered into with the company. Such assistance has, however, now passed outside the control period during which grant may be reclaimed in the event of disposal. The possibility of reclaiming grant related to subsequent refurbishment of this machinery is being examined. It is understood that the machinery in question is now located at a Montefibre plant in Spain.

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement detailing what Government grant-aid was given in respect of the Seydel converter installed by Monsanto in the Coleraine plant now owned by Montefibre and explaining what has happened to this machine.

Dr. Boyson: I am unable to provide the detailed information requested as agreements to provide selective financial assistance were subject to a confidentiality condition prior to October 1980. The Seydel converter was, however, grant-aided in 1972 and remained in use at Coleraine for well beyond the mandatory control period of three years. It is understood that this machinery is now located in Spain.

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement detailing how much grant aid was given in respect of plant installed by Monsanto in the Coleraine plant now owned by Montefibre and which is now packed for shipment to India.

Dr. Boyson: I am unable to provide details of grants paid to Monsanto plc prior to October 1980 as this information is confidential under the terms of the agreement entered into with the company. However, the last grant was paid in 1978 and the assets aided are therefore outside the period of three years in which the Government have an interest in their disposal.

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what regard was paid to the changes in oil prices in the Department of Economic Development's assessment of the profitability of the Montefibre plant.

Dr. Boyson: The Industrial Development Board has not undertaken a separate assessment of the profitability of the Montefibre plant. It is satisfied that the management of the company has taken into account all the relevant factors in arriving at its decision.

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the development at Montefibre, Coleraine, of a new optic fibre; and where Montefibre now intends to produce this product.

Dr. Boyson: In 1984 the company undertook at Coleraine a research and development programme to develop a new optic fibre. As this product was being developed specifically for the United Kingdom market the company has informed the Industrial Development Board that it has no plans to produce it elsewhere within the group.

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the development of the new non-recrimped staple at Montefibre, Coleraine; and where Montefibre now intends to produce this.

Dr. Boyson: The development of the non-recrimped staple represented the introduction to Coleraine of the most modern processing technology that was available within the group. Montefibre had successfully developped this in its other European plants and logically extended the benefits of this work to Coleraine during 1984-85 after adapting the process to the particular equipment in Coleraine.

As the company first developed this processing technology in Italy and Spain, it will continue to use it in these plants.

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement indicating what grant-aid was given in respect of the development of the three new products at Montefibre, Coleraine.

Dr. Boyson: The company had applied to the Industrial Development Board for support on the development of plastic reinforced fibre; on the development of a new optic fibre and on the development of non-recrimped staple. However, the programme for the development of these new products at Coleraine was not complete in respect of any of the products at the time the closure was announced.

The following table gives the financial details:

	Expenditure approved by the group £	*Grant support approved by IDB* £	*Grants paid by IDB* £
Plastic reinforced fibre	912,700	350,405	240,906
New optic fibre	691,980	278,970	59,399
Non-recrimped staple	120,000	41,740	20,490

As the company has announced the closure of the Coleraine plant it is liable to repay grants which were received for research and development projects.

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement outlining what figures are available to indicate the return Montefibre earned on its investment in the Coleraine plant.

Dr. Boyson: The audited results for the 30 months ended 31 December 1985 show an accumulated loss of £92,000 was sustained by Montefibre on its Coleraine operations. For the 12-month period to 31 December 1985 the audited results show a loss of £858,000.

Renal Services

Mr. Hume asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on his policy on the provision of renal services with particular reference to the question of satellite dialysis units in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham: The Government wish to see renal services in Northern Ireland improved and I was pleased recently to be able to announce the allocation of additional funds for 1986-87 which will enable the expansion of dialysis and transplant services. I intend to announce shortly specific targets for the development of services for patients suffering from end stage renal failure including plans for the provision of a satellite dialysis unit in the area of the Western health and social services board.

PRIME MINISTER

Israel (Visit)

Mr. Marlow asked the Prime Minister what is her intention with regard to contact with Palestinians and visits to the occupied territories during her visit to Israel.

The Prime Minister: Arrangements are not yet firm. I hope to meet leading Palestinians as well as Israelis during my visit.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Science Budget

Sir Trevor Skeet asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science what amount of the science budget is used for the purpose of defraying *(a)* superannuation payments, *(b)* costs of restructuring research councils and *(c)* for meeting variations in the exchange rate on international subscriptions.

Mr. Walden: The information requested is given for 1985-86:

	£ million
Science Budget 1985-86	583·9
Amount of Science Budget used for:	
(a) Superannuation payments	19·9
(b) Restructuring costs	11·0
(c) Meeting variations (subsequent to the submission of Estimates) in the exchange rate on international subscriptions	1·15

Health Promotion Research Trust

Mr. Pavitt asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish in the *Official Report* a list of the grants made in association with his Department or a research council by the Health Promotion Research Trust.

Mr. Walden: The Medical Research Council's epidemiology unit is currently receiving grant support of nearly £65,000 from the Health Promotion Research Trust for a project involving the study of the relationship between beliefs, values, behaviour and ischaemic heart disease. No grants are made jointly by the trust and the Department, or the trust and any research council.

Workers Educational Association

Mr. Lyell asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he is yet in a position to respond to the request submitted by the general secretary of the Workers Educational Association for additional financial assistance; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Walden: I have written today on behalf of my right hon. Friend to inform the WEA that we have agreed to make available a further £55,500 in the current financial year specifically to assist WEA districts with the financial adjustments necessary to enable them to move towards greater cost-effectiveness.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Police National Computer

Mr. Maclean asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the present criteria for weeding the criminal names index of the police national computer and records of criminal convictions held by the national identification bureau; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hurd: The weeding criteria have recently been changed so as to reduce substantially the number of criminal records held centrally without significantly impairing police effectiveness.

The previous criteria which were given in detail in reply to a question from the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) on 28 June 1985, at columns 523-24, required records of those who had committed a single minor offence to be kept until the offender was 40 years old and records for those who had committed more than one offence to be kept until they were 70 years old. Under the new criteria these age limits are removed and records will be weeded where offenders have not come to notice for 20 years since the last conviction, whatever the number of convictions before that. This will result in the deletion of a large number of names and records of people who have committed more than one offence in their youth, who have not re-offended for 20 years but whose records would otherwise have been kept until they were 70 years old. Records will not be deleted, however, if they include evidence of mental illness or indecency, custodial sentences of more than six months, or offences of homicide.

Transport Staff (Attacks)

Mr. Sedgemore asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received about the level of violent attacks upon transport staff in London.

Mr. Giles Shaw: We have received one letter about attacks on public transport staff in London; since 1982 nine letters have been received not confined to the position in London. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Brittan) the then Home Secretary, met a delegation of the Transport and General Workers Union in October 1984 to discuss this matter.

Mr. Muhammad Idrish

Mr. Corbett asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what date Mr. Muhammad Idrish, Home

Office reference J137550/44, was asked to submit his passport to immigration authorities for the endorsement of his right to remain in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Waddington: On 25 November 1985, when I wrote to the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape), who had taken up the case.

Data Protection

Mr. Grylls asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any plans to commission an interim report from the Data Protection Registrar on the effect of the operation of the Data Protection Act on business, particularly small firms, pending the 1987 review; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waddington: The Data Protection Registrar has been asked to make a report after the Act has come fully into force in November 1987. He has said that he will report earlier if that seems practical and helpful.

Immigration

Dr. McDonald asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many immigration cases were referred to him by right hon. and hon. Members in the last quarter of 1985 and so far in 1986; and of that number, how many have been kept in detention;

(2) how many immigration cases were referred to him by right hon. and hon. Members in 1983, 1984 and 1985; and, of that number, how many were kept in detention in each of those years.

Mr. Waddington [*pursuant to his reply*, 17 February, c. *47*]: The available information relates to the number of immigration files* created following representations by right hon. and hon. Members, and is as follows:

	Number
1983	11,456
1984	13,164
1985	16,024

From October 1985 to 21 February 1986, 7,259 such files were created.

No figures are available of the number of people who were held in detention when the representations were received.

**Notes:*

1. These figures include a small number of letters dealing with general immigration issues rather than individual cases.
2. Representations made on behalf of a single family may be counted as more than one case where the immigration circumstances of more than one member of the family are under consideration.
3. Further representations made after a reply has been sent are included separately in these figures.
4. Representations received about the same case from more than one right hon. or hon. Member are counted separately.
5. The figures include representations on after entry cases as well as on those arising at the ports.

SCOTLAND

Agricultural Colleges

Mr. Home Robertson asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the scale of the proposed cut in public funding for the advisory services of the Scottish agricultural colleges in 1986-87.

Mr. John MacKay: No reduction in the public funding of the advisory services provided by the Scottish agricultural colleges is planned for 1986-87.

Mr. Home Robertson asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on his policy towards the proposal that the three Scottish agricultural colleges should be combined within a unified structure, with particular reference to the financial arrangements if any one of the colleges were to remain outside the proposed new structure.

Mr. John MacKay [*pursuant to his reply*, 13 March 1986, c. *550*]: As indicated in the consultation paper on the agricultural advisory services in Scotland, issued by the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland, Ministers support the proposal by the Council of Scottish Agricultural Colleges to form a new company which would have overall responsibility for the management of all the services provided by the three Scottish agricultural colleges.

The colleges have yet to finalise on the proposal; it is premature therefore to speculate on how the detailed arrangements, including those relating to funding, might apply in different circumstances, whatever these may be.

Youth Employment

Mr. Wallace asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will provide a breakdown of the numbers of young people aged 16 to 18 years *(a)* in full-time education, *(b)* in employment, *(c)* unemployed and *(d)* on a YTS.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Figures indicating the number of young people aged 16 to 18 in each of the categories for which information is requested are not available on a comparable basis. The figures for Scotland given in the table below, which are the latest available in each case, come from different sources and relate to different points in time. There is therefore an inevitable and unquantifiable element of double counting. For example, many of the young people in full-time education in 1984 also feature in the numbers shown as unemployed or in YTS in early 1986.

	(1) Full-time Education	*(2) Employ-ment*	*(3) Unem-ployed*	*(4) YTS*
Age 16	55,673	32,000	12,780	
Age 17	28,974	45,000	17,645	31,746
Age 18	18,905	49,000	19,098	
Total	103,552	126,000	49,523	31,746

Col. (1) Figures as at September 1984 (schools and colleges) and 31 December 1984 (universities).

Col. (2) Figures are extracted from the 1984 Labour Force Survey and are estimates.

Col. (3) Position as at 9 January 1986, the latest date for which age band figures are available.

Col. (4) Position at end of February 1986. An age breakdown is not currently available.

District Heating

Mr. Orme asked the Secretary of State for Scotland what information he has as to how many local authority dwellings are served by district heating.

Mr. Ancram: This information is not held centrally.

Teachers' Pay

Mrs. McCurley asked the Secretary of State for Scotland if the Government will make additional resources available for teachers' pay in Scotland.

Mr. Rifkind: As I announced last week I will set up an independent inquiry into teachers' pay and other matters. The inquiry will be free to make whatever recommendations it sees fit, having heard the evidence put to it. Meantime the Government have given no new commitment to make additional resources available; when the inquiry has reported its recommendations will be considered in full.

TRANSPORT

Railway Accidents

Mr. Michael Brown asked the Secretary of State for Transport what factors he took into account in deciding not to order a public inquiry into the recent railway accident in Barnetby, South Humberside.

Mr. David Mitchell: There was no loss of life or injury; the situation created by the derailment was quickly and correctly contained by the emergency services and British Railways; there was confidence that the cause of the accident could be established; and that local people could have full information about the accident and about measures to prevent a recurrence by means other than a full public inquiry.

Mr. Michael Brown asked the Secretary of State for Transport what factors he took into account in deciding to order a public inquiry into the recent railway accident in Derbyshire.

Mr. David Mitchell: The accident on 9 March at Chinley in Derbyshire was attended by loss of life and serious injury. There have been other accidents involving passenger trains in the area during recent years. In the circumstances, and in view of early information available to the Railway Inspectorate as to the possible cause of this latest accident, a public inquiry was deemed appropriate and necessary.

Bus Passes

Mr. Stephen Ross asked the Secretary of State for Transport what guidance he has issued to second tier authorities about the effect of the Transport Act 1985 on their provision of bus passes for pensioners; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Mitchell: My Department, acting jointly with the Departments of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales, will very shortly be publishing guidance on the provision of concessionary fare schemes under the Transport Act 1985 addressed to all authorities with public transport responsibilities.

Sea Birds

Dr. David Clark asked the Secretary of State for Transport how many incidents affecting sea birds have been referred to the wildlife incidents units in each of the last five years.

Mr. Michael Spicer: My Department receives reports of oil pollution at sea and those which mention oiled sea birds are referred to the Nature Conservancy Council. During 1985 my Department received 102 reports of oil pollution at sea, of which only one was so referred. Figures for previous years are not readily available.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Polyurethane Foam

Mr. Tom Cox asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the present percentage of polyurethane foam that is allowed to be used in furniture and textile manufacture; and what plans he has to seek to reduce its use.

Mr. Howard: There are no regulations concerning the percentage or amount of polyurethane foam allowed to be used in the manufacture of domestic furniture and furnishings. The Upholstered Furniture (Safety) Regulations require furniture to resist ignition by a smouldering cigarette and, if labelled resistant, ignition by a match flame. I have no plans as such for reduction in the use of polyurethane foam as a filling material in upholstered furniture and there are as yet no entirely satisfactory replacement materials. However, I am aware of the widespread concern about the behaviour of this material in fires. The Government have funded research aimed at improving the fire resistance of furniture including investigation into alternative filling materials and treatments to reduce the emission of toxic fumes. But it would be wrong to imagine that replacement of polyurethane foam with materials which produce less smoke and fumes when burning would solve the whole problem of fires involving furniture. Resistance to ignition and reduction of the rate of flame spread are equally if not more important; I am at present considering making new or revised regulations or approved standards for resistance to ignition of both upholstered furniture and beds and mattresses.

ECGD (Bank Guarantee)

Mr. Warren asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many letters he has received concerning the proposed closure of the Export Credits Guarantee Department's comprehensive bank guarantee facilities; and if he will give full details of the losses and the reasons why they have been incurred.

Mr. Alan Clark: Seventy exporters or their representatives have written about the proposed closure of ECGD's comprehensive bank guarantee. Some have written more than one letter. It is not possible to put a precise figure on the Department's final losses on the facility because ECGD does not become aware of the final loss under its guarantee often for several years, when the extent of any subsequent recoveries becomes known. The cumulative cash deficit at the end of 1985 was over £70 million. Loss under the facility occurs when an exporter fails to repay the finance advanced by his bank which has been guaranteed by ECGD, and ECGD is unable to recover its payment to the bank because, for instance, the exporter has become insolvent.

English Estates (Report and Accounts)

Mr. Fallon asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the normal date for publication of English Estates' annual report and accounts; and why the report and accounts for 1984-85 have not yet been published.

Mr. Peter Morrison: I shall reply to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

British Shipbuilders

Mr. Michael Forsyth asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the latest progress on privatising the interests of British Shipbuilders.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The Secretary of State has given his consent to British Shipbuilders for the sale of Hall Russell Ltd. to Aberdeen Shipbuilders Ltd. The terms of sale, net of purchase consideration and other aspects of the transaction, represent a cost to British Shipbuilders of not more than £1·6 million. British Shipbuilders has also accepted a limited contingent liability in the event of redundancies. This is considerably less than the cost of closing the yard.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

UNESCO

Sir Russell Johnston asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer on 6 February, *Official Report*, column 332, which Community countries made representations at official level against the United Kingdom leaving the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation.

Mr. Eggar: France and Germany.

Mr. Barnett asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will estimate the level of expenditure per annum by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation in the United Kingdom, and the extent to which it is likely to be reduced by the decision to withdraw from that organisation.

Mr. Eggar: Details provided by UNESCO show that total purchases in 1985 amounted to about $2·8 million. It is up to UNESCO itself to decide how much to spend in the future. There is nothing in UNESCO's constitution or regulations which prevents it from purchasing in a non-member state.

Foreign Diplomats

Mr. Meadowcroft asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what guidelines exist governing the involvement in the management or direction of United Kingdom companies of foreign diplomats based in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: Article 42 of the Vienna convention on diplomatic relations states that a diplomat shall not in the receiving state practise for personal profit any professional or commercial activity. We expect diplomats here to comply with this article.

Diplomats (Private Education Costs)

Mr. Frank Field asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the answer of 10 March, *Official Report*, column *362*, if he will now give the information originally requested for each of the last 10 years relating to the number of diplomatic personnel who receive assistance under his Department's scheme for help with defraying the costs of private education for their children; and if he will now also give the breakdown originally requested in relation to the same staff.

Mr. Eggar: The total cost to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office of providing boarding school allowance for the financial years 1975-76 to 1984-85 was as follows:

	£
1975-76	3,135,401
1976-77	3,512,229
1977-78	3,358,337
1978-79	3,790,371
1979-80	4,011,280
1980-81	4,962,267
1981-82	5,663,088
1982-83	7,465,177
1983-84	5,940,981
1984-85	6,239,908

The reply given to the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist), on 28 October 1985, at column *359*, on the figures from 1979-80 explained the exceptional nature of the 1982-83 figure.

The number of employees in receipt of boarding school allowance from 1983 is as follows:

	Number
March 1983	864
March 1984	860
March 1985	839

Figures for earlier years were not collated and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Costs of fares for children's journeys since 1977 are as follows:

	£
1977-78	830,594
1978-79	789,212
1979-80	925,660
1980-81	995,424
1981-82	1,129,908
1982-83	1,215,928
1983-84	1,155,819
1984-85	1,005,303

Costs of fares of children from 1975-78 were not collated separately from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's total travel costs.

EMPLOYMENT

Labour Statistics

Dr. Cunningham asked the Paymaster General if he will publish the total number of people in employment in each non-metropolitan county, metropolitan county and the Greater London area in April of each year from 1975 to 1985 showing the percentage change from year to year, and the overall percentage change from 1975 to 1985.

Mr. Lang: The available information is as follows and relates to June each year from 1975 to 1978, when censuses of employment were taken. For the Greater London area, figures for periods since 1981 are derived

from employment estimates based on small-scale sample inquiries which do not produce reliable results for smaller areas. More up to date employment estimates for the other areas under inquiry will become available following publication of the 1984 census of employment results later this year.

Employees in employment

	Numbers (thousands)					*Percentage change*				
	June 1975	*June* 1976	*June* 1977	*June* 1978	*September* 1981	1975-76	1976-77	1977-78	1978-81	1975-81
Non-metropolitan counties										
Avon	387·1	380·7	386·5	389·0	376·8	−1·7	+1·5	+0·6	−3·1	−2·7
Bedfordshire	193·4	195·0	198·0	202·9	192·7	+0·9	+1·5	+2·5	−5·0	−0·4
Berkshire	296·0	301·3	304·0	312·1	311·5	+1·8	+0·9	+2·7	−0·2	+5·3
Buckinghamshire	175·1	176·5	182·5	188·6	197·7	+0·8	+3·4	+3·3	+4·8	+12·9
Cambridgeshire	208·4	210·1	211·2	212·2	214·5	+0·8	+0·5	+0·5	+1·1	+2·9
Cheshire	352·1	349·8	358·2	356·2	341·9	−0·7	+2·4	−0·5	−4·0	−2·9
Cleveland	251·7	250·4	246·8	241·9	211·2	−0·5	−1·5	−2·0	−12·7	−16·1
Cornwall	120·7	120·7	122·8	125·3	118·0	—	+1·8	+2·0	−5·8	−2·2
Cumbria	185·0	182·7	183·7	181·5	175·5	−1·3	+0·6	−1·2	−3·3	−5·2
Derbyshire	360·8	360·2	359·6	366·6	347·4	−0·1	−0·2	+1·9	−5·2	−3·7
Devon	310·2	309·7	310·4	313·1	311·1	−0·2	+0·2	+0·9	−0·7	+0·3
Dorset	187·2	187·7	194·6	199·0	198·3	+0·3	+3·7	+2·3	−0·4	+5·9
Durham	218·0	213·3	219·0	216·0	191·0	−2·2	+2·7	−1·4	−11·6	−12·3
East Sussex	192·6	195·5	196·5	200·1	206·4	+1·5	+0·5	+1·8	+3·2	+7·2
Essex	466·5	464·3	462·8	468·1	445·8	−0·5	−0·3	+1·1	−4·8	−4·4
Gloucestershire	192·3	191·8	195·6	201·1	200·3	−0·3	+2·0	+2·8	−0·4	+4·2
Hampshire	525·6	530·9	536·2	539·9	555·3	+1·0	+1·0	+0·7	+2·9	+5·6
Hereford & Worcester	216·4	217·2	219·0	220·7	216·2	+0·3	+0·8	+0·8	−2·0	−0·1
Hertfordshire	406·2	397·9	407·1	408·9	412·4	−2·0	+2·3	+0·4	+0·9	+1·5
Humberside	331·2	327·6	329·8	327·5	290·8	−1·1	+0·7	−0·7	−11·2	−12·2
Isle of Wight	38·0	38·7	39·4	39·7	38·3	+1·9	+1·7	+1·0	−3·7	+0·7
Kent	496·4	499·4	508·4	513·6	499·8	+0·6	+1·8	+1·0	−2·7	+0·7
Lancashire	513·2	510·9	516·7	520·6	491·9	−0·4	+1·1	+0·8	−5·5	−4·2
Leicestershire	345·8	345·4	347·6	357·6	337·8	−0·1	+0·6	+2·9	−5·5	−2·3
Lincolnshire	178·2	184·1	189·0	187·5	180·0	+3·3	+2·7	−0·8	−4·0	+1·0
Norfolk	248·0	246·0	249·0	250·6	242·7	−0·8	+1·2	+0·6	−3·2	−2·1
Northamptonshire	197·0	197·8	201·3	205·5	189·1	+0·4	+1·8	+2·1	−7·9	−4·0
Northumberland	90·0	90·5	92·7	92·5	88·9	+0·6	+2·4	−0·3	−3·8	−1·1
North Yorkshire	216·0	221·3	224·4	230·2	227·1	+2·4	+1·4	+2·6	−1·4	+5·1
Nottinghamshire	403·8	409·2	419·5	416·1	396·4	+1·3	+2·5	−0·8	−4·7	−1·8
Oxfordshire	194·6	196·1	195·0	198·5	200·0	+0·8	−0·6	+1·8	+0·7	+2·8
Salop	123·2	122·7	124·7	128·0	120·9	−0·4	+1·6	+2·6	−5·5	−1·8
Somerset	144·0	142·0	144·0	143·4	140·9	−1·4	+1·4	+0·4	−1·8	−2·2
Staffordshire	372·3	372·7	377·1	372·5	346·6	+0·1	+1·2	−1·2	−7·0	−6·9
Suffolk	214·6	213·3	216·7	217·5	213·2	−0·6	+1·6	+0·4	−2·0	−0·7
Surrey	319·7	317·8	317·5	320·8	333·8	−0·6	−0·1	+1·0	+4·1	+4·4
Warwickshire	139·8	135·5	137·5	149·8	146·7	−3·1	+1·5	+9·0	−2·1	+4·9
West Sussex	221·7	223·7	227·2	231·7	238·4	+0·9	+1·5	+2·0	+2·9	+7·5
Wiltshire	181·1	181·0	189·5	191·9	190·6	−0·1	+4·7	+1·3	−0·7	+5·2
Clwyd	115·2	115·9	118·1	127·8	112·9	+0·6	+1·9	+8·2	−11·7	−2·0
Dyfed	102·0	102·3	102·6	105·4	99·3	+0·3	+0·3	+2·8	−5·8	−2·7
Gwent	173·5	168·5	168·3	167·0	150·2	−2·9	−0·1	−0·8	−10·0	−13·4
Gwynedd	62·2	67·7	69·3	70·7	67·1	+8·9	+2·4	+2·0	−5·0	+7·9
Mid-Glamorgan	181·1	179·6	181·8	186·2	162·9	−0·8	+1·2	+2·4	−12·5	−10·0
Powys	32·0	30·6	26·4	32·8	32·0	−4·6	−13·6	+24·2	−2·2	+0·1
South Glamorgan	174·7	172·8	171·8	168·7	162·0	−1·1	−0·6	−1·8	−3·9	−7·3
West Glamorgan	156·9	158·0	159·6	156·8	140·8	+0·7	+1·0	−1·7	−10·3	−10·3
Metropolitan counties										
Greater Manchester	1,158·1	1,146·5	1,150·2	1,147·5	1,040·6	−1·0	+0·3	−0·2	−9·3	−10·2
Merseyside	650·8	630·5	620·8	615·9	555·4	−3·1	−1·5	+0·8	−9·8	−14·7
South Yorkshire	555·7	549·6	556·8	552·4	504·0	−1·1	+1·3	−0·8	−8·8	−9·3
Tyne & Wear	521·0	517·8	514·2	508·6	447·3	−0·6	−0·7	−1·1	−12·1	−14·1
West Midlands	1,360·3	1,338·0	1,344·2	1,339·1	1,181·7	−1·6	+0·5	−0·4	−11·8	−13·1
West Yorkshire	882·6	869·1	873·2	870·7	800·9	−1·5	+0·5	−0·3	−8·0	−9·3

Employees in employment: Greater London

Number (thousands)

June 1975	*June 1976*	*June 1977*	*June 1978*	*September 1981*	*March 1982*	*March 1983*	*March 1984*	*March 1985*
3,793·6	3,709·4	3,652·6	3,679·8	3,566·7	3,511·6	3,450·2	3,455·2	3,467·8

Percentage change

1975-76	*1976-77*	*1977-78*	*1978-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1975-85*
−2·2	−1·5	+0·7	−3·1	−1·5	−1·8	+0·1	+0·4	−8·6

Mrs. Peacock asked the Paymaster General how many people in Batley and Spen have been employed for *(a)* more than six months, *(b)* more than one year and *(c)* more than two years.

Mr. Lang: On 9 January 1986, the latest date for which an analysis of unemployment by duration is available, the numbers of claimants in the Batley and Spen parliamentary constituency who had been unemployed for more than six months, one year, and two years were 3,134, 2,188 and 1,335 respectively. This information is in the Library.

Community Programme

Mr. Sheerman asked the Paymaster General if he will list the dates and nature of the changes in eligibility rules for the community programme since its inception and the effect on the number of people eligible immediately prior to and subsequent to these changes.

Mr. Lang: Since the inception of the community programme in October 1982 there have been two main changes of relevance. In November 1982 priority for entry was given to those aged 18 to 24 who have been unemployed for six of the last nine months and those aged 25 or over who have been unemployed for 12 of the last 15 months. In addition, all applicants must have been unemployed continuously for two months prior to entering the programme. From October 1984 those qualifying for priority entry were also required to be in personal or indirect receipt of an appropriate state benefit.

It is not possible to state the precise effect of these changes on numbers.

Mr. Sheerman asked the Paymaster General what has been the level of the community programme allowance in each year since it began; what percentage rises these represent year-on-year; and what have been the corresponding rises in the retail prices index and in average earnings.

Mr. Lang: The community programme was introduced on 1 October 1982 and replaced the community enterprise programme. Under the programme, workers are paid the locally agreed hourly rate for the job, not an allowance. The reimbursable wages of workers (except managers and supervisors) were subject to a maximum average of £60 per week until the end of September 1984. From October 1984 the average has been £63 per week, which represents an increase of 5 per cent.

The corresponding percentage rises in the retail prices index, and in average earnings since the introduction of the community programme in October 1982 were as follows:

	Retail price *Per cent.*	*Average earnings* *Per cent.*
October 1982 to October 1983	+5·0	+8·7
October 1983 to October 1984	+5·0	+8·2
October 1984 to October 1985	+5·4	+6·0
October 1985 to January 1986	+0·6	+2·2

Mr. Sheerman asked the Paymaster General how many places have been available in each year since the community programme began; how many of these have been filled; and what has been *(a)* the gross cost and *(b)* the net cost after benefit savings of the programme, at constant prices, based on its first year of operation.

Mr. Lang: The community programme was introduced on 1 October 1982 and replaced the community enterprise programme.

Initially funds were made available to provide for 130,000 filled places. In March 1985 the programme was expanded by a further 100,000 places, and the target figure now stands at 230,000 filled places to be achieved by the end of May 1986.

The number of filled places at the end of each year since 1982 are as follows:

March	*Filled places*
1983	39,100
1984	134,400
1985	161,400

The gross cost and net cost after benefit savings of the programme, at constant 1982-83 prices, its first year of operation are as follows:

	Gross costs *£ million*	*Net cost (after benefit savings)* *£ million*
1982-83*	177	†115
1983-84	381	250
1984-85	486	330
1985-86‡	605	405

* Includes expenditure on community enterprise programme.
† Not calculated separately, but assumed to be equivalent to 65 per cent. of gross costs as in 1983-84.
‡ Forecast.

Youth Training Scheme

Mr. Sheerman asked the Paymaster General if he will list the number of people recorded as in training on the YTS for each month since its inception showing separately for each month the contemporary figure available immediately, as provided in the progress report for the

Youth Training Board, and the latest available figure as revised by the Spectrum system, indicating which figures are now definitive.

Mr. Trippier: The figures requested are given in the table. The figures in the right-hand column are definitive for 1983-84 and are the latest available from April 1984.

The contemporary monthly figures are subject to revision as late notifications are received of young people joining and leaving YTS. As delays in notifying leavers tend to be greater than delays in notifying entrants, the contemporary monthly figures are generally higher than the revised numbers.

Number of young people recorded as in training on the youth training scheme on the last day of each month

Number in training on the last day of:	*The contemporary* figure as reported to the Youth Training Board*	*The definitive figure*
1983		
April	†2,590	11,095
May	†7,138	15,245
June	+21,325	34,168
July	†46,392	57,238
August	†86,503	107,409
September	†172,503	202,386
October	†230,482	246,869
November	250,183	257,942
December	256,533	254,797
1984		
January	260,118	257,498
February	259,282	252,737
March	251,516	240,121
April	246,055	233,569
May	238,083	229,418
June	235,227	244,631
July	283,151	277,048
August	292,048	277,661
September	307,179	287,758
October	316,131	291,714
November	311,344	287,485
December	301,896	279,767
1985		
January	293,140	276,296
February	283,363	268,015
March	271,059	252,247
April	259,482	247,556
May	248,523	232,772
June	†261,216	236,340
July	291,583	273,112
August	291,007	247,934
September	†317,143	295,597
October	311,285	292,992
November	301,424	284,638
December	293,268	279,908
1986		
January	285,184	277,893
February	277,548	277,548

* The contemporary figures for April 1983 to April 1984 inclusive were taken from a manual count of the numbers in training. The figures for May 1984 onwards were the most up-to-date available from the Spectrum computerised management system at the time.

† These contemporary figures were not provided in the progress report to the Youth Training Board.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Public Expenditure

Mr. Straw asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish in the *Official Report* his estimate of the likely total gross increase in public expenditure and in the public sector borrowing requirement of the proposals contained in the document "Giving More Help Where the Need is Greatest", published by the Tory Reform Group, together with his estimate of the likely additional jobs created.

Mr. MacGregor: I have made no such estimates.

Mr. Marlow asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will set out for 1981, 1982, 1983 and 1984, respectively, and estimate for 1985, the budget for 1986 and estimated outturn for 1986 both in cash and real terms *(a)* total community expenditure, *(b)* community expenditure excluding rebates and administrative and institutional costs, *(c)* agricultural expenditure and *(d)* *(c)* as a percentage of *(b)*.

Mr. Brooke: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

Income Tax

Mr. Gerald Howarth asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the percentage change in income tax liability for each income range in 1985-86 compared with the 1978-79 tax regime adjusted for price movements over the period.

Mr. Moore: The table shows the percentage reductions in tax liability calculated for the 1985-86 tax regime compared with the 1978-79 regime indexed to 1985-86 levels by reference to the statutory formula. The estimates have been calculated on the 1985-86 tax base.

*Range of total income in 1985-86** £	*Tax reduction as percentage of liability under 1978-79 indexed regime* per cent.
under 5,000	15
5,000-10,000	12
10,000-15,000	12
15,000-20,000	12
20,000-30,000	13
over 30,000	21
All taxpayers	14

* All information is in terms of tax units—that is, married couples are counted as one and their incomes combined.

Economic and Finance Ministers (Meeting)

Mr. Knowles asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the outcome of the latest meeting of the European Community's Council of Economic and Finance Ministers.

Mr. Brooke: The EC Economic and Finance Council met in Brussels on 10 March. I represented the United Kingdom.

The Council considered a report by the European Court of Auditors on the 1984 Community budget, which was introduced by the president of the court. I underlined the need for continued vigilance to ensure effective implementation of Community spending and prevention of fraud.

The Council had a preliminary discussion of the application of budgetary discipline to the 1987 Community budget. It is intended to set the formal reference framework at the Council's meeting on 28 April.

The Council reviewed the economic situation in the Community.

The Council had a discussion on international debt, on the basis of a report from the Monetary Committee. The report, which emphasises the importance of continuing the case by case approach to debt problems, was generally endorsed by the Council.

The Council's agenda included also a possible Community mandate for OECD discussions on tied aid financing for exports, and tax measures to encourage co-operation between undertakings in different member states. These matters will be taken forward at future Councils.

Revenue

Mr. Frank Field asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the proportion of Government revenue raised by *(a)* direct and *(b)* indirect taxes for each of the past 20 years.

Mr. Moore [*pursuant to his reply*, 10 March 1986, c. 390]: The proportion of Government revenue raised by direct and indirect taxes is as follows:

	Direct taxes including royalties	*Of which personal taxes*	*Indirect taxes*
1965-66	49	31	51
1966-67	48	30	52
1967-68	48	30	52
1968-69	49	30	51
1969-70	49	30	51
1970-71	49	32	51
1971-72	50	32	50
1972-73	49	31	51
1973-74	50	30	50
1974-75	53	34	47
1975-76	52	38	48
1976-77	52	37	48
1977-78	49	33	51
1978-79	49	32	51
1979-80	46	29	54
1980-81	47	29	53
1981-82	48	28	52
1982-83	49	27	51
1983-84	49	26	51
1984-85	50	25	50

THE ARTS

Museums and Galleries

Mr. Latham asked the Minister for the Arts if he will make a further statement about the present arrangements for loans from national museums and galleries for which he is responsible to local collections.

Mr. Luce: Six of the nine national collections which regularly lend works of art for exhibition are continuing to do so without requiring commercial insurance by the borrower.

A fresh formula has now been devised which I hope will overcome the anxieties of the other three national collections. Discussions are now proceeding on the new formula with the Tate gallery and others and I hope to reach an early solution.

Tax Settlements

Mr. Faulds asked the Minister for the Arts whether he will list, giving the relevant references in the *Official Report*, those occasions on which the amounts of estate duty or capital transfer tax satisfied by the acceptance of objects or land in respect of individual cases have been specified in written answers during the period between the financial year 1976-77 and 1984-85.

Mr. Luce [*pursuant to his reply*, 10 March 1986. c. *359*]: The Minister for the Arts assumed responsibility for acceptances in lieu of tax with the passing of the National Heritage Act 1980. Prior to this responsibility rested with the Treasury.

Announcements of such acceptances in the periods April 1980 to March 1985, indicating the estate duty or capital transfer tax satisfied, were made on the following dates:

27 October 1980 Col. 696
3 April 1981 Col. 695
7 December 1981 Statement laid before the House
7 April 1982 Col. 355
22 October 1982 Col. 214
12 May 1983 Statement laid before the House
6 April 1984 Col. 697
2 April 1985 Col. 577

Mr. Faulds asked the Minister for the Arts what steps he took to verify the accuracy of the information in relation to the dates of recommendations by the Museums and Galleries Commission for acceptances in satisfaction of tax on which his answer of 26 February, *Official Report*, column *593*, was based, and if he now has anything to add to that answer.

Mr. Luce [*pursuant to his reply*, 10 March 1986, c. *359-60*]: The dates were correctly given on the basis of information provided by the Museums and Galleries Commission.

In the case of the Kedleston photographs the recommendation from the commission related to a condition of acceptance that the photographs be kept in the India Office library. Ownership was transferred to the British Library for the India Office library in May 1985 and the allocation was announced in answer to the hon. Member's question of 4 July 1985.

Mr. Faulds asked the Minister for the Arts if he will specify, giving the relevant references in the *Official Report*, the occasions on which it has been stated to the House since 1979 and prior to his answer to the hon. Member for Warley, East of 26 February, *Official Report*, c. *593*, that the amounts of estate duty or capital transfer tax satisfied by the acceptance of objects or land is confidential in respect of individual cases.

Mr. Luce [*pursuant to his reply*, 10 March 1986, c. *360*]: The answer to the hon. Member's question on 26 February was the first occasion on which it was stated in the House that the amounts of estate duty or capital transfer tax satisfied by acceptance of objects or land were confidential in individual cases.

Mr. Faulds asked the Minister for the Arts why, in the light of his answers of 13 February, *Official Report*, column *502*, and 26 February, *Official Report*, column *593*, indicating that £505,650 had been accounted for out of a total original provision of £2 million in respect of items of heritage quality accepted in lieu of tax, it was necessary to increase the cash limit on class V, vote 10 in relation to expenditure under subhead C2; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Luce [*pursuant to his reply*, 10 March 1986, c. *360*]: The cash limit on class V, vote 10 was increased as the consequence of a call on the public expenditure reserve in accordance with Lord Gowrie's statement of 26 July 1985. This was to enable the Government to accept certain offers in lieu of tax about which I hope to make an announcement shortly when arrangements between the parties have been completed.

Works of Art (Exports)

Mr. Faulds asked the Minister for the Arts if he will state for each year since 1979 the length of time which elapsed between the end of the year to which successive reports of the Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art related and the publications of the relevant reports to what factors he attributes the length of these periods and the trend shown by them; and what steps he is taking to reduce the time taken to publish these reports.

Mr. Luce [*pursuant to his reply*, 10 March 1986, c. *360*]: The reports of the reviewing committee refer to the year running from 1 July to 30 June. Recent publication dates are as follows:

Reporting year	*Date of publication*	*Time from end of reporting year*
1979-80	May 1981	11 months
1980-81	March 1982	9 months
1981-82	March 1983	9 months
1982-83	March 1984	9 months
1983-84	June 1985	12 months

These figures do not illustrate any particular trend, but the case load of the reviewing committee has in that time increased substantially, although its staffing has not. I am conscious of the desirability of prompt publication, notwithstanding other pressures, and the secretariat is continuing to do its best to reduce the publication time despite its increased workload.

DEFENCE

Nuclear Weapons

Mr. Greenway asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the volume and potential of known Russian and Soviet bloc nuclear weapons; how this compares with that of the West; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stanley: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Mr. Chapman) on 11 March, at column *424*.

Disciplinary Proceedings (Pension Rights)

Mr. Stern asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will state the number of cases in the last five years of which he is aware in which disciplinary proceedings against a member of the armed forces led, wholly or partially, to the deprivation of pension rights.

Mr. Lee: Separate statistics are not maintained. However, I am aware of 11 cases in the period 1981 to 1985 inclusive in which pensions due for immediate payment have been forfeited or reduced below the rates applicable to normal or premature retirement.

Water Cannons

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for Defence on what occasions water cannons have been present at Greenham common air base; under whose authority; for what purposes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stanley At no time have water cannons been deployed at RAF Greenham common.

Cars and Trucks (Replacement)

Mr. Warren asked the Secretary of State for Defence if BL was invited to bid for all replacements of cars and trucks required by Her Majesty's forces in the financial years 1982-83 to date; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lee: I can confirm that British Leyland has had full opportunity to compete for the services' foreseen requirements for new cars and trucks over the period mentioned. Orders have additionally gone to the appropriate manufacturers to replace existing vehicles which have been disposed of on grounds of age and mileage. Land Rover has, of course, been the sole source of supply for the services' extensive fleet in the ½ tonne and ¾ tonne range: and other BL products in the fleet include Metros (saloon and van) and the Sherpa utility. The company is currently competing actively for the services' requirements for a new 4-tonne truck as well as other specialised logistic vehicles. The Department will be considering appropriate BL models later this year for its grade A and B staff car requirements.

Kneller Hall (Valuation)

Mr. Shersby asked the Secretary of State for Defence what was the extent of the error made by the Property Services Agency in the July 1985 estimate given to his Department of the value of Kneller Hall, Twickenham; and if he will now publish in the *Official Report* the correct figures in tabular form.

Mr. Lee: In estimating the disposal value of Kneller Hall the Property Services Agency overstated the value by £2·3 million because it had included the disposal value of the associated married quarters and mistakenly told the Ministry of Defence that the new figure was for the Kneller Hall site excluding married quarters.

The disposal value of Kneller Hall is currently being reassessed as part of the wider reappraisal of the options for training service musicians announced by my noble Friend the Minister of State for Defence Support in another place on 12 February 1986.

Strategic Defence Initiative

Mr. Wallace asked the Secretary of State for Defence whether Mr. Clarence Robinson and his team of United States consultants sought clearance from his Department to discuss the classification of strategic defence initiative-related research with United Kingdom companies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I have nothing to add to my reply to the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) on 6 March 1986, at column 266.

Royal Dockyards

Mr. Andrew MacKay asked the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current level of company interest in the Government's plans for the future management of the royal dockyards at Devonport and Rosyth.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Responses to the pre-qualification questionnaire issued by my Department to companies interested in the Government's plans to introduce commercial management into the royal dockyards at Devonport and Rosyth have now been received and evaluated. We shall be inviting the consortium of Trafalgar House, Plessey and A and P Appledore and the management-led company Devonport Dockyard Limited to tender for the contract to manage and operate Devonport dockyard. Invitations to tender for the Rosyth contract will be sent to the Babcock International-Thorn-EMI consortium, the Balfour Beatty-Weir Group consortium, Press Offshore and Northern Engineering Industries.

A number of other companies — Foster Wheeler, Vickers SEL, Taylor Woodrow, Tyne Shiprepair, MEL and Cossor — retain an interest in bidding for the contracts, but have indicated that they would need to form partnerships for this purpose. Any consortia formed from these companies will be required to pre-qualify, as will any new companies which come forward.

SOCIAL SERVICES

Patient Services

Mr. Wood asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what plans health authorities have for developing services to patients in the coming year.

Mr. Fowler: As part of our arrangements for management of the National Health Service, we now require health authorities every year to draw up short-term programmes. These programmes set out their plans for developing services in the coming year. I have now approved these plans for 1986-87. They show that health authorities are planning significant expansion in services. They will treat more patients, make available more advanced forms of treatment and continue the progress already being made towards caring for people in the community.

The plans are further evidence of the Government's commitment to the National Health Service and build on the progress made in recent years. Since 1978-79 an extra 17·5 per cent. in real terms has already been provided for hospital and community health services. In the coming year an extra £650 million (6·7 per cent.) is being provided against forecast general inflation of 4·5 per cent.

In addition, the steps we have taken to improve management are now beginning to pay off. Health authorities are planning to generate cash savings of £150 million through a wide variety of value-for-money measures. The measures include energy conservation, better management of supplies and competitive tendering for support services. All the £150 million saved will be retained by health authorities.

Health authorities will also be making better use of manpower. Overall numbers are unlikely to change much, but there will be an increase in staff working directly with patients, and most of these will be nurses.

The progress being made in developing the service can be illustrated in three ways. First, total capital spending will be over £900 million compared with £365 million in 1978-79. Next year's figure includes an estimated £130 million of receipts from the sales of land and property, which health authorities will be able to retain. A number of new hospitals will be opened. For example, in the autumn the brand new Bromsgrove and Redditch district general hospital will open at a cost of £24 million, providing a wide range of acute, psychiatric, geriatric and other services. And in the coming year Mersey region will be investing in a major new district general hospital for Southport.

Secondly, we shall continue the move towards community care for the mentally handicapped and other groups of patients. This means, for example, that in northern region by July 1986 only four children will still be in mental handicap hospitals and in South East Thames region no children will be remaining in such hospitals by March 1987. In Oxford the outdated Bradwell Grove mental handicap hospital will be closed allowing the staff to be deployed to care for people in community units.

Thirdly, all regions are also planning important developments in their acute services. They expect the total number of patients treated to rise significantly, and to make progress in the provision of priority services. For example, coronary artery surgery and renal dialysis will be expanded; more hip and joint replacement operations will be done; and a children's bone marrow transplant unit will open in Bristol.

Life Expectancy

Mr. Deakins asked the Secretary of State for Social Services to what factors he attributes the relatively greater increase in life expectancy for females as compared with males at age 15 years over the period 1953 to 1983.

Mr. Ray Whitney: Examination of age-specific mortality rates for males and females for 1953 and 1983 at ages 15 and over shows that there is a major difference in ischaemic heart disease mortality for the two sexes. Particularly at ages 40 to 44 and 65 to 69 inclusive, the rates rose appreciably for males over the 30-year period, while they fell for females (or rose to a small extent for three of the age-groups).

Because of the major contribution that ischaemic heart disease makes to all cause mortality, the difference in trend in death rates from this condition is reflected in the relatively greater increase in the expectation of life for females compared with males.

Health and Social Services

Mr. Dewar asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will publish a table showing separately for (i) hospital and community health services, (ii) family practitioner services and (iii) social services, actual and planned expenditure in England for the years 1978-79 to 1988-1989 in *(a)* cash prices, *(b)* cost terms and *(c)* volume terms, showing the percentage increases over 1978-79, on a basis consistent with Table 2.12 of Cmnd. 9702-II.

Mr. Hayhoe: The following tables contain the information that the hon. Member requested. Since expenditure is given net of patient charges in table 2.12 of Cmnd. 9702-II, the expenditure figures are given on a net basis. Actual expenditure figures may differ from

planned as a result of transfers between revenue and capital expenditure. The expenditure figures also exclude current and capital expenditure on central health and miscellaneous services. Pay and price indices specific to health and personal social services expenditure programmes are not available for 1985-86, nor for the public expenditure planning period.

Table (i)—Net Expenditure (Current and Capital) on Hospital and Community Health Services (England)

Year	(a) Cash expenditure	(b) Real (cost) terms (1984-85 prices)	(c) HCHS pay and price terms (1984-85 pay and prices)
1978-79	4,728	8,417	9,236
1979-80	5,633	8,580	9,139
1980-81	7,449	9,554	9,447
1981-82	8,266	9,639	9,713
1982-83	8,850	9,644	9,802
1983-84	9,274	9,672	9,797
1984-85	9,836	9,836	9,836
1985-86	10,374	9,880	—
1986-87	11,045	10,066	—
1987-88	11,540	10,162	—
1988-89	12,000	10,259	—
Percentage increase over period shown	+153·8	+21·9	+6·5

(—) Not yet calculable.

Table (ii) Net Expenditure (Current and Capital) on Family Practitioner Services (England)

Year	(a) Cash expenditure	(b) Real (cost) terms (1984-85 prices)	(c) FPS pay and price terms (1984-85 pay and prices)
1978-79	1,374	2,446	2,897
1979-80	1,600	2,437	2,883
1980-81	1,985	2,546	2,852
1981-82	2,275	2,653	2,889
1982-83	2,618	2,853	2,977
1983-84	2,808	2,928	3,030
1984-85	3,090	3,090	3,090
1985-86	3,296	3,139	—
1986-87	3,528	3,215	—
1987-88	3,740	3,293	—
1988-89	3,950	3,377	—
Percentage increase over period shown	+187·5	+38·1	+6·7

(—) Not yet available.

Table (iii)—Net Expenditure (Current and Capital) on Personal Social Services (England)

Year	(a) Cash expenditure	(b) Real (cost) terms (1984-85 prices)	(c) PSS pay and price term (1984-85 pay and prices
1978-79	1,115	1,985	2,077
1979-80	1,370	2,087	2,168
1980-81	1,698	2,178	2,230
1981-82	1,873	2,184	2,198
1982-83	2,044	2,227	2,240
1983-84	2,218	2,313	2,320
1984-85	2,349	2,349	2,349
1985-86	2,504	2,385	—
1986-87	2,614	2,382	—
1987-88	2,610	2,298	—
1988-89	2,610	2,231	—
Percentage increase over period shown	+134·1	+12·4	+13·1

Note:
Both local authority and central Government expenditure has been included.
(—) Not yet calculable.

Local Authorities (Grants)

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for Social Services if he will list all specific type grants paid by his Department to local authorities, showing the size of each grant, which were hypothecated to any individual service or services or where local authorities had to bid for specific grants.

Mr. Whitney: The following grants were paid by the Department in 1984-85:

a. to reimburse local authorities' administration and benefit expenditure under the housing benefits scheme. For administration expenditure the grant is 60 per cent. of total reasonable costs for authorities in England (65 per cent. in Scotland, 70 per cent. in Wales). Payments to authorities amounted to £78 million. For benefit costs the grant is 100·6 per cent. of expenditure on certificated benefit and 90 per cent. of expenditure on standard benefit. Authorities received £4 billion. These sums are subject to adjustment on final audit;

b. to cover the cost of approved projects to provide secure accommodation for children in care in England (£1 million).

In addition, payments are made where local authorities undertake work for the Department on an agency basis. The largest of these are for the accommodation of children who have been convicted of serious crimes (£1·5 million), and for the provision of milk to children attending day nurseries or playgroups (this is paid to local authorities and other organisations, total payments were £3 million).

Smoking

Mr. Pavitt asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what are his policies and priorities regarding support for research on tobacco-related diseases; what recent representations he has received on this subject; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Whitney: We support research which will assist in reducing the ill effects of tobacco usage on the health of the nation. A priority is to establish methods of assisting people not to smoke or to smoke less dangerously. Studies include investigations of why children smoke, methods of smoking cessation, the role of smoking in heart disease, respiratory disorders and pregnancy, and investigations of the effects on health of changes in the tar, nicotine, and carbon monoxide yields of cigarettes. Research in this field is co-ordinated by the Independent Scientific Committee on Smoking and Health, the Department's Committee into Behavioural Aspects of Smoking and Health, the Health Education Council and Action on Smoking and Health. In addition, the Medical Research Council has recently formed a smoking research review committee. Representations on this subject have recently

been received from a number of bodies including the Royal College of Physicians and the British Medical Association.

Mr. Pavitt asked the Secretary of State for Social Services, as part of his new agreement with the tobacco industries, if he will make it his policy to seek the continuance of the Health Promotion Research Trust; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Whitney: The Health Promotion Research Trust does not figure in the discussions leading to a new voluntary agreement on the advertising and promotion of tobacco products.

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many meetings he has now had with tobacco companies to discuss health warnings; which specific companies he has met; and what agreements have been reached.

Mr. Whitney: Eight meetings with the tobaccoindustry, represented by the Tobacco Advisory Council, have been held at ministerial or official level to discuss the voluntary agreement on advertising, promotion and health warnings in respect of tobacco products. We hope to announce the outcome shortly.

Nurses

Mr. Meacher asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is the number of trainee or student nurses who have in the last year not been offered a nursing job within four weeks of the conclusion of their nurses' training; if he will name the district health authorities involved; and if he will give the equivalent figures for each of the last five years.

Mr. Hayhoe: I regret that this information is not collected centrally.

Griffiths Report

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many nursing adviser posts have been terminated in each regional health authority since the implementation of the proposals of the Griffiths report.

Mr. Hayhoe: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) on 13 March at column *567*. With the introduction of the general management function every health authority is required to appoint a chief nursing adviser to advise the authority and its managers on professional nursing matters; and also to monitor professional nursing standards within the authority.

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many personnel officer posts have been created in each regional health authority since the implementation of the proposals of the Griffiths report.

Mr. Hayhoe: The post of personnel officer was common throughout the Health Service before the implementation of the Griffiths report proposals. I regret that information about the number of personnel officer posts created since implementation of the Griffiths report proposals is not held centrally.

Board and Lodging Allowances

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what discussions he has had with representatives of private charities about the effect on young people under 26 of limits on board and lodgings allowances; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: We have met a number of interested voluntary bodies to discuss the boarder changes affecting younger claimants since proposals were first brought forward in November 1984 and we shall continue to maintain this contact.

Elderly People (Residential Homes)

Mrs. Renée Short asked the Secretary of State for Social Services whether he intends to discuss with representatives of health authorities sharing with local authorities the cost of accommodating elderly people in local authority homes or in local authority-financed places in private homes.

Mr. Whitney: People in residential care homes should not normally require a more intensive degree of health care than that which is already provided in such homes by primary health care teams, and a health authority contribution to accommodation costs would not therefore be appropriate. If, however, the hon. Member has a particular proposal in mind, perhaps she would write to me.

Ageusic-anosmic Condition

Mr. Corbett asked the Secretary of State for Social Services what is his estimate of the number of people known to be suffering from ageusic-anosmic condition; and whether he will detail current research into it assisted by funds from his Department.

Mr. Whitney: I regret that we have no reliable estimates of the number of people who are ageusic and anosmic, that is who suffer from a loss of the senses of taste and smell. On research, I refer the hon. Member to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) on 11 March, at column *442*.

Volunteer Development Workers

Mr. Stern asked the Secretary of State for Social Services when he will introduce legislation to allow volunteer development workers to become entitled to unemployment benefit when they return to the United Kingdom after a period of service abroad.

Mr. Newton: I am pleased to announce that I have today laid before the House the Social Security (Contributions) Amendment Regulations 1986 which introduce a special voluntary national insurance contribution which can be paid by volunteer development workers. I have also laid before the House the Social Security Benefit (Persons Abroad) Amendment Regulations 1986 which will allow the special volunteer development workers contribution to be included when unemployment benefit entitlement is being calculated.

Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Bill

Mr. Alfred Morris asked the Secretary of State for Social Services how many responses he has had to his

Department's consultation paper on the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Bill from organisations of and for disabled people; if he will list the organisations concerned; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hayhoe [*pursuant to his reply*, 7 March 1986, c. *321*]: Forty four responses have been received from organisations of and for disabled people, which are listed as follows. These comments together with those received from other bodies, including professional organisations and the local authority associations are now being considered.

Access Committee for England
Action for Disability Kensington and Chelsea
Advocacy Alliance
Age Concern
ALPHA (Association Linking Parents and Handicapped Children)
Alzheimer's Disease Society
Association for Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus
Association of Carers
Brent Association for Disabled People
British Council of Organisations of Disabled People
British Deaf Association
Campaign for People with Mental Handicaps
Centre on Environment for the Handicapped
Disabled Living Foundation
Greater London Association for Disabled People
Institute of Social Welfare
Islington Access Project
Lady Hoare Trust
Lincolnshire Society for the Physically Handicapped
MENCAP
Mental After Care Association
Mental Heath Act Commission
MIND
Multiple Sclerosis Society
National Council for Voluntary Organisations
National Association of Voluntary Hostels
National Deaf Childrens Society
National League of the Blind and Disabled
National Schizophrenia Fellowship
National Society for Epilepsy
Network for the Handicapped
PACT (Parents and Children Together) Levenmouth
Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association
Queen Elizabeth's Foundation for the Disabled
Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation
Rehabilitation—Great Britain
Royal National Institute for the Blind
Royal National Institute for the Deaf
SENSE
Shaftesbury Society
Sheffield Advocacy Project
Spastic Society
Telford Community Council
VOCAL

ENVIRONMENT

House of Commons (Static Electricity)

Mr. Robert Atkins asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how often the carpets within the House and surrounding working areas are sprayed to prevent the excessive build-up of static electricity.

Sir George Young: The carpets are sprayed with anti-static fluid as and when the problem occurs, and also on request. During the recent sustained spell of dry and cold weather which has lowered the humidity in the House nearly 1,000 sq m have been treated throughout the Palace. The advent of warmer, damper weather should reduce the problem.

Mr. Robert Atkins asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to seek to cure the problem of excess static electricity within the bounds of the House.

Sir George Young: There are no easy or cheap solutions. Certain areas within the House, including the Chamber, have humidity control which mitigates the build-up of static electricity. The cost of providing permanent or temporary humidity control in all the other carpeted areas would be prohibitively expensive.

Water Supplies

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list those water supply zones in which the maximum admissible concentration for aluminium of 0·2 milligrams per litre is exceeded on the basis of a three-monthly average.

Mr. John Patten: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Macfarlane) on 10 June 1985, at columns *319-20*.

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give details of the geographical areas covered by those water supplies in respect of which applications for derogation from the maximum admissible concentrations have been made by the Thames water authority and the Welsh water authority; and if he will indicate which of these applications for derogations have been refused.

Mr. John Patten: Applications for derogation have been made by Thames water authority for the following water supply zones:

Putney-Fulham, Maiden Lane-Kentish Town, Streatham Hill, High Beech, Woodford-Canning Town, Chessington, and Finsbury Park-Mile End in London for the nitrite parameter; Banbury and Abingdon in Oxfordshire for the parameter which includes chlorinated trihalomethanes.

None of these applications has been refused as there is no public health risk.

That part of the question relating to the Welsh water authority is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Vehicle Emissions (Research)

Mr. Chris Smith asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list any research projects he is funding, has funded or intends to fund on the potential for increased environmental hazard from vehicle emissions with respect to traffic flow changes expected on the opening of the Channel tunnel.

Mrs. Rumbold: Research on the environmental effects of vehicle emissions is included in my Department's research programme. I see no need for projects specifically related to traffic flow changes which may be occasioned by the Channel tunnel.

Rate Support Grant

Mr. Adley asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement about the availability of further financial assistance to certain shire counties following the rate support grant settlement.

Mrs. Rumbold: I announced on 12 February, at column *463*, in response to a question from my hon.

Friend the Member for Hyndburn (Mr. Hargreaves), that the total of block grant available in 1986-87 would be increased by £22 million following my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary's decision to increase the rate of police grant for 1986-87 to 51 per cent. All police authorities, both in shire and metropolitan areas, will gain from this. On 5 March, at column *190*, I announced, in response to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, South (Mr. Sumberg), that I was formally guaranteeing that £500 million of grant would be recycled in 1986-87 to local authorities in grant.

Football Authorities

Mr. Canavan asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what subjects he expects to discuss at his next meeting with representatives of the football authorities.

Mr. Tracey: No formal meeting is currently planned, but informal discussions take place frequently within the framework of our close co-operation with the football authorities on measures to combat hooliganism. The results this season are encouraging, but we will continue to review progress. In particular, we are discussing actions needed for the Mexico World Cup, on which I hope to make an announcement soon.

Devon and Cornwall (EC Aid)

Mr. Penhaligon asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will indicate for the years 1975 to 1985 the total aid granted for projects in Devon and Cornwall separately by the European Community under the European regional development fund.

Mr. Tracey: Grant awarded for infrastructure projects is as follows:

	Cornwall £	*Devon* £
1975	10,875	6,660
1976	210,601	21,890
1977	nil	86,263
1978	212,716	175,494
1979	1,575,515	6,164,790
1980	205,350	54,600
1981	5,475,900	800,700
1982	2,595,000	3,330,900
1983	2,993,900	5,138,700
1984	10,582,291	16,307,220
1985	3,639,000	4,950,600

ERDF awards to industrial projects are the responsibility of the Department of Trade and Industry. Accurate annual records are not available. Since 1975, however, a total of £5·9 million has been awarded fo industrial projects in the south-west; about £4·4 million to Devon and about £1·5 million to Cornwall.

Local Government Finance

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the figures for *(a)* domestic rates rises and *(b)* retail prices index which underlie figure A6 on page 82 of Cmnd. 9714.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The figures are as follows:

percentage change on previous year

	Average domestic rate bills (England)	*Retail price index (annual average) (United Kingdom)*
1974-75	+27	+17·9
1975-76	+23	+24·6
1976-77	+9	+15·3
1977-78	+16	+13·9
1978-79	+10	+8·3
1979-80	+19	+15·8
1980-81	+28	+16·3
1981-82	+23	+11·5
1982-83	+15	+7·1
1983-84	+7	+4·7
1984-85	+7	+5·1

Local Authorities (Grants)

Dr. Cunningham asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list all specific type grants paid by his Department to local authorities, showing the size of each grant, which were hypothecated to any individual service or services, or where local authorities had to bid for specific grants.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: My Department pays specific grants to local authorities as set out in the table. The size of each grant is expressed as the forecast outturn payments in 1985-86.

Department of the Environment—Specific grants paid to local authorities

Grant and Purpose	*1985-86 Forecast Outturn*	*Bid required?*
Subsidy in support of the provision and maintenance of housing to rent under the Housing Act 1980	£410·5 million	—
Contributions towards the costs of environmental works in Housing Action Areas and General Improvement Areas	£10·5 million	—
Contributions towards the cost of grants for the improvement, conversion and repair of private sector accommodation approved since 14 December 1980	£306·2 million	—
Grants for homes insulation	£21·1 million	—
Contributions towards the cost of improvement for sale	£1·0 million	—
Grants towards the cost of taking over and repairing former new town housing	£1·2 million	Bid required
Slum clearance subsidy	£51·8 million	—
Payments towards the cost of repurchase or repair of dwellings designated under the Housing Defects Act 1984	New grant—de minimis payments so far	—
Grants for the provision of sites for gypsies	£3·5 million	Bid required
Payments to lending institutions to reimburse the costs of interest free loans and grants under the home purchase assistance scheme	LA element of scheme de minimis	—
Subsidy in support of the provision and maintenance of housing for rent under the Housing Rent and Subsidies Act 1975	£0·15 million	Residual—no new entitlement

Grant and Purpose	1985-86 Forecast Outturn	Bid required?
Transitional town development subsidy	£0·01 million	Residual—no new entitlement
Contributions towards the cost of improving non housing revenue account dwellings	£0·3 million	Residual—no new entitlement
Grants towards the cost of providing accommodation for agricultural workers	£0·03 million	Residual—no new entitlement
Contributions towards the cost of providing hostel accommodation	£0·47 million	Residual—no new entitlement
Contributions towards the cost of grants for the improvement, conversion and repair of private sector accommodation approved before 15 December 1980	£111·3 million	Residual—no new entitlement
Payments towards the costs of repurchase or repair of Airey Houses	£0·78 million	Residual—no new entitlement
Grants towards the costs of rent rebates and rent allowances*	(£0·33 million)	Residual—no new entitlement
Grants to defray the costs of the National Mobility Office and the tenants exchange scheme	£0·25 million	Bid required
Payments to reimburse the costs of the rent officer service	£18 million	Bid required
Planning Redevelopment Grant towards the cost of loan charges incurred in comprehensive development schemes	£3·8 million	Residual—no new entitlement after 1 April 1986
Public Open Space Grant towards the cost of land acquisition	£8·0 million	Residual—no new entitlement
Town Development Grants towards the costs of providing amenities in approved town expansion schemes	£1·2 million	Bid required
Temporary Defence Works Grant to help meet costs of restoration of land damaged by war works	de minimis	Bid required
Clean Air Grants towards the costs of modifying solid fuel appliances	£1·2 million	Bid required
Contribution towards the operating deficit of the airport at St. Mary's, Isles of Scilly	£0·06 million	Residual—no further payments
Derelict Land Grant	£60 million [local authority element]	Bid required
Urban Programme Grant to assist the regeneration of local economies, the improvement of the environment and to meet social need in inner urban areas	£185 million	Bid required
National Parks Supplementary Grant	£5·8 million	Bid Required
Compensation for the loss of rates from industrial and commercial property in enterprise zones	£21·3 million	—
Grant towards the costs of rate rebates for disabled people	£59·5 million	—

* The net receipt on this residual item in 1985-86 results from adjustments for prior years.

Note: All specific grants paid by the Department are hypothecated to particular services, except for National Parks Supplementary Grant, and Enterprise Zones Rate Rebates Grants.

Housing Statistics

Mr. Orme asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what proportion of houses in each housing tenure have *(a)* loft insulation to the recommended thickness, *(b)* central heating, *(c)* cavity or solid wall insulation and *(d)* double glazing.

Sir George Young: The information requested is as follows:

Proportion of total number of houses in tenure group with:	Owner occupied	Local authority	Private rented
	Per cent.	Per cent.	Per cent.
Loft insulation*			
100mm or more	34	18	12
at least 75mm	55	36	21
at least 50mm	69	48	27
Central heating†	77	59	40
Wall Insulation‡ (cavity wall and solid)	12	10	5
Double glazing			
more than 80 per cent. of glazing double glazing	42	5	11
some double glazing	15	1	1

* The recommended minimum thickness has varied with changes in the building regulations and also varies with the thermal properties of the insulation material concerned. It is now about 100mm.

† Central heating includes partial systems and electric storage heaters.

‡ Wall insulation is almost entirely cavity wall insulation.

All the data, with exception of the element of solid wall insulation, are derived from the audits of Great Britain survey undertaken at the end of 1984.

District Heating

Mr. Orme asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how many local authority dwellings in England and Wales are served by district heating.

Sir George Young: This information is not available.

Home Insulation

Mr. Orme asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how much was allocated to local authorities under the home insulation scheme in the 1982-83, 1983-84 and 1984-85 financial years; how much of this allocation was spent in each of those years; and how many homes were insulated.

Sir George Young: The information requested is as follows:

Homes insulation scheme	1982-83 £ million	1983-84 £ million	1984-85 £ million
Allocation to local authorities	32·8	31·9	31·5
Amount of allocation spent	*26·4	*22·2	*23·2
Homes insulated (thousands)	386,000	315,000	335,000

* These figures are provisional as final audited claims on which they are based are still outstanding from some local authorities.

Radiation Monitoring

Mr. Prescott asked the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his reply given on 18 December 1985, *Official Report*, column *221*, what records of radiation monitoring of dockers and seamen since 1955 are held by the health physics services group division of AERE, Harwell; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: For sea disposal operations carried out since 1961 the Harwell establishment of the UKAEA provided personal dosimeters to all dockers and crew members involved. Before this date only those expected to receive significant doses were issued with dosimeters.

Records of all monitored doses are held by Harwell, and will be for at least 50 years from the time that these doses were incurred. The results of dosimeter assessments were passed to the relevant employers (for example, the shipping line or the port authority) at the same time.

Housing Investment

Mr. Livsey asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent representations he has received concerning public investment in housing.

Sir George Young: This subject is mentioned in a number of letters received by my Department and at meetings in which it takes part. There is no central record kept.

AGRICULTURE FISHERIES AND FOOD

Horse Auctions

Mr. Tom Cox asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many times in 1985 inspectors of his Department visited horse auctions; and what reports were made.

Mr. Gummer: Inspectors of my Department visited premises where horses were sold by auction on 236 occasions in 1985, and reported as appropriate on their findings, particularly in relation to the level of compliance with the code of practice on the operation of horse markets issued by the Agriculture Departments in 1979.

Food Additives

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information he has as to the total number and types of food additives used in United Kingdom food manufacturing; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: There are around 320 additives specifically approved for use in the United Kingdom. The use of flavours, enzymes and modified starches is also permitted within the general provisions of the Food Acts.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he plans any new initiatives relating to the use of additives in food; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: The Food Advisory Committee and the Committee on Toxicity already keep under constant review the use of additives in food. Officials are considering ways in which food purchasers might be better and more accurately informed of the safeguards taken before additives are permitted.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will make a statement on the policy on the use of flavours, modified starches and enzymes in food manufacture, with special reference to the recommendations put to him by the Food Additives and Contaminants Committee;

(2) if he has any plans to introduce a positive permitted list for flavours, modified starches and enzymes in food manufacture.

Mr. Gummer: The use of flavours, modified starches and enzymes is permitted subject to the general provisions of the Food Act 1984. Proposals for European Community directives to control flavours and modified starches, more specifically, are under consideration by the member states. I am still examining the comments that I received on the FACC report on enzymes.

Farm Chemicals

Mr. Tom Cox asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what present inquiry is being undertaken by his Department as to the effects of the use of farm chemicals; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: A very wide variety of chemicals are used on farms, including disinfectants, fertilisers, sillage additives, pesticides and veterinary medicines. There is no general inquiry into the effects of the use of these materials being conducted by my Department.

Sea Defence Works

Mr. Rathbone asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list for 1986-87 all major sea defence works and the Government's contribution to each under the Land Drainage Act 1976.

Mr. Gummer: Under the Land Drainage Act 1976 it is for drainage authorities to decide which sea defence schemes they choose to undertake and submit to the Department for approval in order to obtain grant-aid. We cannot predict when water authorities or local authorities will start approved schemes or the likely progress of work. The following schemes, however, have already commenced and are expected to continue in 1986-87. Grant rates for water authorities for 1986-87 have yet to be confirmed.

Grant Rates 1985-86

Water Authority and Scheme	*Per cent.*
Anglia	
Boston Tidal Defences	67
Huttoft	67
Sea Banks West	59
South West	
Barnstaple (Yeo to Pottington—Phase 1)	57
Home Farm Marsh	57
Southern	
Medway (Kings North)	59
Medway (Isle of Grain)	59
Sheerness	59
Pett	59
Dymchurch	59
Deal, Sandwich	59
Scotts Float	59
Lancing	55
Thames	
Oakingtrough and Whiting sluices	30
Wessex	
Bridport, West Bay	35
Burnham on Sea (Phase II)	67
Yorkshire	
River Ouse, Wheel Hale Reach	37
River Hull, (Stages 7A and 7B)	37
Paull Village	37
Local Authority	
South Hams District Council	
Dartmouth	60

Water Authority and Scheme	Per cent.
West Dorset District Council	
Lyme Regis	60
Weymouth and Portland District Council	
Weymouth and Portland Council	
Chesil Beach	65
Lancaster City Council	
River Lune (North Bank)	36
River Lune (South Bank)	36
Morecambe (Stage V)	65
Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council	
Wallasey Embankment (Stage IV)	65

Mr. Rathbone asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list for 1986-87 all major works combating coastal erosion and the Government's contribution to each under the Coast Protection Act 1949.

Mr. Gummer: Under the Coast Protection Act 1949 it is for local authorities to decide which coast protection schemes they wish to submit for approval. We cannot know precisely when local authorities will start approved schemes or the likely progress of the work. The following schemes have, however, already begun and are expected to continue in 1986-87.

Rate of Grant

Authority and Scheme	Per cent.
Blackpool	
Warbreck—works to sea wall	63
South Shore Baths—sea wall reconstruction	54
Bournemouth	
Groyne building stages 11 and 12	54
Hengistbury Head, stages I and IA	*
Canterbury	
Herne Bay East Cliff II—front wave return wall	75
Swalecliffe—sea wall	79
Chichester	
Selsey—West Beach	43
Christchurch	
Highcliffe Beach renourishment stage II	63
Highcliffe Cliffs—stabilisation	71
Dover	
North Deal—groyne and sea wall reconstruction	79
St. Margaret's Bay	54
Kingsdown	59
Eastbourne	
Groyne replacement	43
Holderness	
Hornsea schemes 5A/5B	79
Withernsea scheme 9B	79
North Norfolk	
Happisburgh (scheme 837)	79
Poole	
Branksome Chine to Carford Cliffs	43
South Hams	
Dartmouth Embankment	51
Swale	
The Leas/Warden Bay	79
Tendring	
The Spa, Dovercourt	51
West End, Dovercourt	54
Thanet	
Margate, Foreness Point to Friends Gap	59
Margate, Stone Pier, Coldharbour	59
Waveney	
Neptune sea wall	51
Wirral	
Wallasey—Four breakwaters Kings Parade	79
Wyre	
Fleetwood aprons, phase I	34

* Awaiting details from council before grant can be calculated.

Animal Hunts

Mr. John asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what deputations he has received from bodies representing those who hunt animals with regard to hunting on agricultural land or land belonging to the Forestry Commission in England in the two years preceding 10 March.

Mr. Jopling: My right hon. Friend met the chairman of the Masters of Foxhounds Association in November 1984 to discuss hunting on Forestry Commission land. He has not received any other deputations.

Mr. John asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what changes he has urged upon the Forestry Commission within the two years preceding 10 March with regard to the rules governing the hunting of animals on its land in England.

Mr. Jopling: We have not asked the Forestry Commission to make any changes to its rules governing hunting over the land it manages in England.

Mr. John asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list all correspondence passing between his Department on his behalf and the Forestry Commission regarding the activities of hunts upon property of the Forestry Commission in the two years immediately preceding 10 March.

Mr. Jopling: There has been no such correspondence; the Forestry Commission answers directly to me for its activities in England.

Mr. John asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what deputations he has received from animal welfare organisations in the two years prior to 10 March regarding hunting on agricultural land or Forestry Commission land in England.

Mr. Jopling: My right hon. Friend has not received any deputations from animal welfare organisations on this matter in the past two years.

Common Agricultural Policy (Budget)

Mr. Deakins asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what would be the reduction in each case in the common agricultural policy budget for 1986 as

a result of a 1 per cent. price reduction on the EEC Commission's price proposals for each of the following commodities: cereals, milk, beef and olive oil.

Mr. Gummer [*pursuant to his reply*, 13 March 1986, c. *573*]: The following table shows the estimated reduction in EAGGF guarantee expenditure that would result in 1986 from a 1 per cent. price reduction additional to the EEC Commission's price proposals:

Mecu

	Cereals	*Milk*	*Beef*
Commission proposals	−392	+48	0
Additional 1 per cent. price reduction	−18	−49	−20
Total	−410	−1	−20

For olive oil, the saving from the Commission's price proposals and any additional 1 per cent. price reduction is likely to be negligible in 1986, as the marketing year for this product begins on 1 November.

ENERGY

Radioactive Material

Mr. Frank Cook asked the Secretary of State for Energy if the Nuclear Industry Radioactive Waste Executive has produced a preconstruction safety report as required by the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate, to be judged against its safety assessment principles, for the construction of a Land 2 disposal facility.

Mr. Goodlad: The Waste Disposal Site Regulations, which will provide the framework for the licensing of sites including near-surface facilities, sometimes known as "land 2", will be laid before Parliament later this year. The preparation of a pre-construction safety report by NIREX will be the first stage of the licensing process, once a site has been chosen.

Energy Costs

Mr. Orme asked the Secretary of State for Energy what was the annual expenditure at current prices by United Kingdom final energy users in each year from 1979.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: The estimated annual expenditure on energy by final users in the United Kingdom, in the current prices for each year from 1979, is as follows:

	£ million
1979	21,295
1980	25,780
1981	29,830
1982	32,520
1983	34,980
1984	36,640

Source: Digest of UK Energy Statistics.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Orme asked the Secretary of State for Energy what level of expenditure in both cash and as a percentage of the total budget for energy research, development and demonstration, has been allocated to energy efficiency research in each financial year since 1979.

Mr. David Hunt: The information requested is given in the table.

Year	*(a) Outturn expenditure on energy efficiency research and development and demonstration* £000	*(b) Column (a) as a percentage of total Department of Energy expenditure on energy research development and demonstration* Per cent.
1979-80	1,023	0·6
1980-81	2,015	0·9
1981-82	4,106	1·6
1982-83	6,841	2·6
1983-84	6,997	2·9
1984-85	6,564	3·0

Mr Wallace asked the Secretary of State for Energy how many people are employed on the energy conservation demonstration project scheme at Harwell.

Mr. David Hunt: There are currently 61 staff employed on the energy efficiency demonstration scheme at Harwell.

Mr. Orme asked the Secretary of State for Energy what information he has as to the energy savings as a proportion of total energy consumption which have been made in each of the European Economic Community member states in each year from 1979.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: The following table shows estimated percentage changes in the primary energy ratio (primary energy consumption per unit of gross domestic products) for individual countries betweeen 1979 and 1984. The figures are not temperature corrected. Changes in the ratio over short periods such as a year are not considered to provide a reliable indication of energy savings. Data for 1985 are not yet available.

Percentage change in energy ratio

	1979-84
Belgium	−13
Denmark	−20
Germany	−12
Greece	+6
France	−3
Ireland	−18
Italy	−4
Luxembourg	−28
Netherlands	−2
United Kingdom	−13

Source: 1. Eurostat, Basic Statistics of the Community
2. National Accounts of OECD Countries.

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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 93**

SESSION 1985-86

3rd March—14th March 1986

SCOPE OF THE INDEX, ARRANGEMENT AND ABBREVIATIONS

This index is derived from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Information System (POLIS), and the subject terms used are based on those used in POLIS. There are often changes in column numbering, etc., between the daily part or weekly Hansard (which simply collects together the daily parts without revision) and the bound volume. The index for the bound volume is revised to take account of these changes.

Scope and arrangement of the Index

Oral and Written Parliamentary Questions are indexed under subject headings and the names of Members asking and Ministers replying to them. Questions are not listed under the names of Departments replying. Departmental listings can be arrived at indirectly by looking under the names of the Minister(s) of that Department. There will, however, be headings 'Northern Ireland', 'Scotland', and 'Wales' under which one will find not only most Questions answered by the Northern Ireland Office, Scottish Office, Welsh Office but also Questions about these areas of the United Kingdom which are answered by other Departments. Ministerial statements are indexed under subject headings, under 'Ministerial statements' and the names of Ministers making them and Members speaking on them. General debates are indexed under broad subject headings and under the names of all Members and Ministers taking part. Debates on legislation (Bills, Orders, Regulations etc.) are indexed under the name of the Bill, Statutory Instrument etc., under subject headings and under the names of those taking part.

Rulings and Statements by Mr. Speaker and his deputies are brought together under the heading Speakers rulings and statements.

Other contributions by Mr. Speaker and his deputies appear under the heading Speaker.

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The date of each item except Parliamentary Questions is inserted immediately before the reference.

Members' names are given in the form by which they prefer to be known and are printed in bold italics. Under their names, entries are arranged under one of the two headings *Debates etc.* (to include interventions on statements, points of order and so on) or *Questions*.

Abbreviations

Bills 1R=first reading, 2R=second reading, Money res=money resolution, Com=Committee stage, Rep=Report stage, 3R=third reading, amendt/amendts=amendment/amendments, *=matter taken formally, without debate.

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